

[Night work speeds completion of new parkway span](#)

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The skies over the Great Egg Harbor Bridge are aglow as contractors work to repair the aging structure.

Route 52 Contractors is in the process of replacing the southbound span of the Garden State Parkway bridge that connects Atlantic and Cape May counties as part of a \$131.6 million rehabilitation project, which is expected to be completed sometime next year.

State officials said the late hours are not unusual, especially for a bridge reconstruction.

“Sometimes construction work is done at night,” said Thomas Feeney, spokesman for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. “It depends on what work they’re doing, what time of year it is and what lane closings are necessary. For bridge projects, it can depend on the tide schedule.”

The new span is being built next to the existing southbound lanes over Great Egg Harbor and Drag Channel, Feeney said. Under a separate contract expected to be awarded after the completion of the southern span, the authority plans to rehabilitate the existing northbound span and demolish the existing southbound span.

“That work is about 65 percent complete and is scheduled to be done next year,” Feeney said. “A contract for the rehab of the northbound span is likely to be awarded in mid-2016.”

Over the past couple of decades, the bridge has had its share of issues. The southbound bridge was built in 1955 and underwent \$900,000 in emergency repairs in 2000, when cracks were found in steel supports known as hangers that hold sections of the span together.

In 1999, the northbound bridge, which was built in 1973, was closed to traffic for seven weeks after suffering a failure that could have been catastrophic. Cracks were observed in the steel hangers. Fortunately, workers had installed a redundant safety system on the twin parkway bridges in 1989 to prevent a disaster like the one that happened in 1983 on a similarly constructed span in Connecticut. In that case, a section of the Mianus River Bridge collapsed into the water, killing three people.

In August, the bridge was closed for hours after a concrete beam intended for the new construction fell onto the southbound span about midnight while crews were unloading it from a truck. The closure of the bridge illustrated its importance: The incident backed up summer traffic for hours.

Freeholder Director Gerald Thornton said the reconstruction of the parkway bridges was warmly welcomed in Cape May County. Route 47, an alternate route along the Delaware Bay, can become impassable during major storms, he said.

“We would be trapped here without the Garden State Parkway. It’s necessary we have a functioning roadway to protect the citizens of the county,” Thornton said.

Route 52 Contractors is a joint venture of Wagman Construction Inc. and R.E. Pierson Construction Co.

A little farther north on the parkway, work continues on an \$84.1 million project to improve traffic flow near interchanges 36, 37 and 38 in Egg Harbor Township. Overall, the parkway project will improve traffic flow around the closely grouped exits by adding a deceleration lane on the southbound parkway and an acceleration lane on Tilton Road at Exit 36, officials said.

Feeney said the Egg Harbor Township project is 21 percent complete.

The project is expected to help increase traffic flow in the area by separating traffic entering the parkway at Exit 38 from the Atlantic City Expressway and from traffic exiting the parkway at Exit 37, Washington Avenue. Highway officials have said this stretch of road has the highest crash rate on the southern part of the parkway. The project is expected to be completed by August 2018, Feeney said.