Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

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Ranking Member

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James H. Zoia, Democrat Staff Director

June 12, 2013

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

The collapse of Minnesota's I-35W Bridge in 2007 and the recent failure of Washington's I-5 Skagit River Bridge highlight the devastating personal and economic costs of our decaying infrastructure. With one of every four bridges in the Nation structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, we must work together to ensure that our Nation's highway bridges are safe and ensure that such a bridge collapse does not occur again.

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) (P.L. 112-141) included provisions to strengthen Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) bridge inspection and inventory standards. Based on legislation developed by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure in the wake of the 2007 collapse of the I-35W Bridge, section 1111 of MAP-21 requires the U.S. Department of Transportation to update inspection standards to specify methods for and frequency of bridge inspections, as well as training and qualifications for bridge inspectors.[1] Although MAP-21 provided the Department three years to complete the update of the inspection standards and inspector training and qualifications, I strongly urge you to expedite implementation of new inspection standards and inspector training and qualifications.

[1] P.L. 112-141, § 1111(a) (23 U.S.C. 144(h)(6)).

MAP-21 also requires the Department to strengthen and improve its procedures for conducting annual reviews of state compliance with bridge inspection standards, and calculation or reevaluation of bridge load ratings.[2] The Department must also develop procedures for States to report to the Department any critical findings related to structural or safety deficiencies identified during a highway bridge inspection, and any monitoring or corrective action taken in response to such critical findings.[3] These changes are necessary to address critical shortcomings with FHWA's management and the States' implementation of highway bridge safety programs that were identified by the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General.[4] FHWA's oversight of bridge safety programs is critical to improving State compliance with program requirements, ensuring uniformity among States, and strengthening highway bridge safety. I urge you to expedite implementation of these new procedures and requirements, which will ensure consistency and transparency and improve compliance with bridge inspection standards. In addition, I urge you to ensure that FHWA and the States have adopted all bridge safety recommendations identified by the Inspector General.

MAP-21's bridge safety provisions are designed to ensure that States comply with the requirements of the bridge inventory and inspection standards, and have the necessary tools to better monitor and target those bridges most in need of repair. Implementation of these provisions, as well as MAP-21's asset and performance management provisions, will enable States to develop a risk-based prioritization of their highway bridge investments. Strengthening the bridge inspection standards and ensuring States are complying with the requirements of this program are critical to ensuring that highway bridges remain safe to the traveling public.

I look forward to working with you to expedite implementation of these important provisions of MAP-21.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

NICK J. RAHALL, II
Ranking Democratic Member

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[2] P.L. 112-141, § 1111(a) (23 U.S.C. 144(h)(3)(A)).
[3] P.L. 112-141, § 1111(a) (23 U.S.C. 144(h)(3)(B)).
[4] *See* U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General, *Assessment of FHWA Oversight of the Highway Bridge Program and the National Bridge Inspection Program*, MH-2010-039 (January 14, 2010); U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General, *National Bridge Inspection Program: Assessment of FHWA's Implementation of Data-Driven, Risk-Based Oversight*, MH-2009-013 (January 12, 2009); U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General, *Audit of Oversight of Load Ratings and Postings on Structurally Deficient Bridges on the National Highway System*, MH-2006-043 (March 21, 2006).