International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers

May 14, 2021:

Iron Workers Statement on Emergency Closing of DeSoto Bridge

The International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers shares the distress of many at the emergency closing of the I-40 Hernando DeSoto Bridge between Tennessee and Arkansas due to a serious crack in the span. As a union of 128,000 workers who have done bridge construction for 124 years, we are deeply familiar with the high safety standards of bridges and the terrible consequences when they fail. We are lucky that this crack was caught in time, but the incident underlines the urgent need for federal funding to fix this bridge and many like it across the United States.

As many know, tens of thousands of bridges are structurally deficient, and our country has suffered numerous bridge closures and collapses in recent years. This is disturbing and unnecessary since the pandemic has left thousands of our skilled members unemployed. They are ready and able to get to work repairing these bridges but are left on the sidelines for lack of infrastructure funding.

The I-40 bridge also highlights the importance of skill and safety. Few structures must perform to the same standard as a major highway bridge, exposed to the wind and constant punishing weight of traffic. They must be built by workers trained the highest standards of skill, such as those taught in building trades registered apprenticeships. They also require quality materials, not cheap overseas imports, to safely bear traffic for decades on end.

We urge Congress to fix America's bridges by quickly passing legislation based on President Biden's American Jobs Plan. The Plan would provide both the funding to repair these critical bridges and the labor, training, and Buy America standards needed to make sure it is done right. It would make the traveling public safer and create good union jobs. Congress cannot delay; we may not be lucky enough to catch the next failing bridge in time.

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