

Any Marylander who travels across a bridge on their way to work or school as I do was no doubt disturbed by the collapse of an interstate highway bridge in Minneapolis last week that claimed the lives of at least five people and injured dozens more. In the aftermath of this great tragedy, our primary focus should be to understand why this happened and to take measures to ensure an incident like this is not repeated in the future.

It is also critically important that we continue to make investments to meet our transportation infrastructure needs and for state and federal agencies to conduct routine inspections to ensure the safety of our bridges, roads, and waterways.

In Maryland, the State Highway Agency (SHA) conducts inspections every two years on 2,584 bridges and overpasses constructed and maintained by the agency. Underwater inspections are conducted every four years, more frequent than the federal requirement of five years. This aggressive monitoring program identifies bridges very early that may need to be repaired or replaced in the future.

The overall efficiency and security of our nation's transportation infrastructure is critically important. It allows us to get to doctor's appointments on time, to get to and from our places of work, and to visit with our family members. It also plays a critical role in ensuring our military is able to attend to its missions and maintains our economy by enabling the shipping of goods across our nation.

But these are just a few of the important reasons we travel. In fact, traveling is something we Americans do best, and as our population increases the number of vehicles on our roads continues to increase.

These additional cars and trucks, however, can cause frustrating traffic jams and congestion, as well as pollution and tremendous wear and tear on our roadways. Residents, commuters and visitors to our region, not far from the nation's capital, are well aware that our transportation infrastructure is experiencing these problems.

Time and again we have seen studies and surveys reporting that, in comparison to other major cities in our nation, our region is not only doing poorly, but the problem is getting worse. What this tells us is that it is more important than ever to make improving our transit systems and transportation infrastructure a top priority.

In 2005, Congress passed the Transportation Reauthorization bill which authorizes federal funding for transportation projects over the next six years. This bill has already delivered significant funds for major projects in our region to make our roads safer by reducing congestion, making improvements to some of our region's most dangerous intersections, and ensuring that our roads can handle higher volumes of traffic.

At my request, Congress has also recently approved investments for other key transit and transportation programs - like the planning, design, and construction of the Southern Maryland Commuter Bus Initiative, and the South Capitol Street Corridor, one of Southern Maryland's key gateways into the Nation's Capital, not to mention improvements to Great Mills Road, Route 5, and Chancellor's Run Road.

Another top transportation priority in Southern Maryland has long been construction of the Hughesville bypass to alleviate congestion at the hazardous and accident-prone intersection of Route 5 and 231. For this important project, the Congress has provided \$10 million to facilitate its expedited completion, and I am pleased to be participating in a ceremony this week to officially mark the completion of the project.

I believe these investments secured for high-priority transportation projects in our region will address some of Southern Maryland's major transportation infrastructure needs and make it easier to travel through our state.

I remain committed to working with state, local and federal officials to secure the necessary resources for these projects and others that will develop effective solutions to our traffic and transit needs and ensure the continued safety of our transportation infrastructure.