

THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM BRIDGE RECONSTRUCTION INITIATIVE
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HIGHWAY BRIDGE CONDITIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (“DOT”), one of every eight bridges in the nation is structurally deficient. Of the 597,340 bridges in the United States, 154,101 bridges are deficient, including 73,784 structurally deficient bridges and 80,317 functionally obsolete bridges.¹

According to DOT, more than \$65 billion could be invested immediately in a cost-beneficial way to replace or otherwise address existing bridge deficiencies.²

The high percentage of deficient bridges and the large existing backlog are, in part, due to the age of the network. One-half of all bridges in the United States were built before 1964. Interstate System bridges, which were primarily constructed in the 1960s, pose a special challenge because a large percentage of these bridges are in the same period of their service lives (e.g., 44 percent of these bridges were constructed in the 1960s). Concrete and steel superstructure on the Interstate Highway System are, on average, 35 to 40 years old.

National Highway System Bridges

The National Highway System (“NHS”) is a 162,000-mile highway network that consists of the 46,747-mile Interstate System, the Strategic Highway Network for military mobilizations, and other major highways. While the NHS makes up only 4.1 percent of total U.S. mileage, it carries 45 percent of vehicle miles traveled.

NHS bridges carry an even greater percentage of total travel. NHS bridges carry more than 70 percent of all traffic on bridges. Of the 116,172 bridges on the NHS (including more than 55,000 Interstate System bridges), 6,175 NHS bridges are structurally deficient. Almost one-half of these structurally deficient NHS bridges are bridges on the Interstate Highway System (2,830 structurally deficient Interstate System bridges).

According to DOT, the current NHS bridge investment backlog is estimated at \$32.1 billion (including \$19.1 billion for the Interstate Highway System bridge backlog).³

See attachment 1 for additional information on bridge inspection standards.

¹ A Structurally deficient bridge is a bridge that has major deterioration, cracks, or other flaws that reduce its ability to support vehicles. A functionally obsolete bridge is a bridge that does not have the lane widths, shoulder widths, or vertical clearances adequate to service traffic demand.

² U.S. Department of Transportation, *2006 Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions & Performance*, January 22, 2007, p. 7-17. The economic backlog of bridge deficiencies consists of all improvements to bridge elements that would be justified on both engineering and economic grounds. It includes improvements on bridges that warrant repair but whose overall condition is not sufficiently deteriorated for the bridges to be classified as structurally deficient. *Id.*, p. 7-16.

³ U.S. Department of Transportation, *2006 Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions & Performance*, January 22, 2007, p. 12-12, 11-17.

THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM BRIDGE RECONSTRUCTION INITIATIVE

The NHS Bridge Reconstruction Initiative provides dedicated funding to States to repair, rehabilitate, and replace structurally deficient bridges on the National Highway System.

The Initiative has four main components:

- **Significantly Improves Bridge Inspection Requirements.** Requires the Federal Highway Administration (“FHWA”) and States to significantly improve the processes for inspection of structurally deficient bridges.
- **Provides Dedicated Funding.** Provides dedicated funding to repair, rehabilitate, and replace structurally deficient bridges on the National Highway System;
- **Distributes Funds based on Public Safety and Need.** Requires the U.S. Department of Transportation to develop an administrative formula for distributing all funds. **Prohibits any Congressional or Administration earmarks.**
- **Establishes NHS Bridge Reconstruction Trust Fund.** Establishes an NHS Bridge Reconstruction Trust Fund to finance the repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of structurally deficient NHS bridges.

SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES BRIDGE INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS

The Initiative requires FHWA and States to significantly improve the processes for inspection of structurally deficient bridges, including:

- Requires FHWA to **immediately update National Bridge Inspection Standards** (“NBIS”) regarding the frequency of bridge inspections, inspection procedures and techniques, qualifications of inspection personnel, inspector training requirements, and data to be collected;
- Requires States to **immediately inspect all structurally deficient bridges on the National Highway System** and provide updated information to the National Bridge Inventory (“NBI”);
- Requires States to **recalculate the load rating for all structurally deficient NHS bridges and ensure that maximum weight limits for such bridges are properly posted;**
- Requires FHWA to **conduct annual compliance reviews** of States’ inspections, load ratings, and weight limit postings of structurally deficient bridges; and
- Requires FHWA and States to **institute computerized bridge management systems to improve the bridge inspection process and quality of data collected and reported to the NBI.**

PROVIDES DEDICATED FUNDING

The Initiative **provides dedicated funding to repair, rehabilitate, and replace structurally deficient bridges on the National Highway System.** A small percentage of funding may also be used to finance FHWA and States' administrative expenses for inspection of structurally deficient NHS bridges and development of computerized bridge management systems.

The Federal share for the NHS Bridge Rehabilitation Initiative is 90 percent for structurally deficient Interstate bridges and 80 percent for other structurally deficient NHS bridges. Funds are made available for four years. All Federal-aid Highway requirements under title 23, United States Code, apply to the NHS Bridge Initiative.

DISTRIBUTES FUNDS BASED ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND NEED

The Initiative **requires FHWA to develop a formula based on public safety and need that weighs the relative risk of structurally deficient NHS bridges in each State.** In developing the formula for apportionment to the States, the Secretary shall consider:

- the threat to public safety of the conditions of the structurally deficient NHS bridges in each State;
- the importance of the structurally deficient NHS bridges to regional and national mobility (including freight movement);
- vehicle miles traveled on the structurally deficient NHS bridges;
- the relative share of total cost to repair, rehabilitate, or replace the structurally deficient NHS bridges; and
- the State's financial commitment to reconstruction of all structurally deficient bridges in the State.

The Initiative **specifically prohibits Congressional or Administration earmarks of any NHS Bridge Reconstruction Initiative funds.** If any funds are earmarked by Congressional or Administration earmarks (including earmarks in Congressional reports), the Secretary of the Treasury is required to immediately stop all transfers of dedicated revenue from the Treasury to the NHS Bridge Reconstruction Trust Fund.

ESTABLISHES NHS BRIDGE RECONSTRUCTION TRUST FUND

The Initiative **establishes an NHS Bridge Reconstruction Trust Fund to finance the repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of structurally deficient NHS bridges.** The Trust Fund will be **modeled after the Highway Trust Fund.** The Trust Fund will collect dedicated revenue to finance the Initiative.

The sources and amount of dedicated revenue will be determined after FHWA and States provide additional data on the costs to finance the repair, rehabilitation, and replacement of structurally deficient NHS bridges. The revenue will be dedicated sources of funding that will only be available to finance the NHS Bridge Reconstruction Initiative. Options include a temporary user fee on gasoline and diesel fuel dedicated specifically for this Initiative, or a tax on each barrel of oil imported to the United States. For instance, each one-cent-per-gallon user fee on gasoline and diesel fuel could generate approximately \$1.7 billion each year for the NHS Bridge Reconstruction Initiative. Therefore, a three-year, five-cent-per-gallon user fee on gasoline and diesel fuel could generate approximately \$25 billion to repair, rehabilitate, and replace structurally deficient bridges in the United States. Similarly, a \$1.00 fee on each barrel of oil at the refinery, two-thirds of which is imported to the United States, could generate \$5.5 billion per year or more than \$16 billion over three years.