

**Ken Harycki
Mayor
Stillwater, Minnesota**

**Testimony regarding the St. Croix River Crossing Project
HR850**

**House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Wednesday, May 4, 2011**

- Chairman Bishop, ranking member Grijalva and members of the committee.
- My name is Ken Harycki. I am the Mayor of Stillwater, Minnesota, and also co-chairman of the Coalition for the St. Croix River Crossing, a two-state regional community organization that has been formed to advocate for the new bridge project.
- My hometown is a beautiful and historic city located on the St. Croix River, which creates the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin. Our downtown is protected by the National Register of Historic Places, and the counties on both sides of the river are part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.
- Since even before 1848, when Wisconsin was admitted by Congress into the Union, communities on both sides of the river have been connected by a river crossing at Stillwater.
- In 1931, 80 years ago, a lift bridge was built across the river as our communities grew. Through the 1940's and 50's the bridge was able to handle the demands of people who needed to cross between our communities, but in the 1960's it became apparent that demand was exceeding this design.
- Now, in 2011 our bridge is dangerously outdated.

- The lift bridge was designed to handle a capacity of 11,000 cars per day, but today it is overburdened by an average of 18,400 vehicles daily. In the summer, traffic can jump to over 25,000 cars a day.
- The road that leads up to the bridge has a traffic accident rate that is nearly twice the state average for comparable roadways.
- Cars idle for hours on both sides waiting to cross the bridge, creating pollution and making it challenging for residents and visitors to navigate Stillwater's historic downtown.
- Too many years and too much traffic have taken a toll on the bridge. Flooding and maintenance force the bridge to close on a regular basis, sending tens of thousands of cars and trucks elsewhere.
- This bridge is a functionally-obsolete, fracture-critical structure, meaning that if something fails on the bridge, it would collapse. The bridge's sufficiency rating of 33 is lower than that of the I-35W Bridge before it collapsed in 2007, killing 13 and injuring 144 people.
- As you can see from the handout that we've provided to the committee, it has been difficult to find the right plan that is consistent with three important federal laws.
 - Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act;
 - Section 4 of the Transportation Act of 1996; and
 - Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- In particular, the St. Croix River is an important natural resource that is recognized and protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Area residents want to continue to protect the river from over-development and protect historic sites throughout the region. But we still need a safe, reliable crossing.

- The project that we are asking the Congress to permit to go forward was developed through an unprecedented environmental mediation process that was administered by the Udall Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution.
- To make sure every possible idea for a new bridge was considered, the Udall Institute brought together 27 different stakeholder organizations. They are listed in your materials, and also on the poster board behind us. The group met in Stillwater City Hall at least monthly for three years.
- The Stakeholder Group, staffed by a team of engineering, environmental and design professionals, worked together to study a multitude of options, designs and features. These organizations represented the community, state and federal regulatory agencies, environmental organizations, historic preservation interests, economic development interests, and local governments from both sides of the river.
- The City of Stillwater and our sister city, the City of Oak Park Heights were important parts of this exhaustive planning process. And so was the National Park Service.
- This diverse group looked at every possible idea and location for a new crossing. We even looked at tunneling under the river in order to protect the scenic views. Your handout includes a map of the dozen or so routes that were reviewed as part of the Stakeholder process.
- The Stakeholders considered ways to protect the river, to make this national resource more accessible to people, and respect the history of Stillwater and the region– all while making sure the metro area has a transportation resource that is capable of meeting current and future needs.
- The result was a plan that balances the three laws. All but one of the groups involved supported the plan. We received a Record of Decision by the Federal Highway Administration that validated the work we did and the final result.

- Our plan and the community's vision are for more than just a new bridge. We'll be using federal and state highway funds to make significant park improvements and environmental remediation as part of the project.
- The project will preserve the historic bridge by converting it into the key element of a new bicycle and pedestrian loop trail along and above the river, giving people a new and exciting way to access and enjoy the river valley and this national park.
- Bluff lands on both sides of the river where the present-day roadway is located will be restored.
- The pilings and the riverfront for the old coal barge terminal in front of the power plant will be removed.
- The new bridge will also decrease the amount of phosphorous pollution entering the river by 20 percent -- the number one goal of the St. Croix River Basin Team. The new crossing will also reduce the dangerous levels of traffic and automotive pollution from our small, historic downtown area.
- And finally, the bridge design and location. As you can see from our posters, the bridge is gorgeous. It's a modified cable stay design that has been built in only two other locations in North America. The Stakeholders wanted a "signature bridge" that is worthy of the St. Croix Valley. We believe it will become as iconic as the Lift Bridge.
- Also, note the location. We think it's appropriate to build the new crossing within the industrial part of the riverway, next to a power plant, a sewage treatment plant and a marina. This portion of the river is assuredly not wild, and not historic like downtown Stillwater. It is the correct location for the crossing.
- The National Park Service has determined that the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act does not allow them to grant a permit for any new construction in a

designated riverway. This is an important point: the NPS has not just blocked this bridge; it has rejected any new construction in a Wild and Scenic Riverway. Only Congress is allowed to review and approve new construction.

- The longer we wait, the more expensive the solution will get and the greater the risk that something tragic could happen. Living in Minnesota, after the 35W bridge collapse, we are especially sensitive about our bridges.
- It's worth noting that support for the project is not universal. Like all large public projects, there will always be opponents. But make no mistake, the public strongly supports this new bridge. So do a majority of elected local officials in Stillwater and Oak Park Heights in Minnesota, and our counterparts in Wisconsin overwhelmingly support this project. All of our state legislators representing us on both sides of the river are in support for this project.
- And we are especially pleased to say that throughout the decades this support has been bi-partisan. Now is no different, with the Governors in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and your Congressional colleagues Representatives Bachmann and Kind supporting our project.
- I assure you that the people who live and work in the St. Croix River Valley have done everything possible to create the best plan for the entire region. We care deeply about the river that unites our communities.
- Together, with the help of federal and state officials, we have created a project that
 - Meets current and future traffic demands
 - Respects the river and its scenic beauty
 - Protects the historic lift bridge and historic sites throughout the region.
- It's now up to you to take action and help us resolve this matter. I thank you for your time and again ask for your help and support.