

Monday, November 2, 2009

Bay Bridge to Reopen By 9 A.M.

Expected reopen time: between 8:45 a.m. to 9 a.m.

By [Lori Preuitt](#) and [Jessica Greene](#)

The Bay Bridge will be an option for Monday afternoon commuters. [California Department of Transportation](#) spokesman Bart Ney said Monday morning that crews made a lot of progress overnight and the last step to opening the Oakland Bay Bridge is a final inspection.

"Things have gone very well," Ney told reporters at a pre-dawn news conference. "It does look like we'll be able to get the bridge open today."

Ney said at about 8:30 a.m. that they expect to reopen the span before 9 a.m. He reminded reporters in an earlier news conference who pressed for a solid reopening time that the crews are focusing on "safety first." As soon as the span passes final safety inspections, drivers will have the green light to use it again.



Some of the heavy equipment is already off the bridge, Ney said, and crews were able to "get the geometry" in place to set the stage for the final stress tests.

The hundreds of thousands of commuters who use the Bay Bridge every morning are still forced to use alternate commute routes to get to work Monday morning.

The crews were having problems getting an exact [alignment of a huge screw type cylinders into a series of metal plates or eyebars](#). They can't get them to fit correctly so that there is no metal on metal contact.

[Ney](#) said the last stress test happened Saturday. He said the fix was not satisfactory for engineers, so the workers had to try again Sunday. "The engineers didn't get what they were looking for in Saturday's stress test," Ney said. He said another stress test could happen Sunday evening.

After the stress does is completed with a positive outcome, Ney said crews will likely run heavy trucks on the lower deck of the bridge in order to cause vibrations on the upper deck. They test will also have to pass inspection before the bridge will be open to traffic. When asked about wind tests, Ney said there was no way to simulate that on a bridge the size of the eastern span.

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Although hundreds of thousands of people are waiting for the bridge to open, the specialized team working on the bridge consists of fewer than two dozen workers. That team was given Saturday night off after midnight because they were facing exhaustion from their 24 hour a day efforts since Tuesday night.

The same crew will work in the overnight hours Sunday, according to Caltrans.

Sunday morning, reporters pressed Ney about a possible Plan B if the current effort does not work. After resisting the question, Ney said if they had to entirely replace the suspension area in question, it could take weeks because they would have to order the materials. He said for now the crews would keep trying to make the current plan work.

[Click for Caltrans graphic explaining repair.](#)

Engineers have been trying to repair the bridge so that the 280,000 commuters who use it each weekday.

Construction crews began the repairs after two rods and a crossbar broke during Tuesday evening rush hour, sending 5,000 pounds of steel and a long cable crashing onto the upper deck.

The bridge closure has made for some rough commutes, with heavy traffic and crowded [BART](#) trains. Other bridges that provide access to [San Francisco](#) were especially congested, as some of drivers who normally use the bridge each day take alternate routes. Transit leaders are hoping commuters who were forced to take public transportation during the bridge closure will make it a permanent change. BART has seen a record number of riders each day.

Three vehicles were damaged when a chunk of metal and a long cable fell onto westbound lanes at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The pieces that failed were parts of major repairs done last month after state inspectors discovered a crack in an "eyebars," an important structural beam. The rods that broke were holding a saddle-like cap that had been installed to strengthen the cracked eyebars.

Officials with the California Department of Transportation have attributed the incident to vibrations and grinding on a metal tie rod, causing it to snap. They say they are making enhancements to address the issue.

Here is the Caltrans to do list:

- Workers have to custom-fit steel in their efforts to repair a section where two rods and a crossbar fell at the eastern span's upper deck Tuesday evening.
- Once the custom-fitting is completed, workers will grind areas where steel is rubbing on steel so that those areas are smoother
- Then there will be several hours of rigorous tests followed by enhancements to make the repair area safer.
- Finally, outside experts from the [Federal Highway Administration](#) and other groups will examine the repaired section to make sure it's ready to handle traffic again.

The failure resurrected fears about the safety of a span that millions watching the 1989 World Series broadcast learned had failed during the Loma Prieta earthquake.

Tuesday's incident also stirred anger over the constant delays and soaring costs of the still-unfinished new eastern span of the 73-year-old bridge, which has become the largest public works project in California history.