



Letter to the Editor

May 25, 2010

The following is in response to Charlie Curnow's article, [America's "Failing" Infrastructure?](#), which appeared on March 30:

In response to Mr. Curnow, I am a licensed professional engineer and have spent most of the last 30 years inspecting bridges in New York and New Jersey. I can safely say conditions are getting worse. Budgets have gotten to the point where unless the inspecting engineer of a bridge makes a finding that what he has found must be repaired within two years, or there is a possibility of failure of an element or the bridge itself, the Departments of Transportation don't have the money. If you check the bridge ratings, which are a matter of public record, and compare them to past ratings you will see a gradual decline in the condition of our bridge structures.

There is a bridge in upper New York State which is in such bad shape that it is unsafe and cannot be repaired. It is now closed and had gotten to the point where it was cheaper to build a new bridge. In the interim the residents have a ferry service. In 1988, the same thing almost happened to the Williamsburg Bridge in New York City, which had to be closed for many months due to neglect. This had a tremendous impact on traffic and the economy of the businesses in the area.

Before you believe Mr. Curnow, ask him to prove with concrete facts what he is saying and what makes him qualified to say this. All of the engineering societies agree that our infrastructure is deteriorating and approaching a dangerous level. We are not making it up. For too long politicians have misallocated funds intended for bridge maintenance to other things. Believe it or not, a structure can deteriorate to the point where repairs become more expensive than replacement.

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Mr Ramirez is a Professional Engineer (PE) and a past president of the New York Chapter of the National Society of Professional Engineers, Member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Member of the Structural Engineers Association of New York, and a certified building inspection engineer.



Charlie Curnow responds:

I will concede that I am not an engineer, and that I am personally not qualified to assess the safety or conditions of any particular road or bridge. The Department of Transportation, however, is, and as my article notes, statistics from the department suggest that over the past two decades, conditions on American roads and bridges have not deteriorated as rapidly as one might think given the alarmingly low grades from the American Society of Civil Engineers national infrastructure report card. You ask for concrete facts. As my article notes, the portion of vehicle miles traveled on roads with "good" ride quality actually increased by 5 percentage points between 1995 and 2004, while the percentage of "deficient" bridges has fallen since 2002. Highway fatality rates have fallen steadily since 1994, and wasted time and gas due to congested traffic conditions have also gone down in recent years. If you are interested in learning more about national trends in infrastructure conditions, I would direct you to the Department of Transportation's 2006 Status on the Nation's Highways, Bridges and Transit, which serves as a primary source for the ASCE report card.

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