

Aging, deteriorating Gaysport Bridge to close one lane

Action may be permanent because of lack of funding

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ZANESVILLE — The Gaysport Bridge will close one of its two lanes to traffic next week due to its increasingly rapid structural deterioration, and the Muskingum County Engineer Doug Davis expects the lane closure to be permanent due to a lack of funding.

The one-lane closure comes after a recent inspection revealed corrosion on the deck edge and outermost supporting floor stringers of the bridge, which was built in 1971. Traffic signs will be installed to aid in traffic flow.

While no load restrictions will be required at this time, Davis said further deterioration of the bridge could lead to such restrictions in the future, with the bridge possibly requiring replacement within the next five to 10 years.

“It’s always a tough decision to figure out how to react to a bridge that’s decreasing in structural integrity quicker than we would like,” Davis said, but “we do not have the local dollars to put toward fixing or replacing this structure.”

The inability to fix the Gaysport Bridge, which Davis estimates will cost about \$600,000, highlights the problem of inadequate resources, he said. Funding for the county engineer’s office comes from a tax on gasoline and from license plate fees, which Davis said does not adequately match the rising cost of resources required to replace or fix aging infrastructure.

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One lane of the Gaysport Bridge will be closed after a recent inspection showed corrosion on the deck edge and outermost supporting floor stringers.

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Bridge

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Following the inspection of the Gaysport Bridge earlier this month, Davis asked county commissioners to consider putting a levy to the next ballot that would allow voters to consider adding a \$5 increase to the annual license plate fees. Commissioners denied the request that would've generated an estimated \$400,000 annually, after voters rejected the same levy in 2014.

"We want to try to protect the community and keep these bridges functional as long as we can," Davis said, "but honestly we're losing the battle. We just don't have the resources."

Additionally, Davis' request for Ohio Public Works Emergency funds to fix the Gaysport Bridge was denied. Davis said this left him with no other option but to close one lane of the bridge and wait until 2021, when the bridge will be eligible to receive federal rehabilitation funds. Davis estimated the rehabilitation cost for the bridge to exceed \$6 million.

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