

## editor's note



**ACCORDING TO A RECENT NPR BROADCAST**, there's a bridge just a few miles from my house in imminent danger of collapsing.

Well, that's not exactly what they said.

Ira Flatow's broadcast on August 31 (you can read it by visiting [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) and searching for "time to overhaul america's aging bridges") featured Barry LePatner (creator of [saveourbridges.com](http://saveourbridges.com)), Bill Miller (an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Temple University) and Dan McNichol (prominent author and journalist). According to Flatow, there are 8,000 bridges around the country that are unsafe. "That doesn't mean they'll all collapse tomorrow, of course, but there's a great deal of uncertainty about their safety," he says.

LePatner, though, is even more emphatic. He created a map showing the location of these 8,000 structurally deficient and fracture-critical bridges (including the one near my home) "so anyone can go on the map in their location, wherever they are in any state, and see the bridges in their community [that] are truly dangerous for their children to go over on school buses every day, for their families to travel to and from work and for their communities to be exposed to a peril that now requires them to speak out to their politicians and demand the funding to fix these bridges."

While the situation is not as dire as the picture LePatner paints, our bridges are truly in a sorry state. There were the usual exaggerations and self-aggrandizements (for example, LePatner claims the FHWA national inventory database isn't readily available when a simple Google search shows several sources, including FHWA's own website at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/britab.cfm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/britab.cfm)). But overall, the message and alarm are sound.

The speakers placed blame in several places—the states for failing in their responsibility to adequately maintain our bridges, Congress for lacking the will and

funding to act on this obvious need and President Obama for devoting too much of the \$787 billion stimulus program on quick fixes (repaving roads) rather than more lengthy but more important issues. As LePatner states: "And the stratification of the politics in Washington, unfortunately, has held our infrastructure hostage, and there's no desire right now to seriously put money other than to keep it in the status quo, and that's going to lead to tragedies, unfortunately, in the years to come."

AISC's bridge division, the National Steel Bridge Alliance, is involved in promoting the use of steel for bridges and in encouraging legislators to act on the obvious need to increase bridge funding. But one group cannot do it alone. I urge every reader of this magazine to contact their elected representatives and demand that more resources are put into this critical issue. If you don't know how to contact your representative, simply visit [www.aisc.org/action](http://www.aisc.org/action) and click on "elected officials," and you can quickly and easily find contact information for your senator and member of Congress.

There have been several historic bridge failures throughout U.S. history including the Tacoma Narrows bridge due to high winds, the Schoharie Creek Bridge in 1987 due to scour and the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis due to a design error resulting in inadequate load capacity. No one can argue when LePatner states: "This is a serious situation that cannot be minimized."

Shouldn't we act before even one more bridge fails?

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