



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. Credit: Linda Coan O'Kresik / BDN

Old Town bridge with new weight restrictions has been deteriorating for years

The Llewellyn G. Estes Memorial Bridge is more than 70 years old, but plans to replace the deteriorating bridge are at least two years away.



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Posted on 7.23.2022

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Maine transportation officials say a bridge in Old Town is in poor condition but still safe for most to drive over. But federal and state records show that **parts of the bridge are rapidly deteriorating and have been for years.**

Plans have been in the works for years to replace the Llewellyn G. Estes Memorial Bridge, which consists of two structures that carry Stillwater Avenue across the Stillwater River. The bridge is more than 70 years old.

The state transportation department was supposed to replace the bridge as part of a [multi-year, \\$20 million project](#) slated to start this year. But the department [rejected all bids](#) for the work in April after prospective contractors' quotes came in at around double the state's budget for the work.

Of the two spans, the northernmost one now has a [new weight restriction](#), forcing vehicles that weigh more than 30,000 pounds to take a detour around the bridge starting Monday. And plans to replace the

bridge have now been delayed until at least 2024, **despite the bridge being listed as “structurally deficient,” the federal government’s lowest bridge condition rating.**

Structurally deficient is a classification given to a bridge when either its deck, superstructure that supports the deck, substructure, or culvert are in poor condition or worse, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The deck of a bridge is the surface that vehicles drive over, which is supported by the superstructure underneath. The substructure holds the bridge above the water.

The Maine Department of Transportation tracks and studies its bridges annually and considers the Llewellyn G. Estes Memorial Bridge as two separate structures. A May 17 department inspection of the bridge revealed that water was leaking through the northern span’s deck and found that it had lost a large section of concrete, department spokesperson Paul Merrill said.

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.

The department has known for years that the bridges were in rough condition. In 2020, a bridge assessment found that both bridges had components that were in “advanced deterioration” and “severely deteriorated.” According to the grading scale used to assess the bridges, they have been in the “structurally deficient” category since at least 2020.

While the term doesn’t mean a bridge is about to crumble, it is an indication that the bridge needs close monitoring and repairs, if not replacement.

Across Maine, about 12.6 percent of the bridges are considered structurally deficient, according to the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

When the action on the bridge will be taken and what it will look like is still unclear as the Maine Department of Transportation charts a new course of action as infrastructure projects across the country have been affected by price spikes driven by rising material and labor costs.

Initially, the project to replace the bridge 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.

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 in September.