

Bridge collapses in Pittsburgh ahead of Biden's visit touting scaled-back infrastructure bill

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A major bridge in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, collapsed early Friday morning only hours before President Joe Biden visited the city to boast about his \$1 trillion infrastructure bill.

Luckily no one was killed in the collapse. Ten people were injured and four were taken to local hospitals. None of the injuries are considered life threatening.

Nearby residents reported hearing a loud boom followed by what one resident describes as a sound similar to a “jet engine” around 6:45 a.m. Friday.

Five cars along with a Port Authority bus fell along with the bridge. Photos of the bus shows the bus at a 45-degree angle, being prevented from falling off the broken span only by another section of the bridge that had been heaved upwards.

Rescue workers working with ropes and creating a human chain were able to get the two passengers and driver off the bus as well as the other people who were in their cars. Fortunately, the bus was traveling against rush hour, as buses running into the city at that time would have had many more passengers.

A gas line that runs under the bridge broke and the sound of the escaping gas was what caused the “jet engine” noise. Gas company crews were able to shut off the pipe and no fire or explosion occurred.

The bridge along Forbes Avenue crosses over a ravine in Frick Park. It connects Pittsburgh's East End and eastern suburbs with Downtown, Oakland and Squirrel Hill neighborhoods.

Approximately 14,000 vehicles use the bridge each day including cars, buses and trucks. Oakland is the site of Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh and the major hospitals in the city. Along with Downtown, tens of thousands of people commute

into the area for work and school.

A 2018 photo taken by Dr. G. Kochanski, which has gone viral on Twitter, shows a support beam for the bridge completely rusted away. Kochanski sent the photo to Pittsburgh 311 Response Center with the following text “@pgh311 I hope someone is keeping an eye on the underside of the Forbes Avenue bridge over Frick Park? One of the big “X” beams is rusted through entirely (and, yes, I see the cables, so it's probably not a crisis).”

Pittsburgh officials have not responded when asked about the report or what actions were taken after they received the report.

With its three rivers and rolling hills, Pittsburgh has more bridges than any other city in the world for cars, rail and foot traffic. In total, Allegheny County has over 1,187 bridges and another 397 local road bridges. Of these, 176 are listed in poor condition by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Since 2011, the Forbes Avenue bridge has been rated in poor condition on the National Bridge Inventory. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation also rated the bridge in poor condition during its last inspection in 2021 yet nothing was done to repair the decaying structure or warn the public.

Photos taken from underneath the bridge show rusting and broken support beams and that the bridge has not been painted in years. Painting is an essential necessity for bridge maintenance to prevent the steel beams from rusting.

“The politicians don't fix anything,” said Fran, who lives a few blocks from the collapsed bridge. “The roads are full of potholes, our water lines are still made of lead. They can spend millions on stadiums, the

downtown looks beautiful, but come into the neighborhoods and things just deteriorate.

“Thousands of people cross that bridge every day to get to work and school, this will take months if not over a year before this is fixed. All these bridges are old, you never see them getting repaired. It’s just a wonder no one was killed.”

Built in the early 1970s, the 497-foot bridge was awarded a prize by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1974 for its sloping piers that gave the bridge a “sense of logic and beauty.”

Overall, Pennsylvania bridges received a grade of D+ by the American Society of Civil Engineers, which wrote in their most recent report that more than 18 percent, twice the national average, of the state’s highway bridges are classified in poor condition.

On average, Pennsylvania’s bridges are 15 years older than the national average and continue to be in need of repair and modernization. Pennsylvania has more than double the national average of bridges rated in “poor” condition.

President Biden had previously planned to be in Pittsburgh on Friday to promote his recently passed scaled down infrastructure bill which he has claimed will rebuild roads, bridges and ports throughout the country, though the \$1 trillion budget is but a dent in what is needed to overhaul the country’s decaying infrastructure.

Biden made the trip as part of a cross-country campaign in the lead up to the midterm elections. He plans to brag about the bill’s passage to help boost his collapsing approval ratings.

Biden continued with his visit to Pittsburgh, going to the site of the bridge collapse where he stated that it demonstrates the need for his infrastructure bill. In a statement to reporters, Biden said, “I didn’t realize there are more bridges in Pittsburgh than any other city in the world. We are going to fix them all.”

In reality, the infrastructure bill falls far short of the need and will instead be a gigantic boon for private construction companies and financiers who will stuff their pockets with public funds. The passage of the infrastructure bill was only done after it was scaled back and the larger “Build Back Better” bill was killed by members of his own party in the Senate. That bill was opposed by senators because it included money for social programs such as day care and child support.

Two weeks ago Pennsylvania received \$327 million from the US Department of Transportation as its share of the infrastructure bill for bridge repair. Pennsylvania has 3,198 bridges rated as being in poor condition. The money amounts to just \$102,251 per bridge, an amount which would not even cover the cost of a proper inspection, let alone making the needed repairs.

Nationwide the American Road & Transportation Builders Association reports that there are over 220,000 bridges that need repair, including 45,000 that are considered to be “structurally deficient.” Another 295,000 bridges are listed as in fair condition.



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