

Samuel I. Schwartz P.E., aka Gridlock Sam, Marks One Year Anniversary of Minnesota Bridge Collapse With Stern Warning For U.S.;

“More bridges will be closed or collapse unless we improve inspections, maintain bridges better and adequately fund repairs.”

Samuel I. Schwartz, P.E., former Chief Engineer of the New York City Department of Transportation, said today that we can expect more Minnesota I-35 and Philadelphia I-95 debacles in coming years as our infrastructure continues to age and deteriorate without adequate attention. Mr. Schwartz is one of the engineers on a forensic team on behalf of victims of the I-35 bridge collapse in Minnesota on August 1, 2007. Thirteen people died and 145 were injured. In March of this year, I-95 in Philadelphia was closed due to a structural emergency crippling that city. Mr. Schwartz also cites three other incidents in just the past five weeks;

- On June 25th, a railroad bridge in Iowa collapsed sending the train into the river. Fortunately, there were no injuries.
- In Pittsburgh, the North Fayette Bridge was closed on July 2nd after the discovery of a severe crack in a steel beam.
- Just this past Saturday, a 1,200 pound chunk of concrete fell onto two cars on I-35E in St. Paul, Minnesota, not too far from last year's I-35W disaster.

Mr. Schwartz is calling for a comprehensive bridge program that includes upgrading inspections, better maintenance and solving the funding pool. But, the future looks bleak unless there is real leadership on the federal level.

Mr. Schwartz points to the following trends that illustrate the urgency for lawmakers to act and act fast;

- Over 72,000 of U.S. bridges are structurally deficient representing one out of eight bridges nationally.
- \$140 billion is needed to repair the nation's bridges.
- The majority of the country's spans were built between 1950 and 1980 (frequently as part of the interstate system) with a "life span" of about 40-50 years. Many need complete rehabilitations now.
- Highway construction costs are up 15% in the past year. Iron and steel jumped 93% from May 2007 to May 2008, largely because of competition in the global marketplace.
- The U.S. commits just 2% of GDP to infrastructure while European countries commit 4% to 5% and China 9%.

- Technology for bridge inspections exists, but 99% of inspections are merely visual.
- Gas tax money, which pays for much of the highway system, is shrinking as people drive less. We're losing \$1.5 to \$2 billion per month, which means less rehabilitation projects will be able to proceed as planned.

Mr. Schwartz's remedies for bridging the infrastructure divide include:

- 1- Replacing the gas tax per gallon with a sales tax. The rate should result in no increase now, but rise if gas prices increase.
- 2- Congress just passed Minnesota Congressman Jim Oberstar's bill to increase inspections for structurally deficient bridges and provide \$1 billion for fixing up "critical condition" bridges. The White House is threatening to veto it because of the \$1 billion set-aside. Schwartz urges Senate passage and preparation for an override.
- 3- Pass the \$8 billion emergency infusion bill already passed by the House and awaiting Senate action.
- 4- Introduce congestion pricing and user fees on our highway system.
- 5- Encourage public-private partnerships to rehabilitate and operate our interstate system.
- 6- Create a National Infrastructure Bank modeled after Europe's European Investment Bank and similar to the one introduced by Senators Dodd and Hagel and supported by Senator and Presidential Candidate Barack Obama.
- 7- Adding \$500 million for establishing bridge health monitoring systems so that bridges can be "interrogated" remotely on their condition.

Schwartz said, "It's important, now more than ever, to support our bridges since after all, they support us."