

Tamar Bridge resurfacing to begin on 1 June -

UPDATE

28 May 2021

Work on resurfacing the deck of the Tamar Bridge will begin on Tuesday, 1 June.

Traffic management arrangements will be put in place overnight on Tuesday, 1 June to enable work on Phase 1 of the project to begin on Wednesday 2 June. This work will begin after 8pm on 1 June after the evening rush hour has finished to avoid disruption to traffic. The free bus services will also begin operating on the evening of 1 June.

Resurfacing the steel bridge deck involves a series of highly complex procedures. These include first removing the majority of the existing surface material using a road planer. A paint 'primer' is then applied to the deck followed by a two layer water proofing system to provide vital corrosion protection to the steel deck plates. Two thin layers of the surfacing material are then applied before the final process of laying the road markings and installing the replacement illuminated road stud system is carried out.

The need to carry out the majority of these works during dry and mild weather means that we cannot move the project to the winter months. It is not possible to carry out the works solely at night as the lanes cannot be re-opened to traffic until the resurfacing has been completed. Working at night also introduces other issues, such as worker safety and noise. Using heavy plant and machinery at night would have a major impact on the lives of the people close to the bridge.

Patching repairs are also difficult to carry out on steel bridge decks and would not be as durable as full resurfacing. Adopting this approach would require more frequent repairs to be carried out, leading to closures of lanes over a longer period, and increasing the potential disruption to bridge users.

The resurfacing work is being carried out by VolkerLaser, a specialist civil engineering contractor with extensive experience of working on bridges. It will be overseen by Tamar Crossing's Engineering Manager Richard Cole.

Three traffic lanes will be kept open throughout the works to help minimise disruption to bridge users, with the south cantilever used as an additional traffic lane when necessary. This means that the south cantilever will be closed to pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooter users

from approximately 8pm on the evening of 1 June for the duration of the works. As with the kerb replacement project, free bus services will be provided to enable these groups to cross the bridge. Local traffic from Saltash will be diverted from the north cantilever onto the main deck of the bridge.

The complex resurfacing project is expected to take approximately six months to complete, with all three lanes on the main deck and both the north and south cantilevers being resurfaced. As well as resurfacing the bridge deck, Tamar Crossings are also taking the opportunity to resurface the toll plaza area and the bridge approaches, and will be replacing all six of the bridge expansion / movement joints.

Phase 1 is currently programmed to last until end of July. The North cantilever will then be returned as a general traffic lane for the remainder of the project. At the same time South cantilever will be opened to westbound traffic.

The complete project is due to be finished in Autumn 2021, when all the lanes will be re-opened to traffic.

We are providing a free shuttle bus service to transport pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooters across the bridge. These include a minibus and trailer service and a scheduled service using single and double-decker buses which is being run in partnership with Plymouth Citybus. This bus service will enable cyclists to remain with their bikes during the journey across the bridge.

The scheduled bus service will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week and the minibus service will run during the day seven days a week. Both services will begin operating on the evening of Tuesday 1 June and will then continue until the works are completed.

The minibus service will run as an 'on-demand' service where customers will be able to contact minibus drivers via call-points located at both Pemros Road and North Road. Minibuses will be equipped with cycle and mobility scooter (up to Class 3) trailers.

The Citybus service will run every 15 minutes between 6 am and 9pm and every 30 mins in the evenings and overnight between the Saltash and Plymouth sides of the crossing. Details of the latest service information will be published on the Plymouth Citybus website, with updates on their social media channels.

Using these services will enable cyclists to avoid cycling through the heavy traffic on the bridge during morning and evening commutes, as well as reducing the interface between user groups.

We will be reviewing both services throughout the programme of works and will make adjustments if necessary.

While cyclists are legally permitted to use the bridge traffic lanes, the opening of the south cantilever nearly twenty years ago was intended to provide them with a safer alternative for crossing the bridge. In offering these services we are doing our best to replicate the improved safety provided by the south cantilever and so, for this reason, we would strongly encourage cyclists to use this option during these works.

While the crossing will remain open throughout the works, the traffic management arrangements and lane restrictions mean that drivers of 'abnormal loads' may be restricted during certain phases of the project. Abnormal load restrictions will be shared with hauliers via ESDAL2 and advanced warning signs will be placed at key locations on the A38 and the local traffic network, as well as on the main motorway junctions. Full details will be placed on the Tamar Crossings website which will also include a suggested diversion route for wide vehicles.

In line with current Government advice on travelling on public transport, people using both the shuttle buses and the Plymouth Citybus service will be required to wear face coverings unless they have a specific exemption.

Regular updates on the project will be posted on the Tamar Crossings website and social media channels, and provided to motoring organisations and the local media.

"We are, of course ,very conscious of the importance of the Tamar Bridge as a vital transport link between Cornwall and Devon" said David List, Tamar Crossings General Manager. "This is a major once in 20-25 years scheme which is essential for the safety of bridge users and in ensuring a long service life for the structure."

"We will be working closely with contractors and partners to deliver the resurfacing project safely, efficiently and with as little disruption to bridge users as possible. "

Anyone with queries in relation to this work can visit the website where there is detailed information about the project, or email enquiries@tamarcrossings.org.uk with their message which will then be dealt with by our customer services staff during normal business hours.

Ends

Notes to editors

For further information or to do interviews on the project please contact Trisha Hewitt at trisha.hewitt@tamarcrossings.org.uk or phone 07946654121.

Constructed between 1959 and 1961, the iconic suspension bridge was last fully resurfaced at the time of the strengthening and widening project in 1999-2001. As part of that project the original concrete deck was replaced by an orthotropic steel deck – this uses steel plate with stiffening ribs underneath.

The purpose of the bridge deck surfacing is to provide a safe durable running surface for vehicles and also to protect the orthotropic steel deck from wear due to corrosion and fatigue. Just like standard road construction, bridge deck surfacing has a limited lifespan as the millions of loading cycles from traffic eventually cause deterioration. The deck of the Tamar Bridge needs to be resurfaced every 20 to 25 years to prevent damage occurring to the steel deck. In the last 20 years the Bridge has carried around 300 million vehicles.

Routine inspections of the bridge surfacing are carried out every four months. During the last two years these inspections have revealed that the existing surface is nearing the end of its serviceable life and requires replacement.

A specialist, thin asphalt material will be used to resurface the bridge deck. At just 45mm thick, this material is much thinner and lighter than the materials used in standard road construction. It is also more expensive due to other factors and processes required during the resurfacing process. The £6m cost of the project is being met by Tamar Crossings funded from toll income. That project cost also covers replacement of the illuminated lane studs and includes the costs of design and supervision.

The project was originally due to be carried out during 2020, but was postponed until this year because of the coronavirus pandemic and the need to complete the kerb replacement works. Delaying the project again could result in further damage to the surfacing material, leading to cracks which then enables water to penetrate onto the steel plates underneath with the potential for corrosion to occur.

All of the works will be carried out in a Covid-secure manner, with contractors required to adhere to Government guidance. Tamar Crossings will also ensure that the latest Construction Leadership Council Site Operating Procedures are rigorously enforced.