



Bridge Program Status Report

On Anniversary of Minnesota Bridge Tragedy, DelDOT Bridge Program Remains Among Best in Nation

Dover – Immediately after the August 2007 bridge collapse in Minneapolis, Minnesota, DelDOT Secretary Carolann Wicks and the DelDOT Bridge Management Section stepped up the frequency of inspections for some bridges while remaining vigilant on completing the design plans for construction on high priority bridges.

The stepped up inspections and a review of procedures did not result in new problems with DelDOT's priority bridges. Of the 38 bridges on DelDOT's priority bridge list as of August 2007, 11 have since been repaired/replaced, while the Indian River Inlet Bridge project is set to begin construction later this year.

The DelDOT staff involved with designing, constructing and maintaining the 1,473 bridges in its inventory are committed to ensuring these structures remain safe and structurally sufficient. One of DelDOT's performance measures is the structural sufficiency of bridges, which for years has been at or above 95 percent based upon federal and state standards. Currently, 97 percent of DelDOT bridges are structurally sufficient, or approximately 2.7 percent of its bridges are structurally deficient.

The term "structurally deficient" is simply an engineering term that, for DelDOT, means there is a component on a bridge that needs attention. All 40 structurally deficient bridges are either being worked on now or are planned to be worked on through our normal program. Also, of the 40, 17 are simply roads over pipes/culverts.

Based on the latest data from the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Bridge Inventory for states, DelDOT's percent of structurally deficient bridges is the fourth lowest in the nation behind Arizona, Florida and Nevada. Also, in comparing Delaware to states that are similar either geographically in size or numbers of bridges, DelDOT has the second lowest percent of structurally deficient bridges, behind only Nevada.

However, the story for the rest of the nation's bridges is much different, said DelDOT Secretary Carolann Wicks, who is also the current President for the Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials (NASTO), one of four regional groups that make up the nationwide American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHTO). Wicks agreed with the conclusions of AASHTO's report on the condition of America's 600,000 bridges. The report, released today, underscores the safety of U.S. bridges, but finds that one out of every four needs to be modernized or repaired. AASHTO reports that it could cost \$140 billion nationwide (in 2006 dollars) to make all of needed repairs or upgrades immediately.

In addition to stepped up inspections, DelDOT also followed the directives from the U.S. Department of Transportation to review issues that could have been factors in the Minnesota bridge collapse, including:

- States should calculate how possible changes in bridge weight, capacity or evolving bridge conditions will affect gusset plates as part of their work to ensure bridge safety. *DelDOT reviewed bridges with gusset plates and all were deemed in good condition. Further, there are no circumstances where "changes in bridge weight, capacity or evolving conditions" would warrant concern for gusset plates.*

- Additional weight placed on bridges during construction or repair projects may put additional stress on gusset plates. *DelDOT does not and has not stockpiled construction materials or stored equipment on bridge decks during construction.*
- Immediate inspection of any steel deck truss bridges similar to the I-35 bridge that collapsed in Minnesota. *DelDOT gave its only steel deck truss bridge -- the Augustine Cutoff Bridge in Wilmington – a complete inspection August 7, 2007, and performed a structural analysis of the gusset plates in May 2008. Neither inspection nor the structural analysis uncovered anything new. The Augustine Cutoff Bridge is not structurally deficient.*

For **DelDOT's Priority Bridges report** and other information go to www.deldot.gov.

Also, for the AASHTO report, ***Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges***, go to www.transportation.org.