

Deteriorating Old Town bridge won't be replaced for at least 2 more years

by [Sawyer Loftus](#) 7.19.2022

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The Maine Department of Transportation plans to replace the Llewellyn G. Estes Memorial Bridge that carries Stillwater Avenue over the Stillwater River in Old Town. No contractor has been selected yet for the multi-year project that was expected to start in February. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

The Maine Department of Transportation says construction of a new bridge that serves as a major Old Town traffic artery won't happen for at least two more years even as the 70-year-old span continues to deteriorate.

The state transportation department was supposed to replace the Llewellyn Estes Memorial Bridge, which carries Stillwater Avenue over the Stillwater River, as part of a [multi-year, \\$20 million project](#). But, the department [rejected all bids](#) for the work in April after they came in at around double the budgeted amount.

Nearly three months later, on Tuesday, the department said it will take an "innovative" approach to get the work done while keeping costs down.

Initially, the project to replace the bridge — which includes two spans — was bundled together with work that would have also made improvements to the crash-prone Bennoch Road and College Avenue intersections with Stillwater Avenue. All of the work was estimated to cost \$20 million, but the lowest bid that came in was nearly double at \$39.2 million.

The high bids came amid a time of [inflated costs](#) for construction materials and labor that have added to the costs of a number of other Maine projects.

To keep costs down, the department now plans to separate the bridge project from the rest of the work and will issue a new request for bids on the road work.



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“During the planning phase of this project, we could not have predicted many of the current cost drivers, such as the high cost of steel components as well as material and labor availability risks over a more-than-four-year-long construction period,” Transportation Commissioner Bruce Van Note said. “As such, we decided to reject all bids on the project. We don’t like to do this, but proceeding with the original plan no longer represented the best value for the people of Maine.”

While the department aims to stick to the original designs for the work on the Bennoch Road and College Avenue intersections, along with work on I-95, the bridge work will see a new approach, Merrill said.

“Although the cost of bridges presents a formidable challenge, it also presents an opportunity to showcase the innovation and advances being made in composite bridge construction, especially those being led by the University of Maine,” he said.

A bridge that carried Route 1A over Souadabscook Stream in Hampden that opened in late 2020 [was the first of its kind](#) to make use of a composite girder system developed by researchers at the University of Maine in partnership with the Brewer company Advanced Infrastructure Technologies.

The Department of Transportation expects the construction phase for the Old Town bridge under this new process to begin in 2024.

Meanwhile, however, the bridge, originally built in 1952, continues to deteriorate, particularly the northern span.



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A May 17 inspection of the bridge revealed that water was leaking through the northern span’s deck and that it had lost a large section of concrete, according to Department of Transportation spokesperson Paul Merrill. The inspection also revealed that the deck rating of the bridge had gone from “poor” to “serious” condition. The bridge’s superstructure and substructure are also in poor condition, he said.

Engineers will monitor the span’s condition as it continues to deteriorate, Merrill said. Additionally, the department has lowered the maximum weight of vehicles that can travel over this section of the bridge.

Starting July 25, vehicles that weigh 30 tons or more cannot use the bridge’s northern span and will have to use a detour. Merrill said the new bridge posting will not affect fire engines, school buses, oil delivery trucks and most local delivery vehicles.

The new limit will likely prohibit vehicles including loaded logging trucks and concrete trucks.

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Once again, the DOT acts surprised that they lack the funding to keep existing infrastructure in good repair. Pictures 1 and 3 in this article are disgusting and the DOT should be ashamed of itself to allow these issues to fester. How many bridges and roads will go in disrepair because the MaineDOT opted instead to promote a \$104 million 6.1 mile section of new roadway that the City of Brewer rejected?