

Infrastructure investment needed across America

(First published in the Charlotte Sun on July 30, 2008)

America's infrastructure is in poor shape and the evidence is everywhere - from collapsing interstate bridges and near-misses at overcrowded airports to insufficient maintenance of the electricity grid and levee breaks during Hurricane Katrina. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gives our national infrastructure a "D" grade and estimates that an investment of \$1.6 trillion over the next five years is needed from federal, state and local governments, as well as private sector sources, to address this crisis. Florida's infrastructure is only marginally better than the national average and the Florida ASCE gives our infrastructure a "C" grade, noting that it will take \$200 billion to repair our waterways, highways, airports, and bridges.

Inadequate infrastructure costs American workers and businesses time and money and threatens the public's safety and health. I believe the time has come for Congress to pass a second economic stimulus package, focused on rebuilding our infrastructure that has been badly neglected for the past eight years. Investing in our infrastructure would create new jobs in the construction industry, which has been hurt in the real estate crisis, and could help revive Florida's sagging economy.

Recently, I brought Chairman Oberstar, who oversees the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, to my district to see our infrastructure needs firsthand. At Charlotte County Airport, Chairman Oberstar saw our cracked runways and heard about importance of building a control tower. The chairman also visited with concerned residents to better understand the need to fully fund the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. I'm pleased to say that his visit is paying off. Charlotte County Airport received \$2.1 million in grants to rehabilitate its cracked apron and to remedy a potential safety hazard on its runways. I will continue to fight to bring more money to my district for infrastructure investment so that we can have the roads, runways, and railways that are critical for Florida's thriving economy.

America grew impressively after World War II because of significant investments in our transportation infrastructure. Unfortunately, we have not sustained this investment in recent years and that needs to change. Infrastructure funding must be a top priority in our efforts to revitalize our economy and to remain globally competitive. Congress must exercise strong leadership and pass another economic stimulus package that rebuilds and repairs our infrastructure-and our economy. America's future depends on it.

Tim Mahoney represents Florida's 16th district in the U.S. House of Representatives.