

## Deficient Bridge Inventory Shows Only Slight Improvement

DES PLAINES, Ill., Oct. 30 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The I-35 bridge collapse focused the nation's attention on our deteriorating bridges, but highway engineers have long been working to reduce the percentage of structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridges. A new study reveals that despite increased efforts, little progress has been made over the past year. An exclusive survey conducted by Better Roads magazine and sponsored by CONTECH Bridge Solutions Inc., shows that across the nation the percentage of structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridges improved by just .4% over the past year to 24.1%. The findings, based on a survey among highway professionals within all 50 State Departments of Transportation and the District of Columbia, represent the most current data available on bridge conditions.

"The gain is very slight," warns Better Roads editor-in-chief Ruth Stidger. "Our 2007 survey counts 1,682 fewer structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges than in 2006, which means that only 1% of the 145,996 bridges classified as substandard a year ago, were improved." Since 2004, more than 6,700 bridges have been taken off the substandard count, but even that small progress has come at a price. "Bridge repair and replacement is enormously expensive," notes Stidger, "and as agencies have spent more of their money on bridges, they have had less to invest in pavement quality and highway capacity improvements."

Funding represents the greatest challenge for agencies. Just 41% of responding agencies feel they will be able to lower the percentage of deficient bridges next year. "The spike in construction materials and diesel fuel has eroded the spending power of our state and local road agencies, and the pace of bridge improvements seems to be slowing," adds Stidger.

According to Tim Beach, president of CONTECH Bridge Solutions, "The country's growing infrastructure needs really center on safety and speed of construction under increasingly tight budgets. Because of these needs, we have seen a significant growth in the use of prefabricated bridge systems. Until a significant change in funding is developed, little if any impact can be made to the long list of deficient bridges. The ability to 'Get In, Get Out and Stay Out' is now more important than ever."

The study provides further insight into the decaying bridge inventory by breaking out structurally deficient bridges from those that are functionally obsolete. Structurally deficient bridges are considered more serious, since they have structural problems that require limiting weight or more frequent inspections. Some must be closed. About 54% of the substandard bridges fall into this category, compared to 46% which are functionally obsolete. Functionally obsolete bridges may be in good condition, but don't meet the needs of current traffic. Responding agencies use a standard sufficiency rating system developed by the Federal Highway Administration, to rate each bridge. Federal law mandates that all bridges must be inspected every two years.

### The Worst

States with the highest percentage of structurally deficient/functionally obsolete bridges include Rhode Island (53%); Hawaii (40%); New York (38%); West Virginia (37%); Massachusetts, Vermont (36%); Connecticut (33%); Missouri, North Carolina (31%); Louisiana, Maine, New Hampshire (30%).

### The Best

States with the lowest percentage of structurally deficient/functionally obsolete bridges include: Nevada (4%); Arizona (6%); Wyoming (12%); Minnesota (13%); Wisconsin (15%); Delaware and Florida (18%); Tennessee (19%).

## Most Improved

Only four states were able to reduce their deficient bridge population by more than one percentage point over the past year: Kentucky (-2%), Michigan (-2%), Oklahoma (-2%), and Utah (-2%).

The complete bridge inventory appears in the November 2007 issue of Better Roads and at <http://obr.gcnpublishing.com/articles/bridgeinv07.htm>.

For a summary of bridge conditions in your state visit:<http://obr.gcnpublishing.com/articles/downloads/StateByStateSummary.pdf>.

Better Roads is the authoritative source for information on the construction and maintenance of highways and bridges, serving more than 39,000 highway and bridge professionals within government, contracting and engineering firms. James Informational Media publishes Better Roads and Aggregates Manager.

CONTECH Bridge Solutions is the provider of modular, prefabricated bridges for a variety of applications and capacities. More than 65,000 CONTECH bridges have been installed worldwide.

Website: <http://obr.gcnpublishing.com/>