



## Labor, Civic, and Faith Groups: Rebuild WV Bridges To Rebuild Economy

September 28, 2011

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Nearly four out of 10 West Virginia bridges are structurally deficient or obsolete, according to the *American Society of Civil Engineers* (ASCE). With low interest rates and a lot of construction workers unemployed, many in labor, citizen and faith groups are saying now is the perfect time to fix that.

State and federal governments should increase infrastructure spending now to deal with problems that aren't going away, says Wayne Rebich with *Affiliated Construction Trades*.

"At some point or another, we are going to have to deal with it. These are bridges that are used every day, that our school buses - our children - cross back and forth every day."

Poor infrastructure cost the U.S. economy nearly \$130 billion last year, the ASCE says, and because it slows the economy, it costs thousands of jobs. Sean O'Leary, a policy analyst for the *West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy*, says that's especially an issue when trying to bring jobs to mountainous West Virginia.

"A lot of people talk about taxes as a cost of doing business. The real cost of doing business is transportation. After labor, when businesses are looking at where to locate, where to expand, the biggest cost for business is transportation."

According to economists, spending on infrastructure stimulates the economy four times as much as do tax cuts. O'Leary says the state has lost 15 percent of its construction jobs to the Great Recession. That plus historically low interest rates makes this an excellent time to invest, he says

"Interest rates are as low as they possibly could be. If we're having a problem with unemployment, why not issue some bonds, make smart investments. We'll reap the benefits for decades and decades, and with these low interest rates it's like free money when you get the bang for the buck out of it."

The Obama administration wants to increase funding for infrastructure, saying it would create tens of thousands of jobs nationally. Republicans in Congress have proposed cutting infrastructure funds by a third to reduce the deficit.

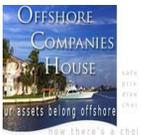
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- John Dewey



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Several groups will hold a news conference at 12:30 p.m. today at the Port of St Albans, near the Dick Henderson Bridge linking St Albans to Nitro. The bridge was built in the 1930s, has a weight restriction, and is slated to have its superstructure replaced.

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