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## I-35W Bridge Deficient from its Debut

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ENR – January 15, 2008

*Minnesota* - A "serious design error" was a key factor in the deadly August 1 collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minnesota, federal investigators announced in a preliminary report this week. National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark V. Rosenker said that some of the gusset plates – the steel parts that connect the girders, which support the bridge – were too thin to handle the increased traffic and the added weight of infrastructure improvements.

"Basically, those 16 gusset plates were too thin to provide the margin of safety expected in a properly designed bridge such as this," Rosenker said, noting that the mistake would not likely have been discovered during routine state inspections. "These gusset plates were roughly half the thickness that would be required – half an inch thick rather than an inch thick." Rosenker said the exact cause of the collapse is still unknown, and the investigation will continue, with a NTSB final report expected by the end of the year.

Investigators had raised concerns about the plates just days after the collapse, although they continued to examine if deficiencies in inspections, maintenance or materials played a significant role in the tragedy. Under NTSB recommendations from the interim findings, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters immediately directed the FHWA to issue a technical advisory to state dot's, to exceed current standard practices and include possible weight and condition changes in their calculations on gusset plates for similar bridges.

# Secretary Peters Rejects Proposal for Massive Tax Hike

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*U.S. DOT Release – January 15, 2008*

WASHINGTON - U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters has rejected a congressional commission's call for massive state and federal gas tax hikes. Secretary Peters and two members of the commission announced Tuesday that they do not endorse the group's call for tax increases, new limitations on state's abilities to draw private sector investments, new federal bureaucracy to centralize transportation decision-making and a brand new federal tax on all public transportation and intercity commuter rail fees.

"Raising taxes won't improve traffic congestion, it will only perpetuate our ineffective reliance on fossil-based fuels to fund infrastructure and send more of Americans' hard-earned money to Washington to be squandered on earmarks and special interest programs," Secretary Peters said. "A better way forward is to provide incentives to states willing to pursue more efficient approaches and to invest federal funds more effectively to give commuters real relief from gridlock."

Commissioners Maria Cino and Rick Geddes, along with the Secretary, said they would not sign the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission's report, which called for up to a 40-cent per gallon federal gas tax increase over the next five years, and reaching up to 91-cents in 20 years when indexed to inflation. The commissioners have joined Secretary Peters in the release of their own approach, the "Chairman's Statement," which notes that transportation officials have an unparalleled range of options available to finance, maintain and improve transportation systems.

"There is nothing to indicate that Washington would do a better job spending billions more of the taxpayers' money than it has so far," said Secretary Peters. "The answer isn't more taxes and adding layers of bureaucracy, it is having the courage to say the current system is broken and it is time to find a better way to invest in, manage and operate our transportation system."

The Chairman's Statement is available at <http://www.dot.gov/affairs/Chairmansstatement.htm>.

## New Secretary Named in Louisiana

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*Louisiana Department of Transportation - January 15, 2008*

Louisiana - Governor Bobby Jindal recently named Dr. William D. Ankner as the new Secretary for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. Dr. Ankner was charged with the creation and managing the Missouri Transportation Institute and owned a consulting firm. He previously served as the CEO of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation for seven years, and held upper management positions with the New Jersey DOT, Delaware DOT and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Dr. Anker, who will take over in February, is a major proponent of mass transit, and he hopes to integrate the state's transportation system using all modes of transportation, although he says

his initial focus is to continue preserving the existing infrastructure. He helped with the legislation for ISTEA (federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991) which has helped Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), including HOT and HOV lanes, become more widespread among states.



*Congratulations to Bill on his new appointment. He is no stranger to the state DOT world as reflected in the news release we used to create this article. Bill will bring new perspectives to the LaDOTD and, together, they will be well equipped to meet some very challenging issues in the state. TW*

## Airlines Facing Congestion Pricing

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*Reuters – January 15, 2008*

WASHINGTON – Airlines could soon be charged extra to use busy U.S. airports during certain times of the day under a proposal by the U.S. Transportation Department to cut flight delays. The agency has been considering options for months to give airlines the opportunity to voluntarily fix the chronically delayed flights out of New York and other major cities.

The airline industry is opposed to a congestion charge, which they say will only drive up fares as they are already struggling with high fuel prices, lower ticket sales and decreasing profit margins. Major carriers continually urge the Bush Administration to focus their efforts on enhancing the Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control system and allow demand and market measures drive to the industry.

The congestion fee proposal would give airports the flexibility to vary charges based on the time of day and traffic volume instead of the age-old practice of charging landing fees based on aircraft weight. The FHWA believes the change would allow airports to smooth out and handle more traffic. Currently airlines will stack flights during the busiest times, heightening congestion problems. The revenue from congestion charges would be structured to allow airports to apply them up front for capital projects including runway construction to reduce borrowing costs to airports.

## Public Meetings Begin for Trans-Texas Corridor

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*Houston Chronicle – January 14, 2008*

Texarkana, Texas – A 4,000 mile super highway of toll roads began the first of a series of public hearings this week to offer a forum for the public to debate the largest construction project ever attempted in Texas. Gov. Rick Perry first proposed the Trans-Texas Corridor six years ago, working with Texas Department of Transportation officials to address future traffic concerns facing one of the fastest growing states in the nation, in the wake of insufficient revenues from gas tax and the federal government.

The TTC would roughly parallel existing interstates, crisscrossing the state and including some quarter-mile-wide strips of separate highways for trucks and cars, rail lines, utility lines and pipelines. The first phase of the superhighway, stretching from Mexico to Oklahoma, roughly

parallel to I-35, was designed by a joint venture of San Antonio-based Zachry Construction Co. and Cintra Concesiones de Infraestructuras de Transporte SA of Spain, one of the world's largest toll road developers.

Although Texas would keep ownership of the road, Cintra Zachry has offered to finance, build and operate segments of the first phase, call TTC-35.

"This state has to look outside the box and the traditional ways we've been doing things the last 50 years," said Robert Black, a spokesman for Gov. Perry's office. TxDOT says they are taking an unprecedented step to travel across the state to answer questions about the \$200 billion project, which could take up to 50 years to complete.

## Gov. Wants Car Sales Tax Hike

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Washington Post – January 15, 2008

*RICHMOND* – Virginia's governor is hoping to increase money for road maintenance by hiking the vehicle sales tax, which is currently only 3 percent even though the state sales tax is 5 percent. "If you are serious about transportation, why have a lower sales tax on vehicles than anything else?" asked Gov. Timothy M. Kaine (D). "That is my proposal. Let's see if the legislature reaches a consensus on that or something else."

The governor said that while he will not write a bill for the tax hike, he believes it would be the best approach for reducing the estimated \$290 million shortfall in the transportation budget for maintaining and repairing roads and bridges. Gov. Kaine's suggestion may be taken as a sign to Senate Democrats that he will support them as they begin to look at ways to raise more money for transportation, which they have called one of their priorities.

One Democratic leader in the House was quick to reject the governor's idea. "The car industry is suffering right now in difficult economic conditions, so it is very likely we would oppose any additional taxes on that industry," said Del. Brian J. Moran (D-Alexandria), chairman of the House Democratic caucus and possible candidate for the governor's office next year. "Last year, we had a comprehensive package. I am in favor of letting the dust settle for a period of time."



*You can't raise the sales tax on vehicles because the auto industry is struggling. No tolls because the motor carrier industry can't pass the costs on to their customers. Sales taxes are seen as a regressive form for raising money for transportation. Gas prices are just too high right now to raise the motor fuel tax. Property taxes are off the table because of the current housing market crisis. Lodging and rental car taxes are opposed since they might affect the tourism industry in various communities. We can't raise taxes because it's an election year; on the other hand, elected officials were just voted into office so how can they raise taxes so soon. When they run for re-election, their opponents will criticize them for raising taxes.*

*There is no form of taxation that is agreeable to all nor is there ever an ideal time to raise money for transportation. However, the need to raise money is critical. You may or may not agree with the commission's report that was released this week but at least it starts the dialogue and hopefully, emerging from that dialogue, will be solutions that we*

## UDOT Goes Green

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*Rocky Mountain Construction – January 8, 2008*

*Utah* - The Utah Transportation Department is making an effort to go green, by equipping its maintenance shed facilities with solar panels to make them more energy efficient. The move will also work towards accomplishing Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr.'s goal of establishing renewable, dependable energy sources while increasing energy efficiency by 20 percent and cutting energy consumption by 2 percent by 2015.

"This is the first attempt by our department at achieving the governor's request well ahead of the deadline," said Tim Ularich, assistant district engineer for UDOT. "Once we become more energy efficient as a state agency, we'll be able to save Utah's citizens and businesses energy and money."

UDOT plans to fully equip all of its facilities with energy efficient technologies, and the agency is currently determining which alternatives would be best to implement. "They can either be solar or wind platform installations, but they'll all be according to the needs at each particular location," Ularich added.

## Gov. Backs Controversial Coastal Tollway Extension

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*The Orange County Register – January 15, 2008*

*SACRAMENTO* – Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is encouraging the California Coastal Commission to approve the controversial plans for the Foothill (241) Toll Road extension which would run through San Onofre State Beach.

"Many parts of Southern California are becoming known for traffic gridlock and crumbling roads, rather than for the magic of our coastline. This is unacceptable to me," Gov. Schwarzenegger wrote in a letter to Chairman Patrick Kruer and other commissioners. "I have concluded that this project is essential to protect our environment and the quality of life for everyone in Southern California."

"This is absolutely huge for us," said Commission spokesperson Jennifer Seaton, of the governor's letter. The road plans got another boost Tuesday when a bill that could have stopped the toll road was rejected in an Assembly Hearing.

The Coastal Commission plans to vote on the extension in February. A recent commission staff report found that the proposed tollway would drive an endangered mouse species to extinction. The Transportation Corridor Agencies voted to donate \$100 million to the state parks if the Foothill extension is ever built.

# Connecticut Searches Nation for New Chief

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*Stamford Advocate* – January 13, 2008

Connecticut is continuing with an aggressive nationwide search to find a new commissioner for the state transportation department, and will continue accepting applications through the Jan. 25, about six weeks after the job was first posted. Commissioner Ralph Carpenter stepped down in December after serving just over year with the department.

State officials say the department is looking for an individual who will keep with the state's long-term transportation strategy focused on smart growth and transit-oriented development. The job posting also mentions Gov. Rell's DOT reform group, established last year to change the structure and culture of the department after a \$52 million drainage installation project went awry on Interstate 84 in Waterbury. The state is still waiting for the committee's report, expected to be released last month.

Former DOT Commissioner Emil Frankel will begin serving as interim commissioner by the end of the month, said Chris Cooper, a spokesman for Gov. M. Jodi Rell's office.



*Emil steps back into public service at a critical time in Connecticut. The state is faced with significant transportation challenges and DOT expectations have never been higher. While interim appointments are always challenging, Emil brings the credibility and experience needed to make this a successful time for the state. TW*

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