

## Bridging Infrastructure Needs And Funds

(NAPSA)—While allocating the funds needed to rebuild or replace deficient bridges is a significant challenge for the nation, discovering new ways to do more for America’s bridge infrastructure with fewer resources is the challenge—and an opportunity—for those who design, engineer and build bridges. That’s especially true considering that more than one in four bridges in America is structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

“Bridges are first and foremost socioeconomic lifelines, vital to our economic health,” said Ted Zoli, national technical director for bridges at HNTB Corporation, an employee-owned infrastructure firm. “They bring people and goods together and if they fail, we fail. It’s necessary that we see bridges for what they are: a durable investment in our future.”

According to a recent survey by Kelton Research, a majority of Americans believe most U.S. bridges are in poor condition and nearly three-quarters think they are not inspected as often and thoroughly as they should be.

“It’s true much of the nation’s bridge infrastructure—built in the middle of the last century as public works projects or as state highways expanded and the Interstate Highway System was constructed—is reaching the end of its anticipated life,” Zoli said. “However, the vast majority of these structures remain sound and they undergo regular inspections to maintain safety.”

While Americans tend to underestimate the average life span of a bridge (36 years versus the actual 50 to 75 years), a majority agrees that most bridges are safe (65 percent). Concern, however, runs higher in rural areas, as 50 percent assume the bulk of the nation’s bridges are unsafe versus 33 percent in more



**Innovation and creativity play an increasingly essential role in modern bridge design and engineering.**

populated areas. More rural Americans also worry that most bridges are in poor condition.

One of the biggest problems facing the nation’s bridges is how to pay for the repair and the replacement of deficient structures, as well as the routine inspection and maintenance of bridges. Traditional state and federal gas tax revenue is in steep decline due to the increased fuel efficiency of vehicles while departments of transportation are facing severe budget cuts. “We need to leverage new and improved ways of identifying and financing infrastructure, as well as to develop new strategies to design and deliver bridges more efficiently,” Zoli said.

Many Americans agree. Nearly half said in the future they would prefer to pay for the maintenance of existing bridges and construction of new ones through more tolls rather than higher sales taxes, higher gas taxes or higher property taxes.

“Bridges help define our sense of place, enhance our quality of life and contribute to our economic vitality. Preserving, protecting and improving them are investments worth making,” Zoli added.

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