



Part III

Bridges

Chapter 11: Federal Bridges Program/Status of the Nation's Bridges	11-1
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Introduction

General information on the composition and conditions of the Nation's bridges was presented in Chapters 2 and 3, which focused on the highway system and provided an overview of bridge performance. This section of the report provides additional detail on the conditions, composition, and performance of bridges as well as information on Federal bridge programs.

Bridges are critical elements within the highway transportation network supporting commerce, economic vitality, and personal mobility. Every day, close to 4 billion vehicles cross bridges in the United States. The public expects these structures to be safe and able to accommodate this volume of traffic. The safety of the bridge network came into question in the late 1960s when, on December 15, 1967, the Silver Bridge spanning between West Virginia and Ohio collapsed during rush-hour traffic. This catastrophic event resulted in 46 fatalities and numerous injuries, prompting national concern about bridge conditions and safety. Following this disastrous event, programs were established to ensure periodic safety inspection of bridges and provide mechanisms for funding of bridge replacement and rehabilitation needs. The primary bridge programs include the National Bridge Inspection Program (NBIP) and the associated Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program (HBRRP).

As shown in the tables and discussions, the Nation's highway bridges have remained safe as a result of the bridge programs and progress has been made toward the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) strategic goals of reducing deficiencies. However, with an ever-aging population of highway structures, increasing traffic demands, and limited budgets, the FHWA and the Nation need to take a closer look at transportation system preservation strategies, such as preventive maintenance and improved bridge inspection and management techniques, to continue to ensure the safety of the motoring public and effective stewardship of the public trust.

Information is presented in the following order:

- Overview of the National Bridge Inspection Program and the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program. The evolution of the programs is also presented and discussed.
- Additional detail on the bridge conditions and composition summarized in Chapters 2 and 3.
- Additional detail on the highway bridge network through the examination of specific functional classifications, ownership, material types, and design types.