

5TH STREET BRIDGE REPLACEMENT – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DECEMBER 1, 2022

1. Why is VDOT replacing the 5th Street Bridge?

VDOT is replacing the 5th Street Bridge as a portion of the larger I-95 Bridges Bundle Project that involves the rehabilitation of the 1st, 4th, 5th, 7th, and Broad Street Bridges. The project aims to extend the life cycle of the bridges, while increasing each bridge's height. This will reduce the likelihood of future bridge strikes from oversized vehicles traveling through the I-95 corridor.

2. Why replace the bridge instead of just performing maintenance?

The condition of the 5th Street Bridge necessitates repairs beyond simple maintenance, causing replacement to be the more fiscally responsible approach. Furthermore, with the increased height of tractor-trailers over time, the bridge height is now considered sub-standard. Raising the bridge will help prevent future bridge strikes. The implications of a bridge strike that damages the structure could potentially leave the 5th Street Bridge fully closed for extensive periods of time, creating a larger regional traffic impact.

3. Why is the bridge replacement planning to take so long?

The bridge replacement is planned in two phases, which maintains one lane of open traffic across the bridge during the entirety of the 5th Street project. The demolition and rebuild of one phase will allow traffic to then travel on that portion of the bridge as the other phase begins. The phased approach allows continuous traffic access from I-64 westbound to I-95 southbound and downtown Richmond, as opposed to an alternate approach that would potentially leave the bridge fully closed for several months.

4. Can the work take place during the day?

As the bridge spans over I-95 and demolition operations cannot occur over live traffic, demolishing the bridge involves lane closures on I-95. To perform demolition operations during the day, there would have to be daytime lane closures on I-95. The implications of having daytime lane closures on I-95 are far greater than the current traffic backup seen on I-64 westbound. Moreover, since I-64 westbound is connected to I-95, any delay felt on I-95 would likely result in more extensive backups on I-64 westbound.

5. When I drive by during the day, it appears that work is not taking place. Why?

The early stage of the replacement process involves deck demolition and beam removal. This procedure requires nighttime operations. As the deck demolition progresses, work not requiring lane closures will begin during the day.

6. What are the current backup lengths and cycle times to get through the work area?

Traffic is heaviest in this area during weekday rush hour times (7-9 a.m., 4-6 p.m.). Backup lengths regularly span 0.5-1 mile; stretching east beyond the Shockoe Valley Bridge towards Mechanicsville Turnpike (Route 360).

Moving through the backup at the heaviest times usually takes 10-15 minutes. At non-peak hours throughout the day, traffic extends to the eastern end of the Shockoe Valley Bridge and may take 5-10 minutes to get through. This time is subject to fluctuate with travel volume and any crashes that may occur along I-64/95 in the vicinity of this closure.

7. Is there anything that can help reduce the backup length and time?

Motorists are encouraged to use both the left lane and center lane of I-64 westbound across the Shockoe Valley Bridge until the point where the center lane continuing to Exit 190 ends and then take turns merging into the single lane crossing the 5th Street Bridge to perform a [“zipper merge.”](#) This strategy has shown to help reduce wait times, as there is less queueing of traffic in one lane prior to the closure.

8. Are there alternate routes that I could take?

There are numerous routes motorists can take to avoid the area. Drivers can use I-295 as an alternate route to destinations north and south of the City of Richmond. To enter into the city, drivers can use one of the many local connector routes. A couple of example alternate routes are as follows:

- Mechanicsville Turnpike → Fairfield Way → Oliver Hill Way → Broad Street*
- Laburnum Avenue → Route 60*
- Nine Mile Road → Fairmount Avenue → Mosby Street → Leigh Street*