



Berrien County Road Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Napier Avenue Bridge Reopens to Emergency Traffic

County Hopes to Reopen Single Lanes to All Traffic by Memorial Day Weekend

St. Joseph Township, Michigan, 5/12/2022 – The Berrien County Road Department has safely reopened the Napier Avenue Bridge to emergency traffic only on 4/29/2022.

The bridge, which provides the most direct route to Spectrum Health Lakeland, is again open to ambulance and police traffic. All other vehicles, including fire trucks, should continue to use the official detour, taking M-139 North to Business Loop I-94 and crossing the St. Joseph River using the Main Street bridge, which remains open.

Construction crews are working to reopen one lane of the bridge in each direction to all traffic in time for Memorial Day weekend.

“We are deeply appreciative of the tremendous efforts from our construction crews, whose fast and careful work has enabled us to reopen the Napier Avenue Bridge safely,” Interim Director Kevin Stack said. “This bridge is a key artery in our community, providing the best route to Lakeland Hospital, so it was important for us to reopen this as quickly as we could without sacrificing safety.”

“Crews continue to work toward the goal of reopening one lane of traffic in each direction prior to Memorial Day weekend. Of course, we will not sacrifice safety for speed or convenience. We appreciate everyone’s patience as we work to complete this rehabilitation project.”

Work began on the Napier Avenue Bridge on March 28 but stopped on April 26 after crews sandblasting rust from bridge rocker arms and beams discovered greater deterioration than originally anticipated. The cleaning process resulted in gaps between the bridge rocker arms, which hold up the bridge beams and deck and allow them to “rock,” so the bridge has some movement.

Out of an abundance of caution, the Road Department closed the bridge to all traffic at 5:30 p.m. on April 26 until repairs could be made. These included the installation of temporary supports. On May 2 a certified weld inspector inspected every weld to certify the work had been safely completed.

The design engineering team then updated calculations for the bridge with the temporary supports, concluding they would make the bridge capable of holding a dead load (stationary weight) and a live load (moving weight) in excess of what the bridge was originally designed for in 1967. Stack then met with local emergency services and the hospital to update that emergency services were permitted to use the bridge.

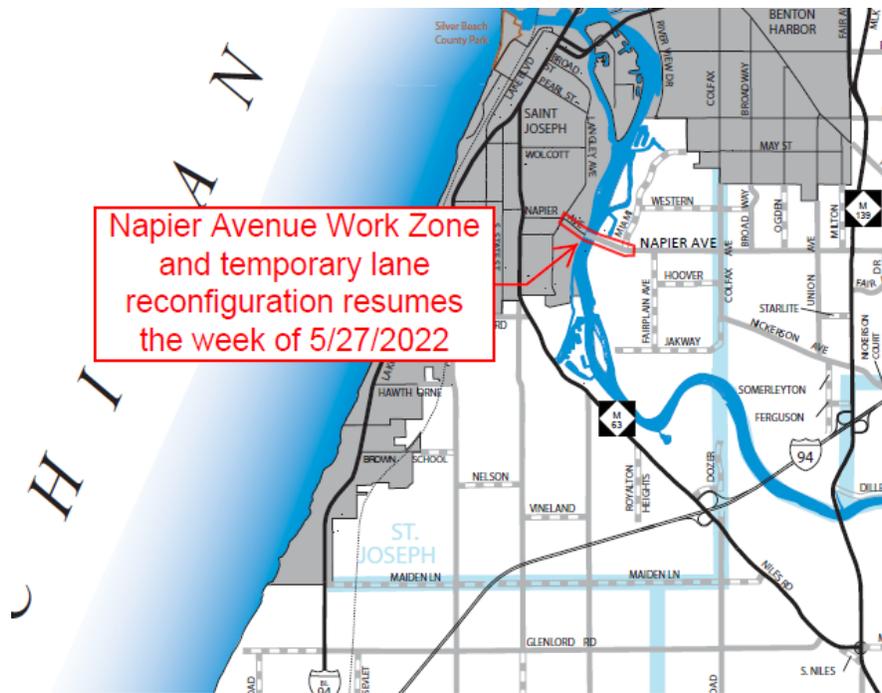
The Road Department will update the community on its continued progress on the Napier Avenue Bridge with the goal of reopening the bridge prior to Memorial Day Weekend, which marks the official start of summer – and the beginning of tourist season. Stack cautioned that this was a goal that would be dependent on a number of factors, including weather and the contractor crews.

“While we recognize the inconvenience of this bridge closure, we want to assure the public we will take all the necessary steps to complete and certify construction before we let non-emergency traffic back on the bridge,” Stack said. “The safety of all motorists is always our primary concern.”

During continued construction, Napier Avenue will have one lane of traffic maintained in each direction between Langley Avenue and Miami Road. Work is expected to be fully complete by August.

Once the bridge has reopened to one-lane traffic, the Road Department cautions:

- Expect possible travel delays.
- Remember to reduce speeds when traveling through work zones.
- Watch out for construction workers and equipment.



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