



Highlights of [GAO-10-930T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

One in four bridges in the United States is either structurally deficient and in need of repair, or functionally obsolete and is not adequate for today's traffic. The Highway Bridge Program (HBP), the primary source of federal funding for bridges, provided about \$7 billion to states in fiscal year 2010. This testimony addresses (1) the current state of the nation's bridges and the impacts of the HBP and (2) the extent to which the HBP aligns with principles GAO developed to guide the re-examination of surface transportation programs. This testimony is based on prior GAO reports, updated with bridge data and information provided by agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any new recommendations. In 2008, GAO recommended that the Secretary of Transportation work with Congress to (1) identify and define national goals for HBP, (2) develop and implement performance measures, (3) identify and evaluate best tools and practices, and (4) review and evaluate HBP funding mechanisms to align funding with performance. DOT generally agreed with these recommendations and has taken some actions to work with Congress to address issues GAO raised regarding the HBP, but much work remains.

GAO provided a draft of this testimony to FHWA for review. We incorporated FHWA comments, as appropriate.

View [GAO-10-930T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Phillip R. Herr at (202) 512-2834 or herrp@gao.gov.

HIGHWAY BRIDGE PROGRAM

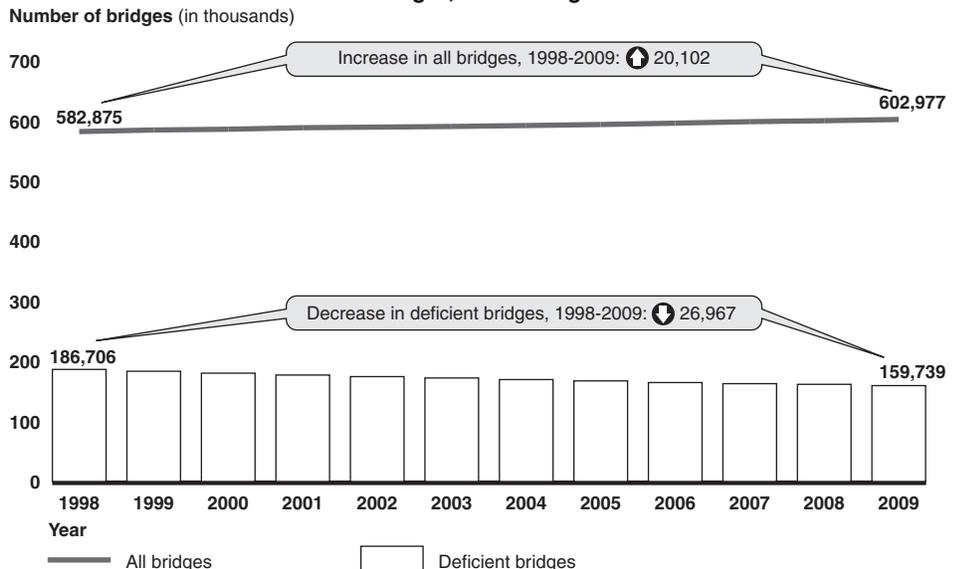
Condition of Nation's Bridges Shows Limited Improvement, but Further Actions Could Enhance the Impact of Federal Investment

What GAO Found

There are over 600,000 bridges on the nation's roadways, of which one in four is deficient in some sense. Data indicate that the total number of deficient bridges has decreased over the past 12 years, even as the total number of bridges has increased, because of a reduction in the number of structurally deficient bridges. However, the impact of the federal investment in the HBP is difficult to measure, in part because there are no comprehensive and complementary data for state and local bridge spending. The lack of comprehensive information on state and local spending makes it impossible to (1) distinguish the impact of HBP funding from other funding to improve bridge conditions and (2) determine the extent to which states may be substituting increased HBP funding for state and local funds that they would otherwise have spent on bridges. Evaluating the impact of the HBP is important not only to understand the outcome of past spending but also to determine how to sensibly invest future federal resources.

The HBP does not fully align with GAO's principles for re-examining surface transportation programs in that the program lacks focus, performance measures, and fiscal sustainability. The program's statutory goals are not focused on a clearly identified national interest but rather have expanded from improving deficient bridges to supporting preventive maintenance and many other projects, thus expanding eligibility to include almost any bridge. In addition, the program lacks measures linking funding to performance and does not utilize new tools such as bridge management systems. Fiscal sustainability also remains a challenge given the nearly \$30 billion in additional revenues added to the Highway Account since fiscal year 2008.

Trends in Number and Condition of Bridges, 1998 through 2009



Source: GAO analysis of 2009 FHWA data.

Note: Deficient bridges include both structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridges.