

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Regarding “Keeping Our Bridges Safe”

A Report to Governor Baldacci on Maine’s Bridge Inspection and Improvement Programs
November 26, 2007

1. *What is the purpose of this report?*

In the wake of the Minnesota bridge tragedy, Governor Baldacci immediately directed MaineDOT to examine its bridge inspection and programming practices to ensure that Maine bridges remain safe.

2. *What are its major findings?*

The report’s team of 15 professional engineers with 284 years of combined engineering experience unanimously found that Maine’s bridge are safe, and that Maine’s bridge inspection program and posting processes (the “safety net”) are strong, but could be further enhanced. The team also found that capital bridge funding is inadequate to keep our bridges safe without additional postings and closures in the future.

3. *What enhancements to the bridge inspection and posting processes are recommended?*

Recommendations include additional effort to address bridge scour and connections, full implementation of the new Bridge Posting Policy, improved process documentation, photo enforcement on critical bridges, and a 24-month inspection cycle in place of the current biennial one.

4. *What level of bridge funding does the report recommend?*

The recommended funding level to keep bridges safe without wholesale load postings and closures is approximately \$120 to \$130 million per year, an increase of about \$50 to \$60 million annually. Even at this level, some additional bridge postings will be necessary.

5. *How did the report assess the current condition of Maine’s bridges?*

As part of the risk assessment process, MaineDOT generated an updated list of state bridges with main structural elements in *poor* condition. This list contains 244 bridges (the “Poor Condition List”).

6. *How does this list compare to the “Posting / Closure List” that was published last February?*

The “Posting / Closure” list of 288 structures included town bridges and bridges that may be in fair or better condition, but because of their design —sometimes older bridges designed without today’s loads in mind— may still be subject to posting. The “Poor Condition List” was generated by this report assesses condition-related safety risk on state bridges only. 138 bridges are common to both lists.

7. *Has MaineDOT developed a new bridge “Watch List”?*

Yes. An updated "MaineDOT Bridge Watch List" that combines the “Posting / Closure List” and the “Poor Condition List” has been generated. Though this list changes continuously as bridge work and inspections are performed, it currently consists of 386 bridges statewide. This represents about 10% of Maine’s public bridge inventory.

8. *Is the number of bridges on the “Watch List” likely to increase or decrease?*

Increase. Without the additional funding recommended in the report, the number of *Poor* bridges will increase and the “safety net” (more postings and closures) will be the only way to keep bridges safe. Even with additional funding, continued bridge deterioration and the backlog of work will mean some additional postings are necessary, but at a slower and more manageable rate.

9. *Who do I call for more information?*

Ken Sweeney, P.E., MaineDOT’s Deputy Chief Engineer and the chair of the task force is available to respond to inquiries regarding the "Keeping Our Bridges Safe" report. To coordinate, contact Herb Thomson at 624-3030.