

Rep. Phil Gingrey  
Opening Statement for Bridge Safety Hearing  
Committee on Science & Technology  
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Thank you Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start by reiterating the deep-felt sorrow and concern that we all have for the family members and loved-ones of those who died in the collapse of the Interstate 35 West Bridge in Minneapolis on August 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Bridge safety is a growing problem across the country and includes not just the National Highway System, but state and local roadways as well. In my State of Georgia, for example, there are 14,523 bridges. 1,113 of these bridges, or about 8%, are "structurally deficient". Nationally, 12% of bridges have received this rating and some states have as high as 25% of their bridges listed as "structurally deficient".

Structurally deficient bridges can be found in every part of the country, in the middle of sprawling cities and in remote wildlands. Repairing them will take an enormous effort that will need the aid of science and technology. Hopefully, we can build advanced structures that are more robust, more reliable and that will have the ability to detect potential problems and warn officials electronically. Reaching this goal will not be easy, however. Replacing aging bridges with new, technologically enhanced designs will require time and money that federal and state transportation departments DO NOT have readily at hand. We have a **STRONG** need for research and development of low-cost approaches to inspect or rehabilitate bridges.

I am particularly **CONCERNED** about our current visual inspection techniques and what can be done to improve this system in the near future. I'd like draw the panel's attention to this issue and look forward to hearing your thoughts. Technology such as embedded sensors clearly offers dramatically more **PRECISE** and **ACCURATE** data. However, we are a long way from widespread use of such systems and will continue to rely on properly trained personnel to make final safety determinations. We need to have inspection processes and training that are validated as effective and regularly improved. I'm pleased that we'll hear today from Mark Bernhardt, a bridge inspector whose company has contracts in over 10 states and who can give us a sense of what a well-trained individual can do and for that matter, what a trained individual cannot do.

I thank the entire panel for coming before us today, and look forward to an enlightening discussion on Research & Development in this area. Thank you and I yield back.