

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

December 12, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We are writing for your immediate assistance and focus on a Rhode Island transportation emergency.

As we alerted your department yesterday, the westbound span of the Washington Bridge, which carries Interstate 195 over the Seekonk River between Providence and East Providence, Rhode Island was closed immediately after the discovery of critical failure of key components of the bridge. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) has declared this a Type 1 emergency as it initiates plans to rebuild this section of the bridge, a process that could take several months.

With nearly 100,000 vehicle crossings per day, the Washington Bridge is a vital commuter and freight transportation link for the state and the region. The Washington Bridge is the primary and fastest route for Rhode Islanders in the eastern part of our state to access the Providence hospitals and the area's only Level 1 trauma center.

To ensure that the bridge can safely reopen as quickly as possible, we urge you to expedite any approvals requested by RIDOT. We also ask that you provide technical assistance to the state where applicable to optimize work on repairs, lane shifts, detour design, shuttle busses, and other items as necessary.

As you know, Congress has made significant investments in improving the safety of our bridges – including through the Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program, which prioritizes funding for states like Rhode Island, that have a high percentage of bridges in poor condition. Indeed, Rhode Island received the most funding of any state under this program every year since its inception. However, in view of this emergency, we ask you make available any additional existing federal formula fund that could expedite the completion of this work.

We also request that the Federal Highway Administration and USDOT Inspector General evaluate the adequacy of bridge inspections in the state and work with RIDOT to identify obsolete design features on other bridges that could lead to a critical failure. Finally, we would also request a meeting with you about this important need for our state.

Thank you for your attention to this important request.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Gabe Amo
Member of Congress

CC: President Biden