ACEC

American Council of Engineering Companies

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The Honorable James Oberstar
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) – the voice of America's engineering industry – I wanted to express our strong support for H.R. 3999, the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act and applaud your leadership in addressing the shortcomings of our national bridge program.

ACEC member firms are involved in every aspect of bridge planning, design and inspection. As you know, ACEC members testified before your committee and others about the need for a risk-based approach to bridge inspections and repair and rehabilitation decisions. Thank you for incorporating our recommendations into the bill. Improving existing inspection procedures and techniques, as called for in H.R. 3999, will allow states and the federal government to better allocate limited resources. The bill rightly calls for priority consideration based on safety, serviceability, and the impact on regional and national freight and passenger mobility.

ACEC strongly supports the requirement in the bill that bridge program managers and critical bridge inspection team leaders be licensed professional engineers. While we recognize the value of experience in bridge inspections, there is no replacement for the rigorous education, testing and standards for professional licensing. We firmly believe that a licensed professional engineer, qualified to practice structural engineering, should be in "responsible charge" of every bridge safety inspection.

Finally, ACEC appreciates the inclusion of a $5 million grant program to evaluate the effectiveness, accuracy and reliability of advanced condition assessment inspection processes and technologies. As noted in our testimony, inspectors are often limited in time and resources to visual or other simple inspections that provide only an immediate snapshot of bridge conditions, existing and emerging deficiencies, and any potential hazards. Significant safety improvements can be found in emerging technologies such as fiber optic, vibrating wire, acoustical emissions, and peak strain displacement for monitoring and evaluating the structural health of a highway bridge. The pilot program in the bill will help move these technologies forward.

For these reasons, ACEC supports passage of H.R. 3999. We look forward to working with you on this and other transportation infrastructure legislation in the future.

Sincerely,

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