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Project FAQs

US 50 Emergency Bridge Repairs

May 1, 2024

Project Overview

A safety closure is in place for a section of US Highway 50 located west of Gunnison. The Colorado Department of Transportation closed the bridge on Thursday, April 18, at the urging of the Federal Highway Administration and state bridge engineering experts due to the findings of an ongoing safety inspection, which identified a crack in the bridge girder. The bridge closure is located between Gunnison and Montrose, east of the US 50 Little Blue Creek Canyon project, which is currently in a planned winter shutdown.

FAQs - Residents, Commuters and Tourists

(answers in blue)

1. What are the closure limits?
 - a. This closure is on US 50 between Montrose and Gunnison between mile points 136 and 140 (4 miles).
 - b. The closure is due to the findings from an ongoing safety inspection, which identified small cracks in a bridge at mile point 136.3. The cracking was noted Thursday, April 18, during a special inspection required by the Federal Highway Administration for high-strength steel bridges constructed in the same way as the Blue Mesa bridges.
 - c. There is one other bridge in the state that uses the same steel, just a few miles west on US 50. CDOT is continuing to inspect both bridges, and the results of those inspections will determine next steps.
2. How long will this closure last?
 - a. This is an evolving situation, and there is currently no reopening date. CDOT's goal is to keep nearby residents and the public informed and will provide updates as they develop.
3. Are there alternate routes available?
 - a. Through traffic should use the recommended detour routes to the north and south:
 - i. Northern Recommended Detour – Via Interstate 70: The route is 354 miles long between Montrose and Gunnison. This detour requires approximately 6 hours of travel time.
 - ii. Southern Recommended Detour – Via US Highway 160: The route is 331 miles long between Montrose and Gunnison and requires nearly 7 hours of travel time.
 - iii. CO 149 is open in both directions at the junction of US 50 and CO 149, which is immediately east of the US 50 closure.





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- iv. County Road 26 (Lake City Cutoff) is open for local access (see question 4 below)
4. How should residents and commuters plan to get between Montrose and Gunnison?
- a. County Road 26 opened Monday, April 22, as a limited local access road for commuters and residents traveling between Gunnison and Montrose. Because it is a natural surface road that wasn't built to maintain the traffic volumes of US 50, it cannot remain open 24/7. Between the piloted travel times detailed below, crews will work on CR 26 to improve the driving surface so it remains safe for travel.
 - b. **Piloted release times are:**
 - i. 6:30 to 7:00 a.m. for westbound travel beginning at CO 149 and CR 26.
 - ii. 7:30 to 8:00 a.m. for eastbound travel beginning at US 50 and CR 26.
 - iii. Noon to 12:30 p.m. for westbound travel beginning at CO 149 and CR 26. **Starting Friday, May 3
 - iv. 1:00 to 1:30 p.m. for eastbound travel beginning at US 50 and CR 26. **Starting Friday, May 3
 - v. 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. for westbound travel beginning at CO 149 and CR 26.
 - vi. 7:30 to 8:00 p.m. for eastbound travel beginning at US 50 and CR 26.
 - vii. 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. for westbound travel beginning at CO 149 and CR 26. **Starting Friday, May 3
 - viii. 9:30 to 10:00 p.m. for eastbound travel beginning at US 50 and CR 26. **Starting Friday, May 3
 - c. Currently, all drivers in the queue at these designated times are being let through (unless their vehicle is overweight or hauling a trailer - see question 7 below).
5. What is considered critical local traffic?
- a. This route is intended for essential trips such as doctor's appointments, school, work, etc. It is not meant for recreational and/or non-local travel. Driver licenses and vehicle plates will not be used to determine eligibility. While CDOT's detour crews trust that drivers will honor the guidelines of the detour, they reserve the right to turn any vehicle away that is not using the detour as stated above.





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6. How long does the County Road 26 piloted detour take?
 - a. It takes approximately 45 minutes to travel one-way across CR 26, but total travel time from Gunnison to Montrose (or vice versa) will be longer with the morning and evening queuing of vehicles. Be prepared for over an hour of travel time.

7. What type of vehicles are allowed to use the CR 26 piloted detour?
 - a. County Road 26 is not open to heavy commercial or recreational vehicles. Trailers of any type are not allowed, and the local access route is not open to commercial vehicles in excess of 16,001 GVWR.
 - i. Prohibited vehicles will need to use detours on I-70 or US Highway 160 to travel between Gunnison and Montrose.

8. Will County Road 26 piloted times remain open during the weekend and/or for weather impacts?
 - a. The County Road 26 piloted times will continue to operate as usual over the weekend. The detour will operate as is during weather impacts unless the project team deems it unsafe for travel.

9. How should folks access their residences/work within the closure limits?
 - a. Residents living in Sapinero will be allowed to reach their residences through the western closure point.
 - b. Residents living on CR 25 and 26 can access their property through the eastern closure point.

10. How do I get my (mail, propane, package, etc.) deliveries or trash picked up?
 - a. Gunnison County is currently working through these various community needs.
 - i. People with post office boxes can travel to the post office during the regular open hours for County Road 26. The Postmasters have been notified and they don't anticipate any disruptions to mail delivery. If anyone does experience a problem with mail service, Senator Hickenlooper's office is helping and people can visit <https://www.hickenlooper.senate.gov/help-with-federal-agencies-for-m/>
 - ii. Propane is available on both sides of the closure so that shouldn't be an issue.
 - iii. For trash collected on the east side of the closure for transport to Grand Junction, please contact the County to use the Gunnison landfill.





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- iv. For all other questions, like whether or not trash haulers can access residences on County Roads 25 and 26, please reach out to the project email at us50bridge@gmail.com.

11. Is Kebler Pass open?

- a. Kebler Pass is currently closed due to winter conditions and typically opens in late May. CDOT is working to potentially clear the roadway for use.

12. I live on County Road 26. Can we leave our house?

- a. Yes, you can leave your property, but only to head east toward Gunnison. You will not be able to access westbound toward Montrose.
- b. County Road 26 is currently under construction to keep it in good condition as the local access route. Residents should avoid traveling while crews are working. Please coordinate with the construction crews and let them know where you live. They should be able to get you through when it's safe to leave.
- c. Watch for increased truck/construction traffic on CR 26, and please proceed with caution.

13. Is HazMat allowed on the alternate routes provided?

- a. HazMat drivers should check with CDOT's freight office when choosing between the recommended alternate routes (I-70 and US 160). The freight office can be reached at 303-757-9539 or dot_cdot_permits@state.co.us. More information is posted to <https://freight.colorado.gov/>
- b. HazMat vehicles will not be allowed on any local alternate routes available now or in the coming weeks.

14. Can we drive boats under the bridge?

- a. Currently, there are no restrictions against boaters driving under the bridge, but please refrain from stopping right under the bridge where inspectors are working above. This could pose a safety risk should a piece of equipment fall from the bridge. CDOT's concern is vehicles driving on the bridge. The bridge is structurally sound as it stands and does not impact boaters.

15. When was the bridge built, and when was it inspected?

- a. This bridge was built in 1963 and was last inspected 22 months ago as part of the standard federal rules for all bridges. It was in the early stages of a special inspection for bridges with a specific type of steel and construction that a safety issue was discovered.

16. Is there access to marinas and recreation areas?

- a. The closure point on the Gunnison side has been moved further west to provide access to places like the Bay of Chickens and Elk Creek Marina. Likewise for people on the Montrose side of the reservoir, they will be able to access the Lake Fork Marina and recreation





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areas on that end. When you approach flaggers at the closure point, just let them know that is where you are going and they will let you through.

- b. To get to the east side of recreation areas from Montrose and west side recreation areas from Gunnison, people will need to take the County Road 26 cut-through during the set hours of pilot car operations.

17. Will CR 25 be open to local traffic like CR 26?

- a. County Road 25 is not open to vehicle traffic, and currently, there are no plans to open this road to traffic. Opening day is typically May 15, but it doesn't always open depending on heavy snow years or mud issues. CDOT will be assessing whether or not it can open the road, but no timeline has been established.

18. When can we move our livestock from one side to the other?

- a. Multiple agencies are coordinating on this issue, and we are putting together a list of everyone who is in need of livestock transport. If you would like to be added to the list for updates once the team knows more, please email the project at US50bridge@gmail.com.

19. When will larger vehicles be able to use CR 26, and/or when will more travel windows open up for CR 26?

- a. This is an ever-changing situation, and right now we are unsure when we will know more. Kiewit Construction started remediation work on County Road 26 on Tuesday, April 23. We are adding additional travel time windows on CR 26 on May 3.
- b. There are no plans to pave County Road 26, and larger vehicles will not be allowed to use it.

20. What is being done to accommodate emergency services?

- a. If you have a question regarding any type of emergency services, please reach out to the project email at US50bridge@gmail.com, and we will direct you to the correct person.
- b. If you have an emergency, dial 911.

21. What is being done to support the small businesses affected by this? Are there grants or similar financial assistance they can access?

- a. Given the declaration of a state emergency, we have activated the state's recovery task force to coordinate the capacity of various state agencies to address the economic impacts for agriculture, tourism and other impacted economies in the county. The effort will





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begin with an assessment of the economy by working in collaboration with the impacted jurisdictions and then work with state agencies to find opportunities. Legislation that may be applicable and appropriate to these circumstances was passed two years ago. We will work with the appropriate parties for solutions.

22. Would you be able to build a temporary pontoon style bridge similar to what the military uses?
- There is not a great departure point in and out of the water. CDOT has been in coordination with other agencies to see if this is a possibility or alternative. At this time, it does not look like a viable solution.
23. Can a ferry accommodate folks trying to detour this closure?
- Similar to the pontoon-style bridge, this option doesn't have any good departure points. We are still investigating this, but we have no update at this time.
24. Has Colorado Parks and Wildlife weighed in that County Road 26 is a major travel route for deer in the spring and fall? How will this be addressed to mitigate car and deer encounters?
- Residents of Lake City use this road regularly. The danger from hitting deer or elk is much higher on Highway 149 of US 50 because motorists travel at a higher speed. CDOT will continue to work with partner agencies regarding impacts to wildlife along County Road 26 during the US 50 bridge closure.
25. What kind of supply chain issues can we expect?
- It is a little too early to say what supply chain issues will be and the specifics of it. We will work with distributors and assess the situation with local emergency managers to create a report to inform us of the potential issues to the supply chain and implement measures to address those.
26. Has there been any discussion about adding additional air flights between Gunnison and Montrose?
- We have only been looking into additional air flights for medical emergencies. We have not looked into additional flights for anything else at this time. For more information regarding air flights, please reach out to the appropriate regional airport:
 - Gunnison-Crested Butte Regional Airport: 970-641-2304
 - Montrose Regional Airport: 970-249-3203





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27. What is CDOT doing during the bridge closure?

- a. CDOT is continuing to inspect the bridge to find any further cracks or anomalies. More have been found since the original closure on April 18. Engineering teams are reviewing repair options, so that repairs to the bridge can begin as quickly and safely as possible. CDOT is working with contractor Kiewit Infrastructure Co., to assist with the bridge inspections and repairs, as well as improvements to County Road 26 (Lake City Cutoff), to allow limited local traffic around the road closure.

28. What about the other bridges in the area?

- a. There is one other bridge in the state that uses the same steel and construction, just a few miles west on US 50. CDOT is continuing to inspect both bridges, and the results of those inspections will determine next steps.

29. How can I get added to the project update email list?

- a. Once you're on our website, click on the "Stay Informed" box in the lower right-hand corner.
- b. On the next page, make these selections:
 - i. Scroll down to "construction updates."
 - ii. Select northwest Colorado.
 - iii. Look at the "southern"
 - iv. Click on "US 50 Blue Mesa Bridge" (although it may already be auto-selected for you).
 - v. Click save!
- c. If you run into issues, please contact the project email and request to be signed up.

30. How can I contact the project?

- a. Call the hotline - (970) 648-4423
- b. Email the project - US50bridge@gmail.com
- c. Project webpage - bit.ly/us50bridge
- d. Real-time traffic information - Visit COtrip.org.
- e. Follow CDOT on Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter).

