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Senate passes Infrastructure Improvement Act

Source: WaterWeek Staff

The US Senate unanimously passed the National Infrastructure Improvement Act late Aug. 2 to address the deteriorating condition of America's bridges, roads, drinking water systems, dams and other public works.

The bipartisan bill ([S 775](#)) creates the National Commission on Infrastructure. A [press release](#) by co-sponsors Senators George Voinovich, R-Ohio, Thomas Carper, D-Del., Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., and Norm Coleman, R-Minn., says the commission is mandated to complete a study by February 2010 to address "the state of the nation's infrastructure, including: capacity of infrastructure improvements to sustain current and anticipated economic development; the age, condition and capacity of public infrastructure; repair and maintenance needs; financing methods; and investment requirements."

By February 2010, the commission is directed to produce a federal infrastructure plan that details priorities and to complete a report to Congress that will detail infrastructure legislation deemed necessary for the next five, 15, 30 and 50 years.

The bill was sent to the US House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure just before Congress began its summer break, which ends August 31. Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., introduced identical legislation (HR 3398) on Aug. 3.

Statements from bill sponsors indicate that the recent collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis and levee failures in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina "made evident the serious need for the repair and improvement of aging infrastructure and waterway systems" and made action urgent.

The Senate sponsors also stated, "Our infrastructure is collapsing due to insufficient funding," and pointed out "a \$1.2 billion backlog of unfunded Army Corps of Engineers operation and maintenance projects."

Meanwhile, the first Water Resources Development Act in seven years — legislation that authorizes projects to be undertaken by the US Army Corps of Engineers — awaits final action when Congress returns from break. (See separate story.)