



NEWS

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Northeast Regional Office, 944 Vanderperren Way, Green Bay, WI 54304 Phone: 920/492-5623 FAX: 920/492-5640
www.dot.wisconsin.gov

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For more information, contact:

Kim Rudat, Regional Communications Manager
Kim.Rudat@dot.wi.gov, (920) 492-5743

Spring time means bridge washing and inspection

Traffic impacts scheduled to bridges throughout northeast Wisconsin

(Green Bay) Spring time means warmer weather, a chance to spend more time outside and for many, time for some much needed spring cleaning. For others, it heralds melting ice with rivers and lakes finally opening back up to boaters and commerce. For the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) northeast region, it means a little of both for their 13 hard working lift bridges. WisDOT owns and manages more lift bridges in the northeast region than any of the department's other regions (there are five regions total) in Wisconsin. Each bridge needs to be inspected and washed prior to start of the navigation season.

Dale Weber, WisDOT NE bridge maintenance supervisor said, "WisDOT staff, assisted by city and county forces, invests about 10 hours of time getting each bridge ready. Costs average between \$3,500 to \$4,500 per bridge."

The 13 WisDOT lift bridges include the Menekaunee Bridge (Ogden Street), Marinette; Bay View, Oregon Street and Michigan Street bridges, Sturgeon Bay (Michigan Street is currently being rehabilitated and expected to open back up in November); Walnut Street and Mason Street bridges, Green Bay; Racine Street and Tayco Street bridges, Menasha; Main St. bridge, Winneconne; and Congress Avenue, Wisconsin Street, Jackson Street and Main Street bridges, Oshkosh.

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The work on the bridges coincides with the start of the navigation season when bridges are staffed with operators. In Sturgeon Bay, the bridges operate year round (with 12-hour advance notice during the winter months), and the navigation season is long, beginning March 15 and ending December 31. For Green Bay, the season stretches from April 1 to November 30, in the Fox Valley it is April 23 to October 10 and in Marinette, the season begins May 1 and ends October 31.

Lift bridges are expensive and complex pieces of machinery, comprising key parts of our transportation infrastructure in Northeast Wisconsin. Getting a lift bridge ready requires from 8 to 13 people performing all the necessary work, depending on the bridge. In some cases, the work is done all at once and in others, it is spread out over a couple of days.

According to WisDOT bridge engineer Jim McDowell, “We have to carefully inspect every lift bridge.”

McDowell listed the various tasks needed to get a lift bridge ready for another navigation season. This includes physically inspecting the entire bridge and inspecting the brakes, emergency brakes, motors (one per leaf), auxiliary motors and all electrical contacts. Limit switches are used to stop the bridge at predetermined positions and must be carefully checked. Equipment is greased and the bridges are washed. The washing removes dirt – reducing the bridge’s lift span weight - and removes other corrosive materials, especially road salt. In some cases – being this is Wisconsin and cold weather can stay long - ice has to be removed that would inhibit the movement of the lift spans or counter weights. Maintenance work is either performed during this time or scheduled, depending on the need. Finally, the bridge is monitored closely while it is opened and shut. All this work not only insures that the equipment is working properly, but it extends the service life of the bridge. Over decades of bridge operation, that saves money.

Lift bridges also present some special challenges. For instance, they are favorite roosting places for birds. There are significant accumulations of bird droppings which are highly corrosive and must be removed each spring. This is not a very pleasant job, but a necessary one. The NE region is reviewing various options to persuade the birds to move elsewhere.

The Sturgeon Bay bridges operate in an extremely hostile weather environment, but must open during the winter (with advance notice) and throughout the year. Problems typically arise during the winter months. McDowell recalled WisDOT engineers having to brave wind chills as low as minus 45 degrees F to unfreeze machinery and keep the bridges functioning.

McDowell said, "When a ship is scheduled to come through, the bridge must function, regardless. If the bridge's spans are too heavy to lift due to ice, we have to go out and remove the ice."

There is a lot of water to use and to cross in northeast Wisconsin, for commerce and recreation. WisDOT makes sure its lift bridges stand ready to accommodate the demand.

The following is a list of bridge inspections, washings and repairs that will impact traffic:

Monday, April 5 and Tuesday, April 6

- Congress Street Bridge, Oshkosh – bridge will be closed from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. for cleaning.

Wednesday, April 7 and Thursday, April 8

- Wisconsin Street Bridge, Oshkosh – bridge closed from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. for cleaning.

Friday, April 9

- Oregon Street Bridge, Sturgeon Bay - bridge closed from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. for cleaning.

Monday, April 12

- Main Street, Oshkosh - bridge closed from 8 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. for cleaning.
- Mason Street Bridge will remain open with lane closures from 1 p.m. until 3:30 p.m. for inspection.
- Walnut Street Bridge, Green Bay – will remain open with lane closures from 9 a.m. until noon for inspection.

Tuesday, April 13

- Wrightstown Bridge, Wrightstown – one lane of the bridge will remain open with traffic controlled by flagging operations from 9 a.m. until noon for inspection.
- Racine Street Bridge, Menasha – one lane of the bridge will remain open with traffic controlled by flagging operations from 1 p.m. until 3:30 p.m. for inspection.

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Wednesday, April 14

- Main Street Bridge, Oshkosh – bridge will remain open with lane closures from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. for inspection.
- Oregon Street Bridge, Oshkosh – bridge will remain open with lane closures from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for inspection.
- Oshkosh Avenue Bridge, Oshkosh – bridge will remain open with lane closures from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. for inspection.

Thursday, April 15

- Wisconsin Street Bridge, Oshkosh – bridge will remain open with lane closures from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. for inspection.
- Winneconne Bridge, Winneconne – one lane of the bridge will remain open with traffic controlled by flagging operations from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. for inspection.

Sunday, April 25

- Mason Street Bridge, Green Bay – bridge closed from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. for cleaning.

Tuesday, April 27

- Walnut Street Bridge, Green Bay – bridge closed from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. for cleaning.

Additional bridge inspections will be taking place throughout the month of April. WisDOT will announce these inspections as they are scheduled. Motorists are reminded to use caution and remain alert when driving through these or any work zones.

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NOTE: News releases can be viewed on the Web at: www.dot.wisconsin.gov/news/index.htm.