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## Valley bridge restrictions hurt haulers

As aging structure awaits replacement, some heavy loads are forced to reroute

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**Central Pre-Mix Co.'s trucks that travel southbound across the Sullivan Road bridge must reduce their loads by 25 percent to 30 percent, President Mark Murphy says.**

—Staff photo by Linn Parish

Weight restrictions recently put in place by the city of Spokane Valley on the southbound Sullivan Road bridge that crosses the Spokane River are creating setbacks for a number of nearby companies that rely on the bridge as a main trucking route.

The Spokane Business & Industrial Park and several industrial and manufacturing facilities, including Kaiser Aluminum Corp.'s Trentwood plant and Central Pre-Mix Concrete Co.'s main gravel pit, are located either along or near Sullivan Road,

and trucks from those facilities regularly cross the bridge en route to Interstate 90.

In early July, the city's public works department put the weight restrictions in place in an effort to preserve the aging two-lane, 34-foot-wide bridge until it can be replaced, says Steve Worley, a senior engineer with the city.

The city says that while the 60-year-old bridge is not in immediate risk of a structural failure, it has experienced deterioration typical of a bridge that age, including some cracking in the girders and wear and tear on its driving surface. It was determined to be structurally deficient during an inspection last year and needs to be replaced to accommodate both current and projected future traffic flows and loads.

The Sullivan Road southbound bridge currently serves about 20,800 vehicles each day, with up to about one-quarter of those vehicles being trucks, the city says. The recently enacted weight restrictions vary depending on a truck's maximum load capacity, Worley says. A diagram of those restrictions for various types of trucks is available on the city's website.

The city hasn't enacted any weight restrictions for traffic traveling on the Sullivan Road northbound bridge. Worley says that bridge is in good condition since it was built sometime during the mid-1970s, about 20 years after the southbound bridge.

Most of the tonnage limits that have been put in place on the southbound bridge still allow trucks to cross the bridge, but not with a full load for many. Some smaller trucks only are required to reduce their loads by two or three tons, while large trucks' weight reductions range between about eight and 11 tons below their legal load limit.

Mark Murphy, president of Central Pre-Mix's Spokane operations, says those load limits are greatly affecting the company's trucks leaving its gravel pit—located just northeast of the bridge—and traveling south to I-90 to get to projects its serving across the Inland Northwest.

"Primarily we are routing around so we can have a full load," Murphy says. "It's affecting our business, and I've talked with others in the industrial park that it's greatly affecting." Different associations are working to meet with the Valley to discuss the issue, he adds.

Overall, Murphy says, the company's trucks that still use the southbound bridge have to reduce their loads between 25 percent and 30 percent. Because Central Pre-Mix sells its products by weight, all loaded trucks that leave its facility are weighed, he says, so truck drivers know whether they are under the bridge's limits.

Murphy says that while the routes that Central Pre-Mix's drivers now are taking depends on the size of their load and where they are going, its trucks heading westbound mostly are going north to Trent Avenue and then east to Pines Road to get to I-90. If traffic is stopped at the train tracks that cross Pines just south of its intersection with Trent, he says, drivers will continue east to Argonne Road to reach the freeway.

Central Pre-Mix's trucks traveling eastbound are taking Trent to Barker Road to get onto I-90, Murphy says. He says that the detours are adding a significant amount of additional time to the company's trucking routes.

Central Pre-Mix is providing materials for a number of large transportation-related projects under way in the Spokane area, Murphy says. Those projects include the Washington state Department of Transportation's I-90 lane expansion project between Sullivan and Barker and the Runway 21 partial reconstruction project at Spokane International Airport.

Various smaller street projects that the company's asphalt-paving affiliate— Inland Asphalt Co.— is working on also require materials to be trucked from its North Sullivan site, Murphy says.

Another Spokane Valley-based company that's encountered similar issues as a result of the weight restrictions is Inland Empire Distribution Systems Inc., located in the Spokane Business and Industrial Park.

Matt Ewers, the company's vice president of business development, says Inland Empire Distribution has had to reduce its cargo loads by up to 25 percent in some cases in order to meet the bridge's weight restrictions. He says, however, the majority of its trucks also are rerouting to Pines or Barker to access the interstate so they can carry full loads.

"That does two things," he says of the detours. "It uses more fuel, but it also affects the amount of time the driver has to be rerouted. We're having to absorb the cost from that."

Estimates from the city of Spokane Valley show that some of the alternate routes truckers are using to bypass the bridge could add six miles or more to a one-way trip.

Worley says it's been difficult to enforce the weight restrictions because the numerous types of trucks still using the bridge have different restrictions, and because regular monitoring of the trucks crossing

the bridge would interrupt traffic flow more so than it already is interrupted by road construction projects.

"What we tried to do was give as much flexibility to as many different types of trucks that we could," he says. "In other words, we wanted them to go over it with as much load as they could without damaging the bridge."

He says the city is relying on companies with trucks that still are using the bridge to follow the weight restrictions so the bridge structure is not further compromised. If it did suffer additional deterioration due to heavy loads, the city would need to reduce the maximum load weight even more, he says.

"That will impact everyone because we'll have to put more restrictive weight limits on it and that's what we're trying to prevent," he says.

Not all companies that truck goods south from facilities on North Sullivan, however, are being affected by the weight restrictions. Companies that transport less weighty materials and use smaller trucks haven't had to reduce their load capacities, and one such example is DeVries Moving, Packing & Storage.

"We aren't in that heavy truck weight, so it won't affect us too much," says Dave Jelinek, DeVries' vice president of operations. "As a household goods carrier, our commodities are fairly lightweight."

The city currently is working on financing to replace the southbound bridge, referred to as the west bridge, but it doesn't have a firm timetable for doing so.

The estimated cost to replace the bridge is just under \$20 million, and the city so far has secured about \$10 million in federal funding, which is enough to begin the engineering phase of the project, Worley says.

Early this month, the city issued a request for qualified engineering firms to apply to design the new structure, and Worley says the city's goal is to have a firm selected for that work before the end of summer.

The remaining portion of funding needed to construct the structure has yet to be secured, Worley says, and he adds that a construction timeline is dependent on that factor.

The city hopes to replace the bridge with a new structure that would be nearly twice as wide and would have two through lanes of travel, as well as designated left and right turn lanes to accommodate traffic turning off of Sullivan onto Indiana directly south of the bridge. Plans also include a sidewalk and designated bike lane.

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