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Congress of the United States
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IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

May 13, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

As my staff has been in continual conversations with the U.S. Department of Transportation since Tuesday, I know you are aware of the indefinite closure of the I-40 Hernando de Soto “M” bridge over the Mississippi River between Memphis, TN and Arkansas. On Wednesday, May 11, 2021, during a routine inspection, an Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT) contractor discovered a “fatigue crack” on one of two 900-foot (274-meter) horizontal steel beams that are crucial for the bridge’s integrity. Car and truck traffic has been diverted to a 71-year-old bridge on I-55, and barge traffic on the Mississippi River is still at a standstill. At this time, Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) officials are still assessing the damage before a repair plan can be formulated.

The closure is also beginning and will continue to significantly impact companies and distributors nationwide. This is the third heaviest freight corridor in the country that is serviced by five Class I railroads, in addition to the 4th largest inland port in the U.S., FedEx’s distribution hub, and more than 400 trucking companies. According to TDOT, an average 50,000 vehicles cross the bridge each day with 25% of those vehicles being trucks. According to the Waterways Council, barges carry

about 430,000 tons of cargo transit under this bridge every day. Moving that equivalent tonnage would require over 17,000 trucks per day. Thousands of individuals and companies around the country will be significantly impacted by this closure as goods become increasingly delayed.

The closure is also contributing to heavy traffic congestion in Memphis and neighboring West Memphis, Arkansas. The next nearest crossings over the Mississippi River are 60 miles to the south near Lula Mississippi or 100 miles north near Dyersburg, Tennessee.

The closure of this important supply chain artery demonstrates the immediate need for the American Jobs Plan and ambitious investments in our nation's aging infrastructure. Therefore, I highly encourage you to visit Memphis at your earliest convenience so you can see first-hand the damage of the I-40 Hernando DeSoto bridge and the devastating effects it is having on our distribution network.

Thank you for the responsiveness of your Department this week and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress