



MISSOURI SENATE

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Column for the Week
of July 30, 2007**

**Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859**

Safe and Sound

JEFFERSON CITY — The recent tragedy in Minnesota underscores how big a role bridges play in our state and the need to keep them properly maintained. Every day, just about every one of us passes over some type of bridge on our way to home, work, or school. We need to feel safe and secure that the bridges in this state don't fall victim to the same fate as the one that crossed the Mississippi River well to our north.

Statewide, this state has 24,042 bridges. A 2006 survey by the Federal Highway Administration says about 4,600 of them are structurally deficient. Of the more than 24,000 bridges, the Missouri Department of Transportation is responsible for 10,240. Of those, 1,613 are considered structurally deficient. Another 1,223 are functionally obsolete. Structurally deficient means the structure is in relatively poor condition or has insufficient load capacity. Functionally obsolete bridges have poor roadway alignments or clearance width restrictions that no longer meet the usual criteria for the system it serves. On a scale of zero to nine, most of the bridges in our area are rated at a four. The tragedy also shows how important a strong bridge maintenance program really is. MoDOT has implemented the "Safe & Sound" bridge improvement program to get 800 of Missouri's most worn out bridges in good shape and keep them that way for 25 years. Eighty-three bridges in Southeast Missouri are on that list. Of the five major river bridges in our area, four — the Mississippi River Bridge at Caruthersville, the Route 57 bridge at Cairo, the Route 60 bridge at Cairo, and the Emerson Bridge at Cape Girardeau — are listed in satisfactory or good condition. The Route 51 bridge up at Chester, Illinois is rated in fair condition.

The folks at MoDOT assure us that no bridge that is dangerous to cross or that is in imminent peril of collapse is allowed to be open. Immediately after the Minneapolis-St. Paul bridge collapse, MoDOT started an aggressive program to make sure similar type bridges in this state are safe. There is one of the same structure type on Highway 60 near Poplar Bluff, and

MoDOT inspectors are checking it to make sure the same kind of collapse doesn't happen to it. All other bridges are inspected every other year, so if you're able to drive across it, then it was recently found to be safe.

Your state transportation department is doing everything within its power to make sure the bridges... and the roads, for that matter... are safe to drive on. The recent success of the Smoother, Safer, Sooner program — completed last December a year ahead of schedule — improved the condition of about 2,200 miles of the worst roads in the state. Roads in the state saw a major upgrade to their conditions from just 47 percent considered in good condition in 2004 to 74 percent now considered good. MoDOT officials want 85 percent of our busiest highways in good condition by 2011. A recent survey of truckers nationwide said that Interstates 44 and 70 are among the nation's most improved highways. That's the good news.

The bad news is MoDOT runs into funding issues with the Amendment Three money drying up. In 2008, construction spending will be \$1.23 billion. By 2010, the amount goes down to just \$569 million. This means a funding shortfall for the agency of \$18 billion over the next 20 years. We'll have to come up with a solution, but what that will be is yet to be determined.

In the meantime, I hope each and every one of you keeps the families of the victims and the people in Minnesota in your prayers as they deal with this tragedy.

-END-

Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.