

# The 414 Plan to fix America's infrastructure

BY U.S. REP. RANDY FORBES

It is the epitome of governmental red tape. A bridge that had been rated "structurally deficient," it was one of over 100,000 bridges that had been placed on a wait-list of sorts for overhaul or reconstruction. It would have likely been over a decade before the bridge was revamped, due to bureaucratic regulations that have stalled the highway construction process to an average of 13.1 years. But the bridge could not make it that long. In 2007, the United States watched in alarm as the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, Minn. — under the weight of typical rush hour traffic — suddenly collapsed into the Mississippi River, killing 13 and injuring 79 others.

The disaster itself was shocking. It was probably one of the first times we, collectively as a nation, have faced the reality that our infrastructure is not only aging, but is actually becoming unsafe. It brought a magnifying glass over government regulations and their impact on transportation and infrastructure projects, as well as the safety of Americans. It poured salt on the wound for millions of Americans, who saw their taxpayer dollars being dumped into transportation projects in their own states that were taking years and years to complete.



But in a sort of perfect juxtaposition, there was something else that was shocking about the Minnesota Bridge collapse — something that provided a glimmer of opportunity in the rubble. It was this: it took only 414 days to completely construct the I-35W replacement bridge.

You see, Congress voted to make the reconstruction a top national priority and not only allocated funding, but also helped to build consensus with key stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels. Most importantly, though, the reconstruction project circumvented much of the burden of federal regulations that slow down the process, allowing the engineering and construction teams assigned to the replacement project to not only finish in a short deadline, but to come in under budget and ahead of schedule — a feat rarely heard of in U.S. transportation projects. The bridge opened to traffic on Sept. 28, 2008, just 414 days after the project started.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the president proposed

another stimulus package that sounded tiredly familiar to many Americans; it would seek to funnel taxpayer dollars into transportation and infrastructure projects as a way to boost the economy. The President is right that in order to encourage economic development and job creation, we must address transportation needs. But he is approaching it in exactly the wrong way.

Throwing more taxpayer dollars into transportation projects that are being choked by bureaucratic red tape will result in more waste, less advancement, and more frustrated citizens. We need to address the regulations that are hindering the successful and efficient completion of transportation projects across the nation.

Recently, I introduced a bill to do just that. The 414 Plan (H.R. 2924) seeks to mirror the process that allowed the efficient reconstruction of the Minneapolis bridge by suspending for five years all federal regulations that do not pertain to the safety or durability of highway facilities, or of public and workplace safety. The legislation gets rid of costly, outdated federal requirements, while continuing to give states and localities flexibility in utilizing federal funding for road and bridge projects. It also expresses the sense of Congress on the need for greater interagency cooperation among project stakeholders to further expedite surface transportation projects.

Americans don't need another tragic bridge collapse to tell them that fixing our nation's aging infrastructure is a national priority. Americans have also learned from the Administration's failed stimulus plan that simply throwing money at the problem is not the answer. The 414 Plan takes a much-needed new approach to put Americans back to work, cut costs, and accelerate necessary construction and improvements to our nation's roads and bridges.

Because if we can completely construct a 10-lane, 504-foot bridge in 414 days, we can certainly build a road in less than 13 years.

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