

TESTIMONY BY CONGRESSMAN G. K. BUTTERFIELD  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT  
MEMBERS DAY HEARING RE: REAUTHORIZATION OF SURFACE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS  
APRIL 5, 2011

Chairman Duncan and Ranking Member DeFazio,  
thank you for the opportunity to testify before your  
subcommittee.

As we can all remember, August 1, 2007 was a  
tragic day. Early that morning, the I-35 West highway  
bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota collapsed, leaving 13  
people dead and 145 people injured. The National  
Transportation Safety Board determined that  
inadequate load capacity created by increases in bridge  
weight and traffic as the likely cause. Sadly, the bridge  
had been deemed structurally deficient since 1991.

This was an avoidable tragedy we must never be repeated.

Ensuring adequate federal funding for inspection, necessary upgrades, and bridge replacements is a priority for my constituents in eastern North Carolina.

As we consider reauthorizing surface transportation programs, I urge you to provide adequate funding for critical transportation projects to ensure public safety and create jobs. Specifically, I urge you to support President Obama's \$23 billion budget request for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The FHWA bridge program was funded at \$5.3 billion in 2010, but even more funding was needed. In 2010, nationwide 24.3 percent of bridges were considered deficient, and out of 19,000 bridges in North Carolina, 29 percent are rated as deficient or obsolete. The North Carolina Department of Transportation has indicated replacing those bridges in a timely manner will be a considerable challenge in the coming years.

I represent a largely rural district in eastern North Carolina and, as you know, most deficient and obsolete bridges are in rural areas. The most recent Bureau of Transportation Statistics Report showed that 69 percent

of deficient and obsolete bridges were rural local bridges.

The need for improved transportation infrastructure in my district is clear. Many bridges in rural eastern North Carolina are deteriorating and pose unacceptable safety concerns. In numerous cases, bridge use is limited or restricted because the infrastructure cannot support the weight or dimensions of modern vehicles. Nearly 600 bridges in my district are rated deficient or obsolete.

Elizabeth City, the home to a U.S. Coast Guard Air Station, has an obsolete bridge spanning the Pasquotank River set to be replaced in summer 2011.

Replacing the bridge will cost over \$96 million and North Carolina depends on 77 percent of those funds to come from the federal government. The project will improve safety for large volumes of traffic and repair sinking roads and sidewalks.

Havelock, the home to Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, has a deficient bridge spanning Slocum Creek. Without significant investment, the bridge cannot meet safety requirements and will continue to pose a threat to public safety. NCDOT has already determined that there is an immediate need to correct structural deficiencies in the pilings supporting the structure and has moved the scheduled start date for the

project up from 2019 to 2013. My district needs additional funding from the federal government to make the project a reality.

States and municipalities depend on federal funding to make necessary safety improvements and to help restore bridges like Elizabeth City's and Slocum Creek's to sustainability.

Mr. Chairman, we must retain a distinct bridge program to ensure that FHWA and states like North Carolina continue to have flexibility to upgrade our nation's aging bridge infrastructure. I urge my colleagues to support the President's budget requests to

adequately fund the USDOT and the distinct Highway  
Bridge Program.

Thank you very much.