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

Washington, DC 20515

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Chairman

Nick J. Rahall, II
Ranking Member

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June 12, 2013

The Honorable Calvin L. Scovel, III
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
West Building, W70-300
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Inspector General Scovel:

I am extremely concerned about the condition and performance of the Nation's highway bridges. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, one of every four bridges in the Nation is structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. Moreover, from the collapse of West Virginia's Silver Bridge in 1967 to the more recent failures of Minnesota's I-35W Bridge and Washington's I-5 Skagit River Bridge, I have seen firsthand the devastating personal and economic costs of our decaying infrastructure.

In Congress, I have consistently worked to improve the condition and performance of the Nation's highway bridges. Moreover, throughout these efforts, you have worked with me to identify critical shortcomings of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) management and State Department of Transportation's implementation of the highway bridge safety programs. Over the past decade, you have issued a series of audit reports of the Highway Bridge Program and National Bridge Inspection Program that have raised serious concerns with FHWA's and the States' management and oversight of bridge safety programs.[1]

[1] 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).

To ensure that FHWA and the States have corrected each of the deficiencies identified in your reports and are aggressively improving management and oversight of these bridge safety programs, I request that you provide me with an update on the issues identified in each of the Inspector General reports. Specifically, I request your assessment of FHWA's and the States' responses, including implemented changes, to each of the recommendations contained in these reports. In addition, I request that you conduct an assessment of the U.S. Department of Transportation's plans and progress in carrying out the bridge safety provisions contained in the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) (P.L. 112-141). Finally, I urge you to identify any additional concerns or deficiencies that must be addressed to ensure the safety of the Nation's bridges.

Thank you for your continued work on these critical highway bridge safety issues.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

NICK J. RAHALL, II
Ranking Democratic Member

Enclosure

ASSESSMENT OF FHWA OVERSIGHT OF THE HIGHWAY BRIDGE PROGRAM AND THE NATIONAL BRIDGE INSPECTION PROGRAM

Federal Highway Administration
Report Number: MH-2010-039
Date Issued: January 14, 2010

RECOMMENDATIONS:[1]

To strengthen its oversight of Federal-aid funds, we recommend that the Federal Highway Administrator:

1. Collect and analyze [Highway Bridge Program] HBP expenditure data on a regular basis to identify activities undertaken by states, such as bridge replacement and rehabilitation, to improve the condition of the Nation's deficient bridges.

2. Collaborate with states in setting quantifiable performance targets to measure progress in improving the condition of deficient bridges.

3. Report regularly to internal and external stakeholders on the effectiveness of states' efforts to improve the condition of the Nation's deficient bridges based on the analysis of HBP expenditure data and an evaluation of progress made in achieving performance targets.

4. Develop detailed criteria to help bridge engineers determine with greater consistency whether states demonstrate overall compliance with the [National Bridge Inspection Standards] NBIS.

5. Develop a policy providing clear, comprehensive, risk-based guidance that defines procedures Division Offices should follow to enforce compliance with the NBIS.

6. Conduct a workforce assessment so that FHWA can identify strategic needs and target limited funding to higher priority staffing and training needs in implementing data-driven, risk-based bridge oversight.

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[1] 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), at 10-11 .

NATIONAL BRIDGE INSPECTION PROGRAM: ASSESSMENT OF FHWA'S IMPLEMENTATION OF DATA-DRIVEN, RISK-BASED OVERSIGHT

Federal Highway Administration
Report Number: MH-2009-013
Date Issued: January 12, 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS:[2]

We recommend that the FHWA Administrator:

1. Develop and implement minimum requirements for data-driven, risk-based bridge oversight during bridge engineers' annual [National Bridge Inspection Standards] NBIS compliance reviews.

2. Develop a comprehensive plan to routinely conduct systematic, data-driven analysis to identify nationwide bridge safety risks, prioritize them, and target those higher priority risks for remediation in coordination with states. In implementing the plan:

    a. Direct the Office of Bridge Technology to routinely and systematically identify and prioritize nationwide bridge safety risks.

    b. Direct the Division Offices to work with states to remediate higher priority nationwide bridge safety risks.

3. Develop a requirement for states to correct promptly data inaccuracies found by FHWA's NBI data validation program.

4. Increase FHWA's use of element-level data by:

    a. Coordinating with AASHTO to update the standards for element-level data,

    b. Incorporating AASHTO's updated standards into the NBIS through the rulemaking process, and

    c. Developing and implementing a plan to collect element-level data after AASHTO's updated standards have been incorporated into the NBIS.

5. Initiate a program to collect data regularly on states' use of bridge management systems, evaluate the data to identify those states most in need of assistance in implementing effective bridge management systems, and target them for technical assistance and training resources.

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[2] 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), at 12.

AUDIT OF OVERSIGHT OF LOAD RATINGS AND POSTINGS ON STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT BRIDGES ON THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM

Federal Highway Administration
Report No. MH-2006-043
Date Issued: March 21, 2006

RECOMMENDATIONS:[3]

We recommend that FHWA:

1. Revise its annual compliance reviews of state bridge programs to address the most serious deficiencies found during bridge inspections. FHWA should develop a risk-based, data-driven approach and metrics to focus on ensuring that states:

    a. Maintain up-to-date maximum weight limit records through state quality assurance/quality control programs that ensure current bridge conditions are accurately incorporated into load rating calculations.

    b. Post accurate maximum weight limit signs on bridges in a timely manner, when inspections indicate posting or revised posting should occur.

    c. Coordinate with other states to improve the accuracy and completeness of the Bridge Inventory and reporting of results to Congress. FHWA should focus on reducing discrepancies, including the most frequent deficiency identified in our statistical sample—the failure of information in the Bridge Inventory to match bridge load rating results in state databases.

2. Evaluate greater use of computerized bridge management systems to improve states' bridge inspection programs and enhance the accuracy of bridge load ratings.

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[3] 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), at 17.