

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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ONE IN TEN MASSACHUSETTS BRIDGES “STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT”

Aging infrastructure represents impending maintenance need critical to state’s economy

Boston, Massachusetts - A new report released today shows that Massachusetts is doing better than many other states in terms of the overall condition of its bridges, ranking slightly better than the national average of 11% of bridges being classed “structurally deficient. However, *The Fix We’re In For 2013* reveals that the Commonwealth has some of the oldest bridges in the country, averaging 57 years, behind only Hawaii and Washington DC. With just under 500 structurally deficient bridges across the Commonwealth, drivers are regularly traveling across heavily trafficked bridges rated as “structurally deficient” – bridges that could become dangerous or closed if they are not repaired.

The report is the latest update from Transportation for America, which produced a similar report in 2011, based on a national database of bridge inspections maintained by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

“Massachusetts has taken positive steps to address the most immediate safety needs of its bridges, but the stark reality is that there is not enough state or federal funding available to fix all of the structurally deficient bridges listed in Massachusetts today or as the list grows in the future,” said John Walkey, Massachusetts state director of Transportation for America and field director for Transportation for Massachusetts. “We can’t rely on federal funding to fix our bridges, and the funding being considered by the legislature is not enough either. We need to keep pushing for more state and federal funding to maintain and modernize our bridges and entire transportation system.”

Today, about one out of every ten bridges that motorists in Massachusetts cross each day are likely to be deteriorating to some degree; and 9.6 percent of bridges statewide are rated “structurally deficient” according to government standards, compared to 11 percent nationwide. Nearly 67,000 bridges nationwide are classified as “structurally deficient.” FHWA estimates that transportation agencies would need \$76 billion to overcome the current backlog of deficient bridges. The poor condition of bridges across the country has major implications for safety, mobility and economic activity.

“It is no secret that times are tough, but the safest and most economically viable approach we can take to Massachusetts’ infrastructure is to protect the investments we’ve made with needed safety and structural upgrades,” said **Tim Brennan**, Executive Director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, a Transportation for Massachusetts member. “Allowing roads and bridges to slip into disrepair ultimately costs state and local governments millions more than the cost of regular, timely repair. Deferring maintenance of bridges and highways can cost three times as much as preventative repairs. The backlog also increases safety risks, hinders economic prosperity and significantly burdens taxpayers.”

Particularly pertinent to Massachusetts, age is a major factor in bridge conditions. While the national average age for bridges is 43 years old, Massachusetts makes the top three states with the oldest bridges with an average of 57. Most bridges are designed to last 50 years before major overhaul or replacement, therefore MassDOT can expect a growing number of bridges to go on the repair list as fast as they are able to repair them.

Both federal and state lawmakers have repeatedly declared the condition and safety of our bridges to be of critical significance. However, the money to fix them is getting harder to come by with declining gas tax revenues and a fiscal squeeze at all levels of government. At the same time, the U.S. Congress made the prospects for bridges even more uncertain last year by eliminating a dedicated fund for them in its update of the federal transportation program. The new law also reduces access to funds for 90 percent of structurally deficient bridges, most of which are owned by cash-strapped local governments. Now bridges are left to compete with every other priority.

In Massachusetts, the Transportation Finance Commission in 2007 found that Massachusetts needs to spend approximately \$1 billion per year for 20 years to close funding gaps and maintain its transportation system, including its aging bridge stock. Currently, the legislature is looking at additional funding for transportation that could total \$600 million per year for the next five years. This will help address the backlog of bridge repairs, but will not be enough to fully address the problem or meet the commonwealth’s transportation needs.

RESOURCES:

- An interactive “pin” map showing structurally deficient bridges within miles of any address in the U.S. --
<http://t4america.org/resources/bridges/>
- A map of projects under MassDOT’s Accelerated Bridge Program:
http://www.eot.state.ma.us/acceleratedbridges/pr_bridgemap.htm

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[TRANSPORTATION FOR MASSACHUSETTS](#) is a diverse coalition of Massachusetts-based organizations working together to create safe, convenient, and affordable transportation choices for everyone in Massachusetts. It represents more than 30 members that have expertise in transportation, affordable housing, social justice, public health, the environment, planning and smart growth. www.t4ma.org