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The American Society of Civil Engineers and its members are committed to protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public, and as such, are equally committed to improving the nation's public infrastructure. To achieve that goal, the *Report Card* depicts the condition and performance of the nation's infrastructure in the familiar form of a school report card—assigning letter grades that are based on physical condition and needed fiscal investments for improvement.

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# | INTRODUCTION

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Since 1998, ASCE has issued three infrastructure report cards and numerous status updates that depict the current state of the infrastructure and provide potential solutions for improvement. The *Report Card* has been cited in numerous articles and academic studies, and the nation's political leaders rely on the *Report Card* to provide them with clear information which they can use as a guide for policy decisions.

To develop the quadrennial *Report Card for America's Infrastructure*, ASCE assembles an advisory panel of the nation's leading civil engineers to determine the scope of the inquiry and establish a methodology for assigning grades. They then analyze hundreds of studies, reports, and other sources, and ASCE surveys thousands of engineers to determine what is happening in the field.

The concept for a report card to grade the nation's infrastructure originated in 1988 with a congressionally chartered commission, the National Council on Public Works Improvement. Titled *Fragile Foundations: A Report on America's Public Works*, the council's report issued recommendations on how to improve the nation's infrastructure. As a way to guide the study, the authors used the report card concept to establish a baseline evaluation of the infrastructure. This first report card included eight categories of infrastructure

and assigned letter grades based on performance and capacity of existing public works.

When the report was released in 1988, the nation's infrastructure earned a "C," representing an average grade. Among the problems identified within *Fragile Foundations* were increasing congestion and deferred maintenance and age of the system; the authors of the report worried that fiscal investment was inadequate to meet the current operations costs and future demands on the system.

In 1998, ASCE found that in the decade since the *Fragile Foundations* report was released, the overall grade had dropped a whole letter grade to a D. Moreover, a failing grade was assigned to the nation's public school infrastructure, with near failing grades in such crucial areas as drinking water, roads, and dams. The grades surprised even the authors and generated widespread public attention.

The *Report Card* issued in 2001 showed a slight upturn to a D+ in the overall grade, but by 2005 it sank back to a D. What is most telling, however, is the fact that the concerns in the 1988 report are the same concerns found subsequently, such as inadequate capacity and deferred maintenance.

The grades for the previous report cards can be found in Appendix A of this report. ★