

# Old school methods delay Longfellow Bridge rehab

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CAMBRIDGE — Calling it “kind of the worst kept secret,” the Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s highway administrator told his board of directors on Tuesday that restoration of the Longfellow Bridge, using Rockport granite, has fallen behind schedule and is now expected to last until at least November 2018.

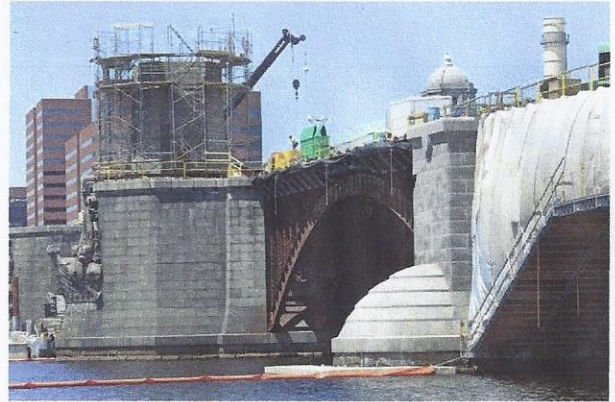
The setback means people who rely on the historic bridge, known for its “salt and pepper shaker” towers, to commute between Boston and Cambridge may be in for about three more years of delays, detours and headaches.

“You don’t have to be a construction expert to realize that this thing was going a lot slower than people had anticipated,” Thomas Tinlin, MassDOT’s acting highway administrator, said.

Tinlin said the project’s contract mandated the use of “complex techniques that have fallen out of use in today’s construction industry” like riveting rather than bolting and welding. The project was also set back by significant deterioration of some of the steel in the bridge that was not obvious to engineers until the bridge started to be disassembled.

“The rehabilitation of this historic bridge has not been an easy or straightforward process,” he said. “The Longfellow has been complicated by a number of factors that boil down to the fact that restoring this historically significant structure back to its former glory has required the use of construction techniques that are no longer the standard in 2015 and have taken more time to do and to do right.”

A significant bit of Rockport’s history is being incorporated into the bridge. When the state tore down and rebuilt the Derek Hines Bridge in Amesbury a few years ago, thousands of tons of Rockport granite was removed and became surplus.



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AP photoEfforts to overhaul the Longfellow Bridge linking Boston to Cambridge, shown in 2014, was supposed to be done in 2016 but now will go on to 2018. Granite quarried in Rockport is being used.



Rockport granite — which has a distinctive look — was used on the Longfellow Bridge, and builders wanted to be sure to find a fresh supply. But the stone hasn't been quarried since the 1930s, so the Amesbury bridge stone was salvaged and has been used in the Longfellow Bridge project.

In 2010, Wakefield-based Olde New England Granite, co-owned by Biz Reed, had purchased the 3,000 tons of historic Rockport granite that had been stripped from the Hines. He had no idea what the company would do with it, but said the deal was too good to pass up.

When Reed got word that a team of MassDOT officials, historical preservationists, and construction contractors were all on the hunt for the Rockport stone, he gave them a call.

The contractor that fabricated the stone parapets had spent more than \$100,000 for about 250 tons of Rockport granite by June 2014 and was still building.

“It’s classic, that salt-and-pepper grain,” Reed said last year of the salvaged Rockport granite — a perfect fit, he added, for a structure nicknamed the “salt and pepper bridge.”

The project management team for the bridge reconstruction will host public meetings in Boston and Cambridge in September to lay out the new construction timeline to residents and commuters.

The Longfellow Bridge, at its regular capacity, carries 28,000 vehicles and 90,000 riders on the MBTA’s Red Line between Boston and Cambridge each day, Tinlin said.

When it started, the Longfellow Bridge restoration had a projected budget of \$304 million and was expected to be completed in 2016. Tinlin said Tuesday the new timeline calls for the bridge to be fully open to traffic by November or December 2018.

“We’ve told the contractor to really think outside the box and we’ve challenged them on how they’re going to try to make some lost time,” Tinlin said. “We’ve also asked them to bring on additional crews and additional equipment in order to accelerate the bridge reconstruction.”

Material from Colin Young of the State House News Service, and the Associated Press was used in this report.