



U.S. SENATE BANKING COMMITTEE

**For Immediate Release
June 12, 2008**

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**Senator Christopher Dodd
“Condition of our Nation’s Infrastructure: Local Perspectives from Mayors”**

Remarks as Prepared:

The Committee will please come to order. We gather here this morning to examine once again the condition of our nation’s infrastructure and proposals for needed improvements to it.

When the Committee last gathered to examine this critical issue, we considered the perspectives from individuals who held expertise in public and private financing, civil engineering, labor, and business. They were unanimous in voicing compelling support for increased investment in our nation’s infrastructure and for the need to develop and implement alternative ways to finance this critically important investment in our nation’s future.

Today, we consider the local perspective on our nation’s infrastructure, and will hear from the individuals most qualified to offer that critical perspective: our nation’s mayors. We are fortunate to have before us a distinguished panel of leaders, who represent cities from different regions of our nation, who hold different political affiliations, and who face different challenges in their cities.

But what they share in common is far more important than what differentiates them. These mayors, like their colleagues across the country, bear the lion’s share of responsibility for maintaining the roads, bridges, mass transit systems, drinking water systems, wastewater removal systems, and other vital components of our national structure.

The Federal Highway Administration reports that out of the 4 million miles of roads in our nation, over 3 million miles are owned by counties, cities, and towns.

Local governments maintain almost 60 percent of our nation’s 54,000 drinking water systems and 98 percent of our 16,000 wastewater systems.

Our counties, cities, and towns also have a frontline perspective of what happens when the needs of our infrastructure go unmet.

When the bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, Mayor Rybak was among the first to respond. When the steam pipe exploded in New York City, Mayor Bloomberg was among the first to respond. And when the Mianus River Bridge collapsed in my home state of Connecticut in 1983, I know that several mayors in Fairfield County joined state officials in responding to that tragedy.

Here in Washington, we may cite alarming statistics like the 14,000 Americans who die each year at least in part because of crumbling roads and bridges. Or the 5,500 Americans who are sickened each year from some of the 850 billion gallons of storm water and raw sewage left untreated by obsolete wastewater systems. Or the average American who wastes 51.5 hours a year in traffic congestion.

However, our mayors see these alarming statistics as more than just numbers on a piece of paper. They witness how these statistics play out each and every day in their communities.

They personally console individuals who lose loved ones in road accidents caused by poorly-engineered highways or collapsed bridges.

They personally connect with individuals who are sickened by an overburdened drinking water or wastewater system.

And they experience the devastating economic effects when jobs are lost because the infrastructure in their communities cannot provide for the effective movement of people, goods, and information.

There is no question, then, that mayors are acutely aware of our nation's enormous, immediate, and unmet infrastructure needs. In fact, this awareness has already translated into meaningful action.

I commend recent and comprehensive efforts undertaken by state and local governments to raise the awareness of our infrastructure needs nationwide – efforts such as *Building America's Future* which Mayor Bloomberg has undertaken with Governors Rendell and Schwarzenegger.

The American Society of Engineers estimates that an investment of \$1.6 trillion over five years is required just to bring our current infrastructure to an acceptable level. That translates into \$320 billion a year – just to upgrade existing structures to serve the needs of our nation.

As we face the prospect of significant long-term budget deficits, a weakening economy, decreasing tax revenue, and increasing unemployment, it is clear that the current ways by

which we invest in our nation's infrastructure have become as obsolete as many of our infrastructure systems themselves.

We must forge a strong partnership between federal, state, and local governments to explore other creative and fiscally-responsible ideas that protect Americans and keep our economy as strong as possible.

We also cannot afford to delay. I believe the cost of meeting our infrastructure needs is great. But the cost of failing to meet them will be even greater. That is why I, along with my colleague Senator Hagel, have proposed creating a National Infrastructure Bank to help us meet these challenges. The Bank would mark the first federal effort to prioritize infrastructure projects across different modes of transportation and of water treatment. It would be the first federal program to rate these different infrastructure projects on the basis of merit and to invest in projects based on their merit. And by focusing on projects of regional and national significance, the Bank would help us meet some of the biggest challenges that we are confronted with. This proposal will not solve all of our problems, but we believe that it will go a long way in addressing many of the concerns that we will hear from our witnesses today and have heard at prior hearings.

I will continue to work with Senator Shelby and other members on the Committee to find common ground and I hope that we can and will be able to move this legislation forward. I do not know an exact timetable – you know we are very busy working on our legislation to address the housing crisis – but I do hope to move the bill through the Committee process in a timely fashion.