



Parents Against Tired Truckers and Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways

**STATEMENT OF KRISTIN WEST
SURVIVOR 35W BRIDGE COLLAPSE
CEDAR, MN
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My name is Kristin West, and I am from Cedar, Minnesota. I am a survivor of the Minneapolis bridge collapse. On August 1, 2007, I was on my way home from work, taking a route that I had driven five days a week, twice a day for 12 years. I just reached the middle of the 35W bridge when I heard an odd rumble. My Trailblazer started slamming from side to side, then I dropped forward and down. As my SUV plummeted to the river below, I was certain that I was going to die. I scrambled to find my cell phone and called my husband to tell him and our five children that I loved them.

On that day, on that bridge, I was one of the 145 people injured in this disaster, and 13 others were killed. I am issuing this statement today as a volunteer for the Truck Safety Coalition because our federal government must take action now to prevent another bridge collapse. I was shocked to learn that less than two years after the tragedy that I and many others endured, some trucking interests are pushing for an increase in truck weights from 80,000 to 97,000 pounds. Considering that the NTSB cited “load” as a factor in the bridge’s ultimate failure, it is inconceivable to me that Congress or the Administration would seriously consider allowing even more load to be carried on our bridges and risk another catastrophic collapse.

Our infrastructure is in dire and urgent need of repair and it does not make sense to allow trucks with even heavier loads to travel on them. Right now, 1 in 4 bridges have been rated structurally deficient or functionally obsolete, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers 2009 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure. This statistic about the poor condition of our bridges affects the safety of every family member who is traveling to and from work, a medical appointment or a soccer practice with a car full of children.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a 41 percent increase in registered large trucks and an 84 percent increase in miles traveled by large trucks. Trucking tonnage is projected to more than double between 2004 and 2035. The increase in freight demand and truck travel means more trucks on more roads and bridges. Today we have an average of 10,500 trucks per day per mile on the Interstate highways system, and in the near future, this will increase to an average of 22,700 trucks per day per mile, with the most heavily used portions of the system seeing upwards of 50,000 trucks per day per mile. If truck size and weight limits are increased, this will have a tremendous impact on our infrastructure and our safety. The risk of bridge damage and fatigue and more deaths and injuries is enormous and real.

The 35W bridge collapse was a wake-up call about the condition of our bridges and I am hopeful that we will learn from this tragedy. Simply put, overweight trucks can overstress bridges and result in damage, deaths, and destruction. I have heard engineers liken the effect of heavy trucks on a bridge to bending a paper clip: it may bend again and again without breaking, but eventually it will snap.

I applaud Senator Lautenberg, Representative McGovern, Representative Kirk and all others who are putting our safety as a top priority and working to keep our current federal truck size and weight limits. I urge Members of Congress to join them and take heed of the threat to highway safety and the possible catastrophic consequences of allowing bigger, heavier trucks on our roads and bridges. Please put the brakes on any increases to truck sizes and weights and protect our infrastructure.

Thank you.