



BELMONT COUNTY US ROUTE 40 BLAINE BRIDGE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why can't ODOT keep one traffic lane open? ODOT will not compromise safety for convenience. Initially, the bridge was closed due to motorists traveling in the wrong direction, causing safety concerns. However, due to the continuing deterioration of the bridge, the bridge will remain closed indefinitely until the rehabilitation project is completed.

Did ODOT only close the bridge because traffic was going the wrong way? No, however, traffic traveling in the wrong direction was a factor that accelerated the inevitable closure of the bridge.

Why can't ODOT install a temporary roadway using the existing roads near the bridge? ODOT does not have jurisdiction over local roads, and the existing roadway cannot handle the traffic volumes or the weight of commercial vehicles. Furthermore, this would require extensive right-of-way acquisition, environmental clearance, and cost. Also, the timeline would take longer than replacing the current bridge, so it is not a viable option.

What is wrong with the bridge? There is substantial deterioration, including significant leaking and cracking on the bridge deck and damage to the columns and concrete structure.

Why can't construction begin now? ODOT is required to follow the comprehensive Project Development Plan for every project, which involves five sequential phases: (1) Planning, (2) Preliminary Engineering, (3) Environmental Engineering, (4) Final Engineering/Right-of-Way, and (5) Construction. Currently, the project is in the second phase of this essential project. The Blaine Bridge is a substantial structure at 754 feet in length.

Does ODOT have funding for this bridge? Yes, ODOT has secured funding. Furthermore, ODOT has proactively pursued several federal grants to enhance funding opportunities, including a Bridge Investment Program grant and a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant.

How did the bridge deteriorate so quickly? Predicting the rate of a bridge's deterioration presents challenges, mainly because environmental factors and traffic patterns are outside ODOT's control. ODOT conducts regular safety inspections of all in-service bridges to maintain a safe transportation system. The Blaine Hill bridge was inspected annually until August 2023. At that point, ODOT elevated the inspection frequency to a maximum of every 90 days to ensure vigilant monitoring of its safety. When ODOT engineers concluded that the bridge had become unsafe, they took decisive action and closed it promptly.

What is ODOT doing to expedite the process? ODOT is working closely with the designer to expedite any stage of the planning process while adhering to the Project Development Plan. To date, the project has been accelerated five months ahead of schedule. ODOT will continue searching for ways to further accelerate the project.

When will construction begin? The project is scheduled to start in October 2025 with a completion date in spring of 2027.

How long will construction take? It is estimated to take about 12 months.

Is the bridge going to be torn down entirely and rebuilt? Since the Blaine Bridge is a historic structure, it must be replaced in a manner that maintains its original condition rather than being entirely demolished and rebuilt.

Why didn't ODOT do something sooner? Looking ahead, ODOT initiated the significant bridge upgrade project in 2023, with an anticipated start date in 2030. The unexpected rapid deterioration of the bridge has expedited construction on this project, which will begin construction by 2027.

What is ODOT's process on bridge projects like the Blaine Bridge?: Projects are prioritized based on the intent (or purpose) of the project. Bridge projects, for example, are based on the bridge rating evaluated each year. The worse the bridge condition(s), the higher priority the bridge project is given. Bridge conditions are rating as follows, 6- Satisfactory Condition, 7- Good (1% distress), or 4 – Poor (heavy leaking, offset).

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