**Where is the Hernando de Soto bridge? Why is it important?**

**This is** the bridge that connects Tennessee and Arkansas and is a major hub in our nation's infrastructure, where Fed Express has its headquarters and its central hub, along with a half dozen major freighters. 40,000 trucks and vehicles use this critical span every day. Their economy has been paralyzed and **everyday** businesses, and the trucking industry are losing million$ in jobs and business.

On May 11, 2021, a large crack was discovered in one of the bridges major beams, and all traffic has been closed off since that day. It is now estimated to be ready for re-0pening some time in July.



**The Crack Photo: Tennessee Department of Transportation/Associated Press**

This is another dire warning to our nation that our roads, and 45,000 bridges must be maintained. The Army Corps of Engineers advised the need for maintaining our national infrastructure 50 years ago, and our elected officials, from both parties, have been too busy with other legislation and funding the maintenance of our infrastructure has not been seriously discussed or funded.

It does not take a genius to know that neglecting roads and bridges, especially bridges is a dumb and dangerous pass time. If several of our interstate connecting bridges were suddenly disabled, it could affect our entire country. Air transportation cannot handle all the freight that is transported by truck.

Without a national network of trucks operational 24 hours a day, there would be no food in our groceries, or gasoline at our gas stations. Our ATMs depend on funds fed regularly by guarded bank trucks. Life would be drastically altered for everyone.

We should all remind our elected officials that we must fund and maintain vigilance on the status of our local and national infrastructure. It is in everyone's best interest to keep our national infrastructure healthy and our trucks rolling.

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**SOURCES:**

**1. "Bridge Closure Jams Local Economies, Businesses take hit as span linking Arkansas, Tennnesse has been shut for a month", Scott Calvert, *WSJ*, June 18, 2021 A3**

**2.** [***https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/one-failed-bridge-in-memphis-is-costing-business-millions-11623922201***](https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/one-failed-bridge-in-memphis-is-costing-business-millions-11623922201)

# One Failed Bridge in Memphis Is Costing Business Millions

## *Closure of cracked Interstate-40 span clogs local roads, hinders national supply chain*

**By** [**Scott Calvert**](https://www.wsj.com/news/author/scott-calvert) **| Photographs by Brad Vest for The Wall Street Journal , June 17, 2021**

**MEMPHIS, Tenn**.—An emergency closure of the Interstate-40 bridge across the Mississippi River **has jammed traffic for over a month, denting companies’ bottom lines, hampering the region’s economic recovery from the pandemic and further straining an already stretched national supply chain.**

**The six-lane bridge linking Tennessee and Arkansas helps make Memphis a critical U.S. distribution hub, along with the headquarters of** [**FedEx**](https://www.wsj.com/market-data/quotes/FDX) **Corp. , a large port and five major freight railroads**. It has **been closed since May 11,** when a contractor for the Arkansas Transportation Department spotted a large crack in a steel support beam that officials said put the span in jeopardy of failing.

**Typically, about 40,000 cars and trucks a day would cross the bridge, a double-arch steel structure that is almost 2 miles long**.

**The bridge’s deficiencies highlight the aging of U.S. infrastructure amid a debate in Washington over a multibillion-dollar funding package**. Despite disagreements between Republicans and Democrats [over the scope and funding sources](https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-talks-on-infrastructure-face-old-problem-how-to-pay-for-it-11623272022) for the legislative package, [bipartisan support has emerged](https://www.wsj.com/articles/bipartisan-group-of-senators-reaches-agreement-on-infrastructure-proposal-11623360255?mod=article_inline) for boosting federal spending on roads and bridges.

**The Arkansas DOT, which is responsible for inspecting the bridge, said inspections in 2019 and 2020 missed the crack, and it since has fired the statewide bridge inspector.** Repair work on the nearly 50-year-old bridge will stretch through at least July, according to the Tennessee Transportation Department, which handles repairs and maintenance. The two states are sharing the cost of repairs, officials said.

Residents, companies and local officials are bracing for a rough summer. Cars and trucks are forced to squeeze onto Interstate 55’s four-lane bridge—the only other vehicle route crossing the Mississippi in the area.

Congestion was so bad one recent weekday that the drive from West Memphis, Ark., to Memphis—usually about 10 minutes long—took more than three hours. Motorists seeking shortcuts clogged West Memphis’s main thoroughfare and some residential side streets.

Clifton Rose, who drives a truck for multistate freight hauler Ozark Motor Lines Inc., said his big rig moved just five miles in four hours that day in “madhouse” traffic, which officials said was worsened by storms, accidents and work to convert a shoulder to a travel lane.

“This has completely crippled our city in so many different ways, from just the quality of life to the economic impact,” said West Memphis Mayor Marco McClendon.

Sales at a Barton’s kitchen and bath showroom in West Memphis were down 45% in the past month from a year earlier. “You cannot get in and out of [the] parking lot with traffic the way it is,” said general manager Jason Long.

Dentist Brian Rhoads says the rate of reschedulings and no-shows at his practice has doubled to around 40%. Revenue at Southland Casino, the city’s biggest employer, fell nearly a third in May compared with March and April, state figures show.

In Memphis, the Majestic Grille’s regulars from Arkansas aren’t driving over for dinner. “They’re calling and saying, ‘We’re sorry, we’re just not going to do it,’ ” said Patrick Reilly, who co-owns the 250-seat downtown restaurant.

Transportation officials in both states said they are acutely aware of the havoc and have had some success speeding up the flow of I-55 by converting shoulders to travel lanes and reducing the number of merge areas.

“It’s a little bit like performing brain surgery,” said Brad Freeze, director of the Tennessee DOT’s traffic operations division.”This is such a critical route right now.”

Nationwide, roughly 45,000 bridges are in poor condition, about 7% of the total, according to an analysis of federal data by the trade group American Road and Transportation Builders Association. That means a key structural element—the deck, superstructure, substructure or culverts—is rated in poor or worse condition.



**The I-40 bridge has a significant crack in a support beam. Photo: Tennessee Department of Transportation/Associated Press**

Before the crack’s discovery, the I-40 bridge was last fully inspected in September 2020 and received an overall rating of 6 on a scale of 0 to 9, Arkansas officials say. That would be considered satisfactory condition on the [National Bridge Inventory](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/nbi.cfm)’s rating scale.

Since the shutdown, average weekday speeds heading east on the I-55 bridge have hovered around 20 miles per hour between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., compared with close to 50 mph before, according to transportation analytics firm Inrix.

**Shannon Samples Newton, president of the Arkansas Trucking Association, said the delays are costing the U.S. trucking industry an estimated $2 million a day.**

“Short of opening the bridge, there really is not anything that can be done,” she said. “There is no quick fix.”

Drivers are often paid by the mile, so congestion hits their wallets, said Jason Higginbotham, finance chief at Ozark. Hiring drivers was already a challenge and is even harder now, he said.

The bridge closure has forced FedEx to make changes, including addressing employee commute delays and adding drivers, a spokeswoman said. Federal regulations require truckers to take a 10-hour break after 11 hours behind the wheel.

The bridge closure came as many states lifted Covid-19 pandemic-related restrictions and local economies began recovering. With the U.S. supply chain already under stress, “No one needed the added cost, the added delay, that this is putting into the system,” said Reid Dulberger, president and chief executive of the economic development agency for Memphis and Shelby County.

West Memphis Mayor McClendon said he is fielding calls from frustrated residents and assuring them he is doing all he can. He said he stays in frequent contact with state officials, has blocked some side streets to through-traffic and even personally directed traffic.

While out surveying congestion recently, he met some exasperated people. Debra Lewis’s normally quiet neighborhood was packed with lines of cars and trucks looking for a path to I-55. She said her 10-minute drive home from work had taken two hours.

“You can’t get through,” she said.

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**3.** [***https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/06/03/memphis-bridge-mississippi-river/?outputType=amp***](https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/06/03/memphis-bridge-mississippi-river/?outputType=amp)

**Repairs to cracked Mississippi River interstate bridge will stretch on for weeks**

*The Tennessee Department of Transportation needs custom-made, 150-foot plates weighing 53 tons each to repair the crack.*

**By Ian Duncan,*Washington Post,* June 3, 2021 at 6:50 p.m. EDT**

Repairs to a cracked Mississippi River bridge in Memphis are likely to stretch for two more months, officials said Thursday, as Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg visited the city to inspect the work and hear how the lengthy closure has affected nearby communities.

Clay Bright, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Transportation, said the agency expects to take delivery of custom-designed repair materials — including 53-ton, 150-foot-long metal plates — later this month, with installation stretching at least through July. The Hernando de Soto Bridge carried 60,000 vehicles daily on Interstate 40, but was closed May 11 when inspectors discovered the crack in a steel support beam.

“I will assure you this: Sometimes you may look on the bridge and you may not see anybody, but I guarantee you there is somebody somewhere” working on the project, Bright said. “We are working on this 24 hours a day.”

Since the closure, drivers have been funneled onto a nearby bridge, causing delays and disruptions.

The first phase of repairs to stabilize the bridge was completed last week. Bright said crews will prepare the work site in the coming days, obtaining and installing materials and completing inspections to ensure that no other parts of the bridge are compromised.

“We are doing a lot more than what we would in a normal bridge inspection,” Bright said, describing ultrasound scans of welds. He said he hoped the high level of effort being put into inspections will convince the public that the bridge is safe when it reopens. Officials on Thursday did not provide a target date for reopening the bridge.

The dramatic episode, in which inspectors placed urgent calls to 911 to get the bridge shut down after the crack was discovered, has symbolized the risks posed by the nation’s aging transportation infrastructure as the Biden administration is pushing for funding to rebuild roads and bridges. Buttigieg, speaking with the bridge as his backdrop, said its closure underscored how the nation is interconnected — the highway that crosses the bridge stretches from Wilmington, N.C., to Barstow, Calif.

‘We need to shut traffic down’: Massive crack in Memphis bridge prompted urgent 911 calls

“Put simply, the reason that I’m here is to emphasize that the situation with this bridge may be a regional issue, but it’s a national concern,” Buttigieg said.

President Biden initially proposed a $2.3 trillion package of spending, including hundreds of billions of dollars for transportation. He has been in negotiations with Republican senators, who favor a smaller sum. Talks have continued this week, with Biden signaling that he could support a $1 trillion package.

Disruptions stemming from the closure have been felt across the Memphis region. Marco McClendon, mayor of West Memphis, Ark., said his community has been nearly paralyzed by the closure. Buttigieg said he was told that trucks had been directed onto residential streets, with workers in the hospitality industry seeing their hours cut.

“We are grateful and glad this was detected without any loss of life, but that doesn’t mean the closure hasn’t been painful,” Buttigieg said.

A nearby bridge, on I-55, has been inspected to ensure it can handle the additional traffic. Officials say they have found no problems there.

Earlier Thursday, Buttigieg met with executives from Memphis-based FedEx and trucking companies to discuss the ripples of the closure.

Shannon Newton, president of the Arkansas Trucking Association, said delays have forced truck drivers to change their work schedules, hurting their quality of life.

“What used to be a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. [shift] has switched to a 2 a.m. to 2 p.m. shift,” Newton said.