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## Route 33 bridge reopening today

Thursday, June 24, 2004

By **BETH BRAVERMAN**  
The Express-Times

The Route 33 northbound bridge will reopen this evening, generating praise from state officials who marveled at how quickly the job was finished.

The bridge had remained closed since Jan. 24, when a sinkhole opened beneath one of its piers. Officials Wednesday applauded the speed in which workers completed repairs to the bridge's foundation. Nyleve Bridge Corp. of Emmaus finished the job in less than four months, weeks before expected.

"They worked beyond our expectations and we're very happy with the work they performed," Pennsylvania Department of Transportation spokesman Ronald Young said.

State Sen. Lisa Boscola, D-Northampton/Lehigh, also praised state Secretary of Transportation Allen D. Biehler for giving immediate attention to the problem.

"When motorists see how we did this so quickly, they're going to wonder why all construction doesn't happen that quickly," she said.

To prevent future sinkhole problems on the southbound Route 33 bridge, PennDOT will replace that bridge next, a move commended by State Rep. Rich Grucela, D-

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Northampton.

"I'd rather be proactive than reactive," he said.

The Route 33 north off-ramp to Route 191 will also reopen tonight. Young has said the southbound onramp at 191 will stay open while work continues on the southbound bridge.

"The traffic congestion will be much better," Boscola said. "The motorists won't be as inconvenienced."

PennDOT officials expect workers will finish the southbound bridge before Thanksgiving.

"The northbound Route 33 bridge was replaced very quickly and we anticipate replacing the southbound structure just as fast,"

PennDOT acting District Executive Amar C. Bhajandas said in a prepared statement. "We appreciate everyone's patience as we restore this vital link."

Difficulties with weather and materials could delay the project, although no problems exist right now, Young said.

Workers will have to watch out for more sinkholes, he added.

"We've had a few minor incidents in the past month but nothing like the magnitude of the sinkhole we had on Jan. 24," he said.

PennDOT will shift a single lane of northbound traffic to the new northbound structure shortly after 6:45 p.m. today, and will conduct 10- to 15-minute traffic stoppages during the transition, which officials expect to complete by 8 p.m.

A single lane of southbound traffic will remain on the southbound structure for about two weeks to allow crews to build southbound crossovers.

Once crews have built the crossovers, motorists will use a single lane in each direction on the new northbound structure, allowing workers to demolish and replace the southbound structure.

This section of Route 33 has an average daily traffic of 40,000 vehicles in both directions.

Transportation officials had planned to keep the southbound bridge open while workers tied its piers and abutments to solid ground to prevent sinkholes from shifting them. But workers need a drill 46 feet tall to bore into the bedrock, which is deeper than expected -- as much as 300 feet in some places. The bridge clearance is only about 27 feet, so workers will have to remove the bridge deck and parapets from one of the travel lanes to reinforce its supports.

While he praised the swift work to fix the bridge, Grucela said the state still needs to look into finding a long-term solution to the sinkholes that plague the



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area.

An ongoing rash of sinkholes along a 1.5-mile stretch of the Bushkill Creek made its first major mark in October 2000, when it collapsed the Bushkill Street bridge that spanned the Bushkill Creek, connecting Stockertown and Tatamy.

The bridge remains in shambles while PennDOT officials design its replacement and state agencies work together to formulate a solution to the sinkhole epidemic.

PennDOT has scheduled reconstruction of that bridge for next year, but could delay that if government agencies agree to repair the stream bed first to prevent future sinkhole problems within its banks.

( Reporter Russ Flanagan contributed to this story.

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