

**Testimony of William Kennedy**  
County Commissioner  
Yellowstone County, Montana  
Before the Environment and Public Works Committee  
Hearing on “State and Local Transportation Perspectives”  
April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

# *Yellowstone County*



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Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Inhofe, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on state and local transportation perspectives.

I am Bill Kennedy, Yellowstone County Commissioner in Montana. I serve both urban and rural interests, representing approximately 148,000 people, including Billings -- Montana's largest city at just over 100,000 people.

I have also served on both Montana's Highway Commission and the congressionally-authorized Infrastructure Financing Commission, which produced a 2009 report examining funding needs and financing mechanisms.

I am acutely aware of the funding challenges this Committee confronts. Still, the American people need mobility, safety, smart investment -- and especially right now, jobs, jobs, and jobs. But at this point, they lack "investor confidence" because they don't really see what their investments provide -- other than earmarks. And states, like Montana, are growing apprehensive about letting projects, due to uncertainty as the program continues to grow more overdue by the day. I fear we will continue to go through one extension after another, much like the overdue F.A.A. bill, which was recently extended for the 18<sup>th</sup> time.

Montana desperately needs the federal-aid highway program. Despite being the 15<sup>th</sup>-highest in state fuel taxes, we could never adequately maintain our interstates, arterials, and county roads by ourselves because we have one of the lowest population levels and one of the lowest per capita income levels in the nation. Meanwhile, we accommodate tens of millions out-of-state users annually for tourism and freight movements. The highway program is also critical to jobs in Montana where unemployment in the construction sector exceeds 20 percent.

We need a 21<sup>st</sup> Century road network. Nearly half of Montana's primary and secondary arterials are at the end of their design life, and one in 13 bridges is structurally deficient according to a recent survey. We need to modernize for safety reasons.

We need a better north-south network to accommodate NAFTA movements because Montana shares a long border with Canada.

We need local buy-in on projects in order to generate support for this program at the ground level.

We need to continue investments in rural roads where the fatality rate remains stubbornly high.

We need a truly national freight program that recognizes each state's individual needs.

I also think we need rural planning, project streamlining where smaller projects with limited environmental impacts have a simpler path to project approval, and continued county road eligibility.

But, mostly, what we need is action. We need a bill. Whether it is the standard six years or even just a two-year bill to buy time while we hopefully have a national discussion about what we as a nation need and want, what we need is certainty. And, we need it soon, or we will fail to see the jobs benefits by 2012 because obligations naturally take months to finalize.

Once again, I thank the Committee for inviting me to speak on behalf of my constituents and my state this morning.

Sincerely,

  
Bill Kennedy  
Yellowstone County Commissioner

BK/ptb

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## Survey finds structurally deficient Montana bridges

- Story
- Discussion

Survey finds structurally deficient Montana bridges

Associated Press The Billings Gazette | Posted: Saturday, April 2, 2011 11:10 am | No Comments Posted

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MISSOULA — A new survey finds one of every 13 highway bridges in Montana is structurally deficient, and that an average of 80,000 motorists a day cross what the report ranks as the top three busiest bridges in the state that are in that category.

The report released this week by Transportation for America says federal guidelines peg a bridge structurally deficient if it has a major defect that requires significant maintenance or replacement.

The busiest bridges with problems are one over the Missouri River in Great Falls, the Russell Street Bridge in Missoula, and the Madison Street Bridge, also in Missoula.

In all, the survey found 391 Montana bridges structurally deficient.

That's 7.6 percent of bridges statewide. Nationally, the survey found 11.5 percent of bridges to be structurally deficient.

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Posted in Montana on *Saturday, April 2, 2011 11:10 am* Updated: 11:20 am. | Tags: Bridges, Transportation For America,

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