

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Bridge Safety: Next Steps to Protect the Nation's Critical Infrastructure

Opening Statement from Ranking Member Hall

Good morning Mr. Chairman.

We are a nation of infrastructure. More than any other country in the world we rely on a massive, interconnected web of power lines and power plants, telecommunications facilities, and train tracks, roadways, and bridges to go about our everyday lives.

This is why tragedies like the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis strike each of us so personally. During our own everyday lives since August 1st we have all thought of the 185 people on the I-35 bridge when it collapsed and the thirteen who perished, perhaps as we drove across bridges in our home towns on the way to work, or to school, or to the shopping center down the road.

Clearly this loss of life is unacceptable.

Ensuring the safety of our basic infrastructure must be the top priority of our federal, state, and local governments. This is a core principle of public service and the reason this Committee is meeting today.

Sadly, this is not the first time that a major bridge has failed. In 1967, forty-six people died from the collapse of the Silver Bridge in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. The following year the federal government began a nationwide bridge inspection program. Today, the National Bridge Inventory, includes almost 600,000 bridges. Almost twenty-five percent of those are over fifty years old. Of the 49,518 bridges on the inventory in my home state of Texas, 2,219 or five percent are considered "structurally deficient."

This designation, "structurally deficient", does not mean these bridges are in immediate danger of collapsing. It does, however, mean that signs of fatigue and stress are beginning to show and that the bridge requires close monitoring. The I-35 bridge was one such "structurally deficient" bridge, however, and was inspected a year prior to the collapse.

So, today, we have a panel before us who can tell us what we're doing as a nation to improve the monitoring and inspections of bridges. What are the technologies and skills that will allow us to better assess and monitor the health of these critical pieces of infrastructure? What can be done in the next five or ten years to improve the data we have on bridges and our ability to correctly interpret that data? And can we do this while also attending to the other challenges facing transportation officials such as growing congestion and deteriorating roadways?

I look forward to hearing your answers and thank you for testifying today.

I yield back.