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\$140 Billion Price Tag to Repair and Modernize America's Bridges

(Philadelphia, PA. July 28, 2008) – Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell and an assembly of transportation and political leaders gathered beneath the Interstate 95 viaduct in North Philadelphia today to address the need for greater investment in the nation's bridges.

As we approach the August 1 anniversary of the Minneapolis I-35W Bridge tragedy, Pennsylvania Transportation Department Secretary Allen Biehler announced the release of ***Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges***, a new report by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) that outlines the critical challenges ahead.

Among the report's key findings:

- **Age** – Usually built to last 50 years, the average bridge in this country today is 43; almost 20 percent of these “Baby Boomer” bridges are over 50 years old. As age and traffic increase, so does the need for repair.
- **The Price Tag** – According to new data from the Federal Highway Administration, the cost to repair or modernize the country's bridges is \$140 billion—assuming all the bridges were fixed immediately.
- **Traffic Congestion** – Many of the nation's large-scale bridges have become chokepoints on the country's freeway system and a drain on the nation's economy. The top 10 highway interchange bottlenecks cause an average of 1.5 million truck hours of delay each year.
- **Soaring Construction Costs** – The costs of steel, asphalt, concrete, and earthwork have risen by at least 50 percent in the past five years, forcing delays of bridge improvements and replacements. Nearly every state faces funding shortages that prevent them from the kind of on-going preventive maintenance, repair, and replacement needed to keep their bridges sound indefinitely.

“Our point today is about putting the country on a solid foundation and not about gaining political advantage or using statistics as scare tactics,” Governor Rendell said. “The release of this report and our ongoing campaign on behalf of realistic transportation investment is all about ensuring public safety and rebuilding our economy. We simply can’t wait. We need solutions, not rhetoric.”

PennDOT Secretary Al Biehler reminded reporters of the March 17, 2008 discovery of a widening crack in the pier support of a bridge carrying Interstate 95 through Philadelphia, a short distance from today’s press conference. Biehler said “During the two day closure, 368,000 vehicles were forced to detour around this section of the interstate. This was just a small example of how vital the nation’s transportation infrastructure is to our economy and quality of life,” Biehler said.

The AASHTO report also points to several solutions. Among them:

- Increased investment in transportation at all levels of government—federal, state, and local.
- Support for a wide range of revenue options such as tolls, tax increases, annual road user fees, bonds, or private investment;
- Continued commitment to research and innovation;
- Systematic maintenance to extend the life of bridges; and
- Increased public awareness that bridges are vital links to business and communities.

AASHTO president and director of the Missouri Department of Transportation Pete Rahn said, “The current generation of baby boomer bridges are showing their age and they’re going to require significant investment. We must act now.”

For a full copy of the report visit www.transportation.org. To see an exclusive AASHTO video about the report visit www.youtube.com/aashtovideo.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) is the “Voice of Transportation” representing state departments of transportation in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. AASHTO is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association serving as a catalyst for excellence in transportation.