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CARDIN URGES CONGRESS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE NATION'S ROADS AND BRIDGES; COMMENDS GOVERNOR O'MALLEY'S CAREFUL CUTS

Washington, DC – **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin** (D-MD), a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, today called again for replenishing the Federal Highway Trust Fund in response to the announcement of budget cuts to cover Maryland's projected \$1.1 billion budget shortfall.

“In the interest of public safety, the most immediate action Congress – particularly the Senate – can take to rescue our ailing state economies is to pay back \$8 billion from the General Fund to the Highway Trust Fund that was borrowed 10 years ago. The Highway Trust Fund is a lifeline to states for highway construction and maintenance resources, but it literally is going broke. If the funds are not restored, it is estimated that the State of Maryland will lose over \$190 million and a projected 6,629 related jobs. This loss is wholly unacceptable.

“I first called for a transfer of funds to restore the Highway Trust Fund in June. At the time, the President was threatening to veto this much-needed fix. President Bush has reversed course and now supports this legislation, and so should his partisan colleagues in the Senate.

“Marylanders are hurting. There is less money for state services at a time when they are needed most,” said Senator Cardin. “I commend Governor O'Malley for his handling of a difficult situation during these tough economic times. His actions reinforce the urgent need for Congress to step up to its responsibility to provide support for states like ours as they try to weather the current economic downturn.

“The governor has protected all systems maintenance and current repair work on our state's roadways, including all bridge funds. I applaud his foresight in protecting transit money at a time when the economy has driven the demand for public transit to all-time highs. But as last month's tragic accident on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge demonstrated, we need a bold, federal investment plan to save our nation's bridges and infrastructure.”

At a hearing today of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to review legislation that would help states fund life-saving technology to better inspect the nation's bridges, Senator Cardin referenced last month's Bay Bridge accident. “We've been lucky. This was the first time since the original Bay Bridge span opened in 1952 that an accident of this kind has occurred. It clearly demonstrated the advantage of newer technologies for bridge inspection and how this tragedy that could be repeated if Congress does not act quickly. At times like this, states like Maryland need more federal investment in safety projects like roads and bridges. We don't need more Congressional gridlock,” Senator Cardin said.

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