



Project FAQs

US 50 Emergency Bridge Repairs

May 31, 2024

Project Overview

A safety closure is in place for a section of US Highway 50 located west of Gunnison. The Colorado Department of Transportation closed the bridge on Thursday, April 18, at the urging of the Federal Highway Administration and state bridge engineering experts due to the findings of an ongoing safety inspection, which identified a crack in the bridge girder. The bridge closure is located between Gunnison and Montrose, east of the US 50 Little Blue Creek Canyon project.

FAQs - Residents, Commuters and Tourists

(answers in blue)

1. How long will this closure last?

The bridge will be repaired in two phases. The goal is to finish phase 1 in early July which will allow reopening one lane across the bridge for limited travel by lighter vehicles. Phase 2 work will focus on making permanent repairs to allow full traffic back onto the bridge. The completion of this work - and the reopening of the full bridge - is expected in fall 2024.

2. What are the closure limits?

- a. This closure is on US 50 between Montrose and Gunnison between mile points 136 and 140 (4 miles).
- b. The closure is due to the findings from an ongoing safety inspection, which identified small cracks in a bridge at mile point 136.3. The cracking was noted Thursday, April 18, during a special inspection required by the Federal Highway Administration for high-strength steel bridges constructed in the same way as the Blue Mesa bridges.
- c. There is one other bridge in the state that uses the same steel, just a few miles west on US 50. CDOT is continuing to inspect both bridges, and the results of those inspections will determine the next steps.

3. Are there alternate routes available?

Through traffic should use the recommended detour routes to the north and south:

- i. Northern Recommended Detour – Via Interstate 70: The route is 354 miles long between Montrose and Gunnison. This detour requires approximately 6 hours of travel time.
- ii. Southern Recommended Detour – Via US Highway 160: The route is 331 miles long between Montrose and Gunnison and requires nearly 7 hours of travel time.





- iii. CO 149 is open in both directions at the junction of US 50 and CO 149, which is immediately east of the US 50 closure.
 - iv. County Road 26 (Lake City Cutoff) is open for local access (see question 4 below)
4. How should residents and commuters plan to get between Montrose and Gunnison?
- a. County Road 26 opened Monday, April 22, as a limited local access road for commuters and residents traveling between Gunnison and Montrose. With roadway improvements, there are now four piloted travel times daily in each direction and Thursday, May 9, weight restrictions were lifted to provide access to heavier trucks and vehicles hauling trailers that meet the State of Colorado’s legal size and weight limits.
 - b. Current piloted release times for westbound travel starting at CO 149 & CR 26 are:

Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays & Tuesdays	Wednesdays only
7:30 to 8 a.m.	7:30 to 8 a.m.
9:30 to 10 a.m.	9:30 to 10 a.m.
12:30 to 1 p.m.	Closed for maintenance
2:30 to 3 p.m.	Closed for maintenance
5:30 to 6 p.m.	5:30 to 6 p.m.
7:30 to 8 p.m.	7:30 to 8 p.m.
10:30 to 11 p.m.	10:30 to 11 p.m.





- c. Current piloted release times for eastbound travel starting at US 50 & CR 26 are:

Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays & Tuesdays	Wednesdays only
6:30 to 7 a.m.	6:30 to 7 a.m.
8:30 to 9 a.m.	8:30 to 9 a.m.
11:30 to noon	Closed for maintenance
1:30 to 2 p.m.	Closed for maintenance
4:30 to 5 p.m.	4:30 to 5 p.m.
6:30 to 7 p.m.	6:30 to 7 p.m.
9:30 to 10 p.m.	9:30 to 10 p.m.

- d. Currently, all drivers in the queue at these designated times are being let through.

5. What is considered critical local traffic?

Critical local traffic refers to people living and/or doing business or recreating in the area. This includes local residents needing to run errands and get to work or doctors' appointments, people who are delivering goods and materials to local communities, recreationalists visiting the various hiking trails, campsites and marinas near US 50, and those looking to just get away and stay in hotels or rentals in the area.

6. How long does the County Road 26 piloted detour take?





The one-way trip across County Road 26 is about 15 ½ miles long and it takes approximately 45 minutes to travel, but total travel time from Gunnison to Montrose (or vice versa) can take 2-3 hours.

7. What type of vehicles are allowed to use the CR 26 piloted detour?

The detour is open to any vehicle up to 85,000 pounds.

- i. Oversized loads and hazardous material loads are still prohibited and will need to use detours on I-70 or US Highway 160 to travel between Gunnison and Montrose.

8. Will County Road 26 piloted times remain open during the weekend and/or for weather impacts?

The County Road 26 piloted times are in effect 7 days a week (including holidays). The detour will operate as is during weather impacts unless the project team deems it unsafe for travel.

9. How should folks access their residences/work within the closure limits?

- a. Residents living in Sapinero will be allowed to reach their residences through the western closure point.
- b. Residents living on CR 25 and 26 can access their property through the eastern closure point.

10. How do I get my (mail, propane, package, etc.) deliveries or trash picked up?

Gunnison County continues to work through these various community needs.

- i. People with post office boxes can travel to the post office during the regular open hours for County Road 26. The Postmasters have been notified and they don't anticipate any disruptions to mail delivery. If anyone does experience a problem with mail service, Senator Hickenlooper's office is helping and people can visit <https://www.hickenlooper.senate.gov/help-with-federal-agencies-form/>
- ii. With heavier trucks, vehicles and trailers now allowed to use County Road 26, delivery services should be able to continue.

11. Is Kebler Pass open?

Kebler Pass, also known as Gunnison County Road 12, will open for the season at 4 p.m. Friday, May 31. Standard vehicle restrictions apply which include no vehicles over 30,000 pounds and no vehicles longer than 50 feet.





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12. Is HazMat allowed on the alternate routes provided?

- a. HazMat drivers should check with CDOT's freight office when choosing between the recommended alternate routes (I-70 and US 160). The freight office can be reached at 303-757-9539 or dot_cdot_permits@state.co.us. More information is posted to <https://freight.colorado.gov/>
- b. HazMat vehicles will not be allowed on any local alternate routes available now or in the coming weeks.

13. Can we drive boats under the bridge?

Currently, there are no restrictions against boaters driving under the bridge, but please refrain from stopping right under the bridge where inspectors are working above. This could pose a safety risk should a piece of equipment fall from the bridge. CDOT's concern is vehicles driving on the bridge. The bridge is structurally sound as it stands and does not impact boaters.

14. When was the bridge built, and when was it inspected?

This bridge was built in 1963 and was last inspected 22 months ago as part of the standard federal rules for all bridges. It was in the early stages of a special inspection for bridges with a specific type of steel and construction that a safety issue was discovered.

15. Is there access to marinas and recreation areas?

- a. The closure point on the Gunnison side has been moved further west to provide access to places like the Bay of Chickens and Elk Creek Marina. Likewise for people on the Montrose side of the reservoir, they will be able to access the Lake Fork Marina and recreation areas on that end. When you approach flaggers at the closure point, just let them know that is where you are going, and they will let you through.
- b. To get to the east side of recreation areas from Montrose and west side recreation areas from Gunnison, people will need to take the County Road 26 cut-through during the set hours of pilot car operations.

16. Will CR 25 be open to local traffic like CR 26?

Gunnison County is working with Kiewit Construction to determine what type of repairs would be needed to County Road 25 and what type of travel might be possible on this road given its steep grades and switchbacks.

17. What is being done to accommodate emergency services?

- a. If you have a question regarding any type of emergency services, please reach out to the project email at US50bridge@gmail.com, and we will direct you to the correct person.
- b. If you have an emergency, dial 911.





18. What is being done to support the small businesses affected by this? Are there grants or similar financial assistance they can access?

Given the declaration of a state emergency, we have activated the state's recovery task force to coordinate the capacity of various state agencies to address the economic impacts for agriculture, tourism and other impacted economies in the county. The effort will begin with an assessment of the economy by working in collaboration with the impacted jurisdictions and then work with state agencies to find opportunities. Legislation that may be applicable and appropriate to these circumstances was passed two years ago. We will work with the appropriate parties for solutions.

19. Would you be able to build a temporary pontoon style bridge similar to what the military uses?

There is not a great departure point in and out of the water. CDOT has been in coordination with other agencies to see if this is a possibility or alternative. At this time, it does not look like a viable solution.

20. Can a ferry accommodate folks trying to detour this closure?

Similar to the pontoon-style bridge, this option doesn't have any good departure points. We are still investigating this, but we have no update at this time.

21. Has Colorado Parks and Wildlife weighed in that County Road 26 is a major travel route for deer in the spring and fall? How will this be addressed to mitigate car and deer encounters?

Residents of Lake City use this road regularly. The danger from hitting deer or elk is much higher on Highway 149 and US 50 because motorists travel at a higher speed. CDOT will continue to work with partner agencies regarding impacts to wildlife along County Road 26 during the US 50 bridge closure.

22. What kind of supply chain issues can we expect?

It is still too early to say what supply chain issues there might be and the specifics of these. Local emergency managers are working with distributors to identify potential issues to the supply chain and implement measures to address those.

23. Has there been any discussion about scheduling additional air flights between Gunnison and Montrose?





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We have only been looking into additional air flights for medical emergencies. We have not looked into additional flights for anything else at this time. For more information regarding air flights, please reach out to the appropriate regional airport:

- i. Gunnison-Crested Butte Regional Airport: 970-641-2304
- ii. Montrose Regional Airport: 970-249-3203

24. What is CDOT doing during the bridge closure?

CDOT is working with a team of engineers and contractor Kiewit Infrastructure Co., on a two-phase repair process to reinstate travel across the bridge as quickly and safely as possible. Now that improvements have been made to County Road 26 (Lake City Cutoff) and the roadway is open to heavier vehicles, CDOT, Gunnison County and Kiewit are monitoring the conditions so spot repairs can be made when needed. The team is also evaluating the potential of using County Road 25 as a detour route.

25. What about the other bridges in the area?

There is one other bridge in the state that uses the same steel and construction, just a few miles west on US 50. CDOT is continuing to inspect both bridges, and the results of those inspections will determine the next steps.

26. How can I get added to the project update email list?

- a. Once you're on our website, click on the "Stay Informed" box in the lower right-hand corner.
- b. On the next page, make these selections:
 - i. Scroll down to "construction updates."
 - ii. Select northwest Colorado.
 - iii. Look at "southern."
 - iv. Click on "US 50 Blue Mesa Bridge" (although it may already be auto-selected for you).
 - v. Click save!
- c. If you run into issues, please contact the project email and request to be signed up.

27. How can I contact the project?

- a. Call the hotline - (970) 648-4423
- b. Email the project - US50bridge@gmail.com
- c. Project webpage - bit.ly/us50bridge
- d. Real-time traffic information - Visit COtrip.org.





e. Follow CDOT on Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter).

28. Could the construction in Little Blue Canyon either be accelerated to be completed sooner or postponed until after the bridge repairs are completed?

Work on this project started back up on Monday, May 13. CDOT is coordinating with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to complete this project sooner by getting as much work done as possible while the bridge is closed. The traffic control subcontractor is the same for both projects, so flaggers are coordinating with each other to ensure drivers only need to stop once to get through both work zones.

29. If a one lane option becomes available across the bridge, will CR 26 still be piloted and restricted?

CDOT hasn't determined if it will be piloted and restricted. It may be one way on CR 26 and the other way on the highway bridge. There are many variables that CDOT will have to evaluate to determine what a one lane option would be.

30. Is bicycling allowed on County Road 26?

We strongly recommend that cyclists avoid traveling on County Road 26, though it is not prohibited. While the road has been improved to allow for a single lane of timed entry, it is still a compacted dirt surface with the requirement to clear the road before the next timed entry traffic. We cannot guarantee the safety of bicyclists on this route and for that reason it is recommended to use alternate roads for recreational cycling.

We encourage cyclists to explore the numerous local trails available. Not only will this ensure a safer experience, but it will also enhance the enjoyment of your ride.

Check with local bike shops for information about where to ride and upcoming events and races.

