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2 city bridges draw warning on safety

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City Controller Alan Butkovitz said yesterday an inspection by his office of 23 randomly selected city bridges found four with some significant deterioration, but none in danger of collapse.

Butkovitz said he undertook the review to see if the city Streets Department was properly maintaining and monitoring bridges in the wake of the 2007 Minneapolis bridge collapse that killed 13 people.

"In general, our inspections revealed that the bridges were in fairly good condition and that the

[Streets Department] inspection reports accurately depicted conditions of the bridges," Butkovitz said.

But inspectors found rusting and corrosion on four bridges, which in two cases posed "serious safety hazards" to motorists, pedestrians or rail traffic that run underneath and could be hit by falling concrete or mortar.

The hazardous conditions involved the Henry Avenue Bridge over Wissahickon Creek and the Calumet Street Bridge, which crosses SEPTA tracks in East Falls.

In a written response, the Streets Department said that major work on the Henry Avenue Bridge was a PennDOT responsibility and that a contractor was

working on repairs.

The department said the Calumet Bridge is in solid structural shape, and that a crew will be sent there to deal with falling mortar from a wall adjacent to the bridge.

The Streets Department agreed that its bridge-maintenance database should be computerized, and is working to achieve that.

Butkovitz also said his inspectors were troubled to find that large buses and trucks are routinely crossing the Willow Grove Avenue Bridge in Chestnut Hill, despite signs banning them because of deterioration in the bridge.

The Streets Department said a replacement bridge for that site was under design. ★

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Report: 4 city bridges need critical work

Controller Alan Butkovitz said there was cause for alarm but no danger of imminent collapse.

By Miriam Hill
and Paul Nussbaum
INQUIRER STAFF WRITERS

At least four Philadelphia bridges need repairs to correct "serious safety hazards," City Controller Alan Butkovitz said yesterday.

Butkovitz emphasized that no bridge was in danger of immediate collapse but that frequent use by heavy vehicles could "lead to more costly repairs and, even worse, the possibility of structural collapse and an ensuing tragedy."

The controller's office reviewed 23 bridges selected randomly from the 360 the city owns. The four in most need of repair are the Willow Grove Avenue, Calumet Street, Edison Avenue, and Henry Avenue Bridges.

The Willow Grove Avenue Bridge, in Chestnut Hill, has lost sections on a number of beams to corrosion, the controller's report said. The city plans to reconstruct the bridge in 2011.

In a written response to Butkovitz, Philadelphia Streets Commissioner Clarena Tolson said the city would inspect the bridge regularly until reconstruction began.

Butkovitz said vehicles heavier than the posted three-ton limit regularly crossed the bridge, accelerating problems.

Tolson said she would ask police to monitor the bridge more closely.

On the Calumet Street Bridge, in North Philadelphia, steel beams are exposed, heavily rusted, and corroded. Tolson said the Streets Department had removed some of the concrete casing from the bridge to keep the material from falling onto SEPTA rails below. Removing the casing does not reduce the bridge's load-carrying ability, Tolson said.

On the Edison Avenue Bridge, in the Far Northeast, concrete is crumbling, and several parts of the parapet are crushed or broken, a safety hazard. The city has allotted money to reconstruct the bridge in fiscal 2013. Tolson said the city had repaired the parapet after Butkovitz's office completed its inspection.

Chipping concrete on the Henry Avenue Bridge in Rox-

Transportation, which owns the Henry Avenue Bridge but has an agreement that the city will maintain it, began repairs that it will pay for and expects to complete this month.

The controller's office inspected the bridges from July through October 2008. Reports often take a year to complete because of the need to check facts, talk to the departments involved, and complete other reports, First Deputy City Controller Harvey Rice said.

Butkovitz estimated repairs for the four bridges could cost as much as \$3.4 million. Replacing them could cost \$33 million.

Deteriorating bridges are a widespread problem throughout Pennsylvania and much of the nation, as age, use, and weather wear them out.

After a Minnesota highway bridge collapsed in 2007, killing 13 people, a PennDot survey found 404 bridges in the five-county Southeastern Pennsylvania region that, like the Minnesota bridge, were "structurally deficient." Pennsylvania has nearly 6,000 structurally deficient highway bridges, more than any other state.

Railroad bridges throughout the region are also deficient: The Inquirer reported in September that Amtrak's bridge-inspection reports show nearly half its 302 bridges in the Philadelphia region have some elements rated poor or worse.

Butkovitz also found that:

- Once the city identified problems on bridges, it often did nothing about them and failed to document whether conditions were getting worse.
- The city does not meet state guidelines requiring bridges with weight restrictions to be inspected yearly instead of every two years.
- The city bridge-maintenance unit does not have a database for prioritizing and managing work orders.

Tolson said that after Butkovitz completed his audit in October 2008, Pennsylvania adopted a policy of having more frequent inspections, and that the city also now checks more often.



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Phila. Controller Calls for Improvements in Bridge Repairs

by KYW's Paul Kurtz

A new study released by Philadelphia's city controller says that some bridges in the city are in need of repair.

The 2007 bridge catastrophe in Minneapolis, Minn. prompted Philadelphia controller Allan Butkovitz and his staff to conduct a review. He says they randomly chose 23 bridges out of a pool of 360:

"In general, our inspections revealed that the bridges were in fairly good condition and that the inspection reports accurately depicted conditions of the bridges. However, four of the 23 bridges were in varying states of deterioration, and corrective action is needed -- as well as more frequent inspections in order to adequately monitor conditions and ensure they do not worsen."

The four bridges in need of repair are along Henry Avenue (in photo), Calumet Street, Edison Avenue, and Willow Grove Avenue.

According to Butkovitz, the city inspects bridges every two years.

Repairing the bridges is an expensive proposition -- about \$2 million alone for the relatively small Willow Grove Avenue bridge.

(File photo)

Controller faults city for crumbling bridges

Wednesday, December 16th, 2009

By: Tom MacDonald
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Philadelphia's City Controller is citing safety hazards on bridges maintained by the city. The controller released a report on the bridges today.

The survey reviewed 23 bridges and found four with serious problems. City Controller Alan Butkovitz says the worst bridges are on Henry Avenue, Calumet Street, Edison Avenue and Willow Grove Avenue.

Butkovitz: These deteriorating conditions present serious safety hazards to motorists, pedestrians and the railroad systems that run under two of the bridges. Poor conditions and weakening structures have caused weight limits restrictions on three of these bridges.

The controller is quick to point out none of the structures is on the verge of collapse, but he is calling for enforcement of weight limits on the spans. Streets department officials say they're keeping an eye on the bridges in question - and others in the city, and are doing maintenance and replacement when the budget money is available.

