

**United States Senate**  
**Washington, D.C. 20510**

April 30, 2024

The Honorable Secretary Buttigieg  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We write to request your assistance as Colorado faces ongoing challenges with the closure of US 50 Blue Mesa Bridge, a vital transportation corridor on the Western Slope. As you may be aware, Governor Jared Polis declared this a disaster emergency. The bridge's closure for an indeterminate time presents a challenge to public safety, health, and our state's economy.

On April 18th, during a planned special inspection of the bridge required by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), engineers found a crack in a steel support structure. At the urging of FHWA, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) immediately closed the bridge to all traffic.

US Highway 50 is a critical East-West transportation corridor in Colorado that connects Gunnison and Lake City to Montrose with a drive that normally takes 75 minutes. With the bridge closed, the recommended highway detour adds over six hours of travel time. CDOT and Gunnison County recently opened an alternative route on a seasonal, narrow dirt county road. The detour is only available to local traffic twice a day. Gunnison County and CDOT went to great lengths, and incurred significant expenses, to open this road and provide relief in a matter of days. They continue to work to bolster this road to accommodate more traffic than the road is designed for. Those who need to cross the bridge for school, work, and medical services, and truckers who deliver fuel, food, and agricultural supplies are still without a direct highway route.

We are grateful for the leadership of Gunnison County, CDOT, and the initial support from the Department of Transportation (DOT). The state is working diligently to understand the full scope of the bridge's structural issue and ensure it is safe again for regular use. Despite this, there is still no timeline for the bridge to reopen. For this reason, we urge DOT to quickly deploy funding to support the short-term management of detours and the long-term bridge repair to restore full highway access.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We welcome the opportunity to work with you to identify and deploy all available DOT resources to tackle the challenge. We look forward to discussing this issue further with you and members of your team.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michael Bennet in blue ink.

Michael Bennet  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of John Hickenlooper in blue ink.

John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator