

# Jamestown bridge deemed safe by state inspectors

By Dotti Farrington

State Department of Transportation (DOT) officials said this week that the Jamestown Verrazano Bridge, built in 1992, was not on the list for special reinspection this month, and is rated safe based on an inspection during the past year.

No unsafe conditions have been reported for Massachusetts bridges that are along that state's nearby corridor to Cape Cod and that were targeted for special review this month.

Information about bridges throughout the country was flashed into the forefront of public interest by the collapse earlier this month of a major highway bridge in Minneapolis. One report that the Jamestown bridge had a partial design similarity to the Minneapolis bridge and was due for reinspection was erroneous, and may have been confused with a report about the Sakonnet Bridge, a DOT official said this week.

In Jamestown, the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority called a press conference to assure the public that the two bridges it owns and operates, Claiborne Pell-Newport and

Mount Hope Bridges, are in good condition.

## Local bridge

The Jamestown Bridge is budgeted for about \$3.5 million in repairs, listed as Phase III improvements, to start within a year as part of routine maintenance, according to the DOT, which has authority over all bridges in Rhode Island.

DOT said the repairs on the Jamestown Bridge "are routine things." They reported that some problems have been fixed, such as joints that were replaced and cracks that were sealed. The state pays five outside firms about \$2.5 million a year to inspect bridges, it was noted.

The DOT reported that it is responsible for 836 bridges or bridge related structures, of which 764 are covered by the Federal Highway Administration program for inspection at least once every two years. More than half of those 764 bridges are listed as "structurally deficient" or "functionally obsolete."

The reports list 176 as deficient and 222 as obsolete, for a total of 398 in need of work. Those numbers put the state at or near the

bottom, or among the worst, on lists of bridge inadequacies in all states.

Jerome Williams, DOT director since last December, has been reporting that structurally deficient "doesn't mean they are in danger of collapsing." He said deficient means they are in need of repairs and the repairs are scheduled in future years. He said obsolete means the bridges may be outdated and or less than sufficient by modern standards, but he emphasized neither term means that they are unsafe. Those bridges do not have the preferred dimensions or newest technology, but remain functional nonetheless, according to the DOT.

According to federal data, the country has almost 600,000 bridges, with an average age of 42 years. Of those bridges, about 13-percent are rated deficient and an added 13-percent are classified as obsolete, although most are said to be structurally sound or functional.

The bridge that collapsed in Minnesota in early August had a sufficiency rating of 50 out of 100, with about one third of the total score having to do with non-structural considerations. It was a bridge of truss design, which has generally been abandoned in recent decades. Minnesota has been cited as being among those states with the best bridge inspection standards.

## RI review

Because of the Minneapolis bridge collapse, many states are reviewing the status of their bridges without top ratings. In Rhode Island, the DOT has been giving special attention to 53 bridges that have the same or similar truss design feature of the Minneapolis bridge. The design generally does not include the use of secondary or redundant mechanisms should any part of the truss design fail,

it was explained. Some states newly authorized extra spending to fix some deficiencies identified in earlier, regularly-scheduled inspections.

In Rhode Island, as in other New England states, officials blame deficiency ratings on old infrastructures, dense population, exposure to corrosive ocean water and the winter climate – harsh in itself and requiring salt for winter icing, with the salt adding to deterioration factions.

According to National Bridge Inventory documents, the federal definition says a structurally deficient bridge may be safe for several years while repairs are being made.

## Nearby bridges

Massachusetts has reviewed inspection records and is fast-

tracking inspections of 27 steel deck truss bridges to make sure the structures are safe. These include the Braga Bridge on I-195 and Route 79 bridge in Fall River; Acushnet Road Bridge in Mattapoisett; and Paper Mill Road Bridge in Wareham.

One official noted the Minneapolis bridge was 40 years old, the same age as the Braga Bridge, considered relatively new, with bridges seen as typically lasting 75 years or more. RITBA officials in Jamestown said calendar age is not a consideration, but the level of maintenance provided in timely fashion is the main measure. They said they have rebuilt much of the 1929 Mount Hope Bridge and see no end date for its use, as long as repairs are kept up to date.

## Island motorists kill 26 deer

At last week's town council meeting, it was reported that Jamestown had the second highest deer auto strikes in Newport County.

Hunters reported 56 deer kills on the island last season, while automobile drivers accounted for 26 more. That makes Jamestown second only to Tiverton in Newport County in terms of deer kills by automobiles according to the town's deer management survey.

According to the survey, the island deer population, which has grown nearly four-fold since 1998, is expected to remain at approximately four hundred for the second straight year. In order to begin reducing the island deer population, the report estimates that future harvests need to increase to approximately 126 animals.



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