



Kentucky Transportation Cabinet • District 1

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UPDATE: Repairs Expected to Begin the Week of July 13 on U.S. 51 Ohio River "Cairo" Bridge

Traffic could resume by July 22

PADUCAH, Ky. (July 10, 2026) – Repairs are expected to begin the week of July 13 on the U.S. 51 Ohio River "Cairo" Bridge connecting Wickliffe, Ky., and Cairo, Ill.

The bridge will remain closed until repairs are completed.

State engineers, designers, safety personnel and the contractor have finalized a detailed repair plan that prioritizes worker safety and aims to protect the nearly 90-year-old bridge from subsequent damage during the repair process.

Early estimates indicate the bridge could reopen to traffic by Wednesday, July 22, pending any unforeseen delays. If repairs are completed ahead of schedule, the bridge could reopen sooner than anticipated.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) District 1 closed the bridge as a traffic safety precaution on Monday, July 6. Inspectors determined that a bearing pad on the Kentucky approach had shifted out of place, causing the bridge deck to become misaligned by approximately two to three inches at an expansion joint.

Bearing pads function like cartilage between joints, supporting steel beams while accommodating the bridge's natural expansion and contraction.

Repairing the bridge will require crews to lift a heavy section of the bridge deck to replace the bearing pad and install additional reinforcement to help prevent future displacement.

The safety of the traveling public remains the cabinet's highest priority. The bridge will reopen only after repairs are complete and inspectors have determined it is safe for traffic.

Bridges of this size are federally required to undergo a hands-on inspection every two years. Known as a Nonredundant Steel Tension Member (NSTM) inspection, this comprehensive evaluation is performed by trained bridge climbers who examine all critical steel components from top to bottom and end to end. This inspection had originally been scheduled for later this year, separate from this incident.

District 1 has coordinated with the state to move the NSTM inspection forward so it can be completed during the emergency repair closure. Performing the NSTM inspection while the bridge is already closed for repairs will help limit future disruptions to the traveling public.

The U.S. 51 Ohio River "Cairo" Bridge is a vital transportation link for the region's residents and businesses. The bridge carries an average of 5,400 vehicles each day, approximately 40% of which are commercial vehicles.

We appreciate the public's patience as we work to restore this critical route as quickly and safely as possible.

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