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# Keystone Bridge project remains at a stand still

Submitted by admin on Tue, 05/03/2022 - 14:46

*In this photo posted by the city of Elkader, one of the consulting engineers scans the stone to determine if there are any other new developments with the Keystone Bridge. Pedestrian access will remain closed, and the city is still exploring options for providing alternative access. Engineers will work with the contractors to develop options for repair for the city council to consider, and the city said this information may not be available until mid-May.*

By Willis Patenaude, Times-Register

The Keystone Bridge rehab project remains at a relative stand still as engineers, contractors and other experts gathered information April 28-29, in an effort to identify possible solutions to the widening crack that halted all work on the bridge and closed down pedestrian access two weeks ago.

Lead engineer Nate Miller, when asked for possible solutions or what the information gathering sessions found, declined to comment. "I will respectfully decline, as it would be inappropriate for me to discuss until the various options are properly vetted and reviewed with the city," he said.

Elkader City Administrator Jennifer Cowsert provided some insight, however,

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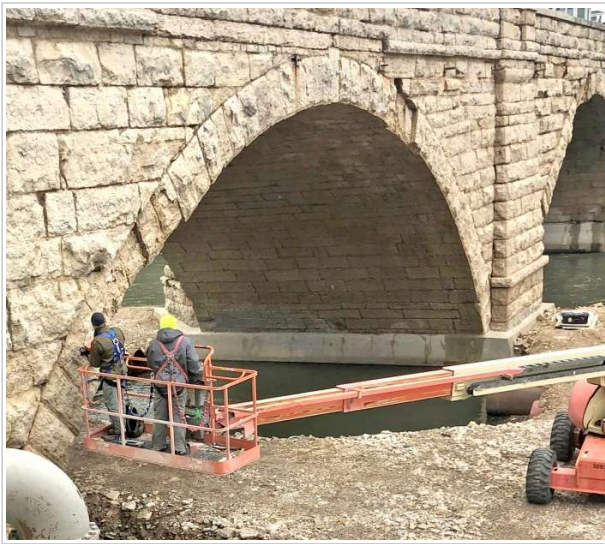
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indicating that while the information gathering session has yielded no concrete conclusions as of yet, "They were gathering data and will need to analyze it before they can share their conclusions."

Cowsert also stated they "hope to have information to provide options to the council by mid-May, [which] will be presented to the city council by the engineers. That will be at a public meeting so anyone may attend."

The delay in the project could come at additional costs, such as the analysis currently taking place by engineers and consultants on the unexplained crack that saw "movement." The city will be responsible for all those additional costs.

As for pedestrian crossing, which has fueled some "angry feedback," as Cowsert put it, that will remain closed for the foreseeable future. Alternatives are still being explored, but according to Cowsert,

one of those alternatives, such as the city providing a shuttle service, isn't doable.

"Right now, we are working with the information that the city is not allowed to provide a shuttle based on information from our insurance company. But we are exploring other options," Cowsert said.

She asserted that "providing pedestrian access has always been a priority for the city and it was assumed a crossing would be maintained throughout construction."

The staged construction option was supposed to allow for continuous pedestrian access throughout the duration of the project. Although several other options were explored during the design phase, such as a temporary pedestrian bridge and a shuttle service, according to Cowsert, those "options were far less economical when compared to the staged construction alternative ultimately selected."

The price tag for those options was an estimated \$500,000 to \$1 million for a temporary bridge or \$1,450 per day at the city's expense to the contractor.

However, there is good news when it comes to the project. The crack does not appear to have widened since it was discovered, but Cowsert mentioned that "engineers are reviewing the monitoring data to verify."

Additionally, while all work has ceased on the bridge itself, the contractors are allowed to continue work on the storm sewer, since that is not on the bridge, and on the wall in Keystone Park.

#### **City working to address traffic safety concerns due to detour**

At its April 25 meeting, the Elkader City Council approved funds for the use of an electronic message board to be placed along Highway 13, to address concerns with increased traffic from the bridge detour.

The council approved \$3,000, which will pay for the board for three weeks. The electronic messages boards will be used three separate weeks throughout the summer. Other weeks, a speed feedback trailer will be used.

A specific date for the placement of the message boards has not been determined, but it is anticipated the boards will have a message similar to "slow down - turning traffic" and be placed on either side of the Highway 56 intersection.

This is one step taken to address the concerns the city and Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) have received. In response to these concerns, the city of Elkader has had multiple internal discussions as well as reached out to the DOT for advice on keeping motorists safe. As a result of these conversations:

- The Iowa DOT will add intersection warning signs on Iowa 13 north and south of Iowa 56.
- The Iowa DOT and Clayton County Sheriff's Department will periodically place speed feedback trailers on Iowa 13 near the intersection to make people more aware of how fast they are driving.

The city of Elkader will:

- Rent the aforementioned electronic message board.
- Continue to use a police presence.
- Focus on public education.

The city has been asked about temporarily reducing the speed limit until construction is over. A traffic engineer contracted by the city said this is not an effective solution. Some motorists will abide by the new posted speed limit and some will simply drive the speed limit they think is appropriate to the surrounding environment.

The city will continue to monitor the intersection and keep safety a priority for the traveling public.

According to Elkader Mayor Josh Pope, "we want residents to be aware that we are taking their concerns seriously, but it takes time to evaluate possible solutions."

He added that he was appreciative of the staff at the IDOT for their assistance.

Elkader Police Chief Mitch Seitz also spoke about the public education aspect.

"Although the altered traffic patterns may not seem like a big change, people need to acknowledge that it is a change for them. Any disruption to a person's daily routine can be stressful. And when you combine stress and




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driving, it exacerbates the situation. Focusing on your own safe driving skills is literally the best thing you can do to help the situation," he stated.

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**JENNY COLEMAN**  
**608-306-2865**  
jcolemanremax@gmail.com



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