

*Remarks for the
State Aid Roads Press Conference
December 17, 2002*

Good morning. For many months now, we have been aware of the critical need for repair and replacement of bridges around Mississippi. In November, that need was further highlighted with the tragic and fatal collapse of a bridge in Wayne County.

No one should feel a sense of trepidation or fear when they drive across a bridge in this state.

Today, we are here to restore a sense of confidence in Mississippi's infrastructure, and in the hundreds of bridges found across the state.

Since this past summer, we have been working with State Aid Road Engineer Brooks Miller to address the urgent needs of our bridges. As you know, funding is tight at this time and solutions call for creative and innovative thinking.

Today we are announcing the Office of State Aid Road Construction and the Mississippi Department of Transportation will be borrowing \$25 million from the Mississippi Development Bank. These funds will be combined with federal bridge funds to provide \$40 million in funding for bridge projects this year.

The loan from the Mississippi Development Bank will be repaid with a portion of the federal funds received each year for bridge projects.

Under this method, we will be able to maximize the funding available to repair or rebuild bridges in Mississippi. More importantly, we will work toward making sure we avoid another tragedy – and another loss of life.

I appreciate the good work done by Brooks Miller and his colleagues at the Department of Transportation. I'd like to ask Wayne Brown, chairman of the Mississippi Transportation Commission, and Brooks Miller to make a few comments, and then we'll be glad to take your questions.