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## **OREGON'S BRIDGES AMONG BEST MAINTAINED IN THE NATION, FOR NOW**

*'Fix-it-first' philosophy pays off, but federal support and new state solutions needed to keep up with escalating costs and need*

**Portland, Oregon** – Oregon has done well, but needs federal help and new state-level solutions to fix its crumbling bridges. A new report released today shows that Oregon ranks 7<sup>th</sup> best nationally in terms of the overall condition of the state's bridges. *The Fix We're In For 2013* finds that 5.7 percent of Oregon's bridges are structurally deficient compared with 11 percent nationwide.

The report is the latest update from Transportation for America, which produced a similar report in 2011, based on a national database of bridge inspections maintained by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Oregon's bridge condition improved since the 2011 report, with the share of deficient bridges dropping by 0.6 percentage points, from 6.3 to 5.7.

However, the number of "structurally deficient" bridges is virtually guaranteed to increase over time, as a wave of old bridges reaches the end of their designed lives. Most bridges are designed to last 50 years before major overhaul or replacement. Oregon bridges are nearing that, with an average age of 42, while the average age of the state's structurally deficient bridges is 56. Furthermore, the 2003 OTIA (Oregon Transportation Investment Act) III State Bridge Delivery Program, which provided \$1.6 billion to repair or replace hundreds of aging bridges, has spent most of the funding, and now requires debt repayment.

"Today, Oregon's bridges are in good condition thanks to significant investment of state and federal funding in bridge repair and replacement projects. In particular, the Oregon Transportation Investment Act III's infusion of \$1.6 billion into state and local bridges has made a significant dent in our backlog of bridge needs," said ODOT Director **Matthew Garrett**. "As we wind down the OTIA program, however, our resources for addressing bridges—from structurally deficient and functionally obsolete spans to those that are vulnerable to a major earthquake—will be nowhere near what we need to maintain our bridges in their current condition. As a result, over time our bridge conditions will deteriorate significantly, and we will see more bridges with traffic restrictions that will harm Oregon's economy."

Almost half of all the nation's bridges could require major structural investments within the next 15 years. Nearly 67,000 bridges nationwide are classified as "structurally deficient." FHWA estimates that transportation agencies would need \$76 billion to overcome the current backlog of deficient bridges. Without significant federal support, the poor condition of bridges across the country has major implications for safety, mobility and economic activity.

"Allowing roads and bridges to slip into disrepair ultimately costs state and local governments billions more than the cost of regular, timely repair," said **Jason Miner**, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Oregon. "Deferring maintenance of bridges and highways can cost three times as much as preventative repairs. Wise funding for repair makes more money available in the long run, and that's money for the whole transportation system, from sidewalks to safety improvements."

Congress has repeatedly declared the condition and safety of bridges to be of national significance. However, the money to fix them is getting harder to come by with declining gas tax revenues and a fiscal squeeze at all levels of government. Congress made the prospects for bridges even more uncertain by eliminating a dedicated bridge fund in its recent update of the federal transportation program. The new law

also reduced access to funds for 90 percent of structurally deficient bridges, most of which are owned by cash-strapped local governments. Now bridges are left to compete with every other federal budget priority.

“Preserving Oregon’s existing transportation system is crucial to ensuring prosperity, safety and a higher quality of life,” said **James Corless**, director of Transportation for America. “The economic and social cost of neglect is simply too high. It is time for our policymakers to shore up our infrastructure and ensure Americans get the most bang for our transportation buck.”

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**Transportation for America (T4 America)** is the largest, most diverse coalition working on transportation reform today. Our nation’s transportation network is based on a policy that has not been significantly updated since the 1950’s. We believe it is time for a bold new vision — transportation that guarantees our freedom to move however we choose and leads to a stronger economy, greater energy security, cleaner environment and healthier America for all of us. We’re calling for more responsible investment of our federal tax dollars to create a safer, cleaner, smarter transportation system that works for everyone.

**1000 Friends of Oregon** advocates for land use and transportation planning that protects Oregon’s productive working landscapes, promotes efficient use of taxpayer resources, and creates affordable housing and transportation options. Since 1975, we have engaged Oregonians statewide to enhance our quality of life by building livable urban and rural communities, protecting family farms and forests, and conserving natural areas. For more information, visit [www.friends.org](http://www.friends.org).