

States Cooperate to Rebuild Critical Duluth-Superior Bridge

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin

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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/blatnik-bridge-2022-s441.jpg>



The John A. Blatnik Bridge carries Interstate 535 and U.S. Highway 53 over the Saint Louis River, a tributary of Lake Superior, between Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, together with Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, today announced their departments of transportation have requested federal funding to help rebuild the John A. Blatnik Bridge between Superior and Duluth, Minnesota. More than \$1 billion is available through the federal Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant program, which is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).



“This project is an effort that’s been years in the works, and in partnership with Minnesota, our departments of transportation are ready to take advantage of this federal funding to make the investments needed to see this project over the finish line,” said Gov. Evers. “The updated Blatnik Bridge will foster regional economic growth, bolster our national supply chains, and strengthen the reliability of the transportation network that serves hundreds of communities. We look forward to continuing our work with our federal partners and the folks in Minnesota to build

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the 21st-century infrastructure our states need to grow and succeed.”

“The Blatnik Bridge connects the Twin Ports communities and economies of Duluth and Superior—it provides a vital route for regional commerce, tourism, and emergency services,” said Gov. Walz. “I’m proud to partner with Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers and our colleagues at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to rebuild and modernize this critical piece of infrastructure as quickly as possible.”

For more than 60 years, the Blatnik Bridge has served as a vital link between Superior and Duluth via Interstate 535 and US 53. Jointly owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the Blatnik Bridge is an important freight and commercial connection between the Duluth-Superior Twin Ports and serves more than 33,000 cars per day. The bridge has reached the end of its service life with significant structural deterioration, resulting in current load restrictions and its anticipated closure in 2030.

“The Blatnik Bridge is overdue for an upgrade, and we are ready to act and no longer rely on regular maintenance efforts,” said WisDOT Secretary Craig Thompson. “This federal funding will reinforce our commitment to invest in the existing infrastructure and rebuild this important route between our two states. Local residents and businesses rely on the Blatnik Bridge every day and any closures or traffic delays for maintenance work directly impacts their livelihood. Together with MnDOT, our improvements will provide a safe crossing to benefit transportation for decades to come.”



Each state recently committed \$400 million and plans to seek additional federal funds through other sources, including other discretionary grants, to get the project over the finish line. Earlier this year, Gov. Evers signed the 2023-25 biennial budget, which authorized \$47.2 million in funding and \$352.8 million in transportation fund-supported, general obligation bonding authority to secure sufficient state support for the project. Additionally, thanks to the efforts of U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin), last year, the federal omnibus spending bill signed by President Joe Biden included more than \$255 million to support dozens of projects throughout Wisconsin, including \$7.5 million for the Blatnik Bridge. This financial commitment has been essential to ensuring the state can be competitive in applying for additional federal support for the project.

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“The Blatnik Bridge is rated as Minnesota’s highest risk for service disruption and replacing the bridge prior to 2030 is a top priority,” said MnDOT Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger. “A new Blatnik Bridge will improve travel reliability and freight access, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide good-paying jobs for local residents. MnDOT is grateful to our federal partners for their consideration and look forward to working with our partners at WisDOT to build the modern and reliable Blatnik Bridge that the Twin Ports deserves.”

The Blatnik Bridge is a major freight asset for the national economy. Each year, it carries nearly 265,000 trucks transporting more than \$2.6 billion in domestic goods and more than \$1 billion in international goods from 42 states and nine Canadian provinces. The nearby Twin Ports is the largest port on the Great Lakes and the 17th largest in the United States. The port accommodates the maritime transportation needs of a wide range of industries including agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacturing, construction, power generation, and passenger cruising.

MnDOT and WisDOT have been working on this project since 2020 and plan to reveal the recommended alternative for replacing the 8,000-foot structure in October.

The federal BIL funding will be allocated to a substantial portion of the project’s budget and streamline scheduling. Design work for the project, which would determine specifications and shape the total cost of the project, is anticipated to begin in 2024. Once a final design is selected, construction is planned to begin in 2027 if full funding is secured.