

Foster's Daily Article: Portsmouth's Albacore Park connector open to divert heavy trucks from newly posted bridge

Date: 07/02/09

PORTSMOUTH — A 20-ton weight limit on the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge will remain indefinitely, say state transportation officials, who on Wednesday announced they will open the Albacore Park connector road to divert heavy loads from the deteriorating bridge.

The connector road will allow all northbound truck traffic exceeding 20 tons to access Market Street along the Route 1 Bypass between the Portsmouth Circle and the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge. The opening goes into effect today at 5 p.m.

Bob Landry, DOT project manager, said there will now be an added left lane on the bypass near the Albacore entrance that will allow northbound travelers who are unable to meet the load limit to access Market Street and the I-95 bridge much easier.

Landry said the connector road will ideally be for trucks with heavier than allowed loads and anyone using the Albacore entrance from Market Street will only be allowed to turn south.

Officials say the connector is required due to the current 20-ton weight limit posting of the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge carrying the Route 1 Bypass over the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth and Kittery, Maine.

The DOT says it is still reviewing the just-completed physical inspection of the bridge to determine the magnitude of repairs and the corresponding cost estimate to remove the 20-ton weight limit posting. Landry said he is unsure of the cost to repair the deterioration.

DOT leaders are just beginning to look at the detailed documentation of

deterioration on both the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge and Memorial Bridge. Landry said the inspections showed the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge in worse shape than DOT officials thought.

Problems have resulted from deterioration caused by salt water coming off the roadway through the expansion joints and causing damage to the steel.

He said while the "physical" inspections of the bridges may be complete, analysts still have to begin to take data and put it into a model to determine the life span and most pressing concerns involving the bridges. Assessing their condition will include the reviewing of more than 4,000 photos taken of the structural components of the bridges, he said.

Landry said he expects the process to last through July.

When asked if either bridges' load limit could be further lowered, Landry has said such a determination would need to wait until officials fully reviewed the data from the recent inspections by Boston-based HDR Engineering.

DOT officials from Maine and New Hampshire have hired engineers to inspect both bridges as part of a comprehensive connections study that will review the transportation needs between Portsmouth and Kittery.

Bridge maintenance crews from the DOT are expected to start necessary repairs to the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge as soon as possible, but Landry said the initial three-week estimate for having the structure reinforced might take longer. Until further information is available, Landry said the 20-ton weight limit will remain in effect indefinitely.

The bridge is expected to remain open to vehicular traffic and marine operations will not be affected by the repair work.