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J. Randy Forbes
United States Congress
4th District, Virginia

307 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6365

425-H SOUTH MAIN STREET
EMPORIA, VA 23847
(434) 634-5575

2903 BOULEVARD, SUITE 8
COLONIAL HEIGHTS, VA 23834
(804) 526-4969

505 INDEPENDENCE PARKWAY
LAKE CENTER II—SUITE 104
CHESAPEAKE, VA 23320
(757) 382-0080

August 27, 2008

Mr. Thomas J. Madison,
Administrator, Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Madison:

I am writing to support the Virginia Department of Transportation's request to obligate funds that may be redistributed from unspent Fiscal Year 2008 federal highway funds. Specifically, I make this request because one of the major projects included in their proposal is the Gilmerton Bridge project, which is critical to the transportation needs of residents of the Fourth Congressional District of Virginia.

I understand that the amount of such redistributed funds for FY 2008 are determined by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (DOT) pursuant to a formula and that such funds will be available for redistribution after August 1, 2008. However, considering the age of the Gilmerton Bridge, its expanding traffic levels, and safety concerns, I urge the Department and your Administration to strongly consider allocating adequate FY 2008 federal highway funds to the Commonwealth of Virginia to fund the remaining shortfall for this project.

The Gilmerton Bridge in Chesapeake, Virginia, is a narrow, four-lane bridge linking commuters across the Elizabeth River from Chesapeake to the City of Portsmouth, Virginia and the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. In terms of safety, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) assigned the Gilmerton Bridge a sufficiency ranking of 3 on a 100-point scale and the bridge has been closed 10 times in five years for repairs. Built in 1938, the bridge has exceeded its expected design life and is functionally obsolete, and weight restrictions for heavy truck and commercial traffic have been imposed.

In terms of traffic, the bridge is designed to accommodate 15,000 vehicles per day but it currently handles approximately 35,000 vehicles per day – more than twice its design capacity. With the anticipated population growth of the Chesapeake area, it is projected that the bridge's traffic volume will increase to approximately 41,000 vehicles per day by 2021. Adding to the concern, the City of Chesapeake announced plans to close the nearby Jordan Bridge because of safety concerns, which is one of the only other bridge links between the city of Chesapeake and the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. This closing will increase congestion on the Gilmerton Bridge by an additional 4,000 vehicles per day, and without a replacement, the congestion will be twice as worse on the remaining tunnel and bridge over the Elizabeth River.

VDOT plans to commence a four-year replacement project for the Gilmerton Bridge in early 2009. The cost for the project is estimated at \$180 million and is facing a funding shortfall of up to \$25 million. The most up-to-date figure can be obtained from the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The combination of a deteriorating structure, inadequate capacity, and general traffic operations concerns make the replacement of this bridge a major priority for me and the residents of Chesapeake. I appreciate your assistance with this matter and thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions with respect to the foregoing, please do not hesitate to contact me or my Legislative Assistant for transportation, Brian Perkins (bperkins@mail.house.gov), at (202) 225-6365.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Randy Forbes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress