



Kentucky Transportation Cabinet • District 1

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U.S. 51 Ohio River ‘Cairo’ Bridge Replacement Project Moves to Mussels Survey Process

*The reinvigorated project will improve cross-river mobility
between Wickliffe, Kentucky and Cairo, Illinois*

PADUCAH, Ky. (Aug. 30, 2023) — The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) announced the U.S. 51 Ohio River ‘Cairo’ Bridge Replacement Project started a mussel survey on August 28, 2023. The survey will not disrupt current traffic patterns or cause delays for motorists.

The objective of the mussel survey is to discover if any federally listed threatened or endangered species exist in the waterway where construction is expected to occur. Members of the fieldwork team will be working in and around the river to make their observations over the coming weeks and months.

“We’re excited to continue progress on the U.S. 51 Bridge Replacement Project,” said Kyle Poat, KYTC District 1 Chief Engineer. “We’ve had setbacks along the way, including those connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the team is working full steam ahead to move to the next phase of the project.”

Later this fall, the project team plans to continue work on the geotechnical fieldwork study. The team will be collecting data in the river itself from barges. The study is to assess existing conditions and the potential impacts within the corridor for the design of the bridge. This information will be used to advance the bridge into the final design.

The next step of the project is a preliminary design of the structure.

While engineering work continues for construction of a new bridge near the existing crossing, KYTC engineers and consultants are conducting a study of an alternate route that would run from U.S. 60 in Barlow westward to connect with the Interstate 57 interchange north of Cairo. The study, requested by the state legislature, is to be completed early next year. At that time, transportation officials will compare the connectivity and cost of each route and determine which site would continue to construction.

The U.S. 51 Ohio River ‘Cairo’ Bridge serves as a north-south connector for U.S. 51 and an east-west transportation corridor for U.S. 60 and U.S. 62. The bridge carries about 5,500 vehicles per day between Kentucky and Illinois. About 35 percent of the traffic is commercial trucks.

Construction on a new bridge to carry U.S. 51, U.S. 60, and U.S. 62 across the Ohio River is expected to start in the next five to 10 years.

The existing Wickliffe-Cairo Bridge carries U.S. 51, U.S. 60, and U.S. 62 traffic across the Ohio River at U.S. 51 Kentucky mile point 7.372. Also known as The Cairo Bridge, the structure is the longest bridge in Kentucky and the westernmost bridge over the Ohio River.

The U.S. 51 Ohio River Bridge was constructed by the Cairo Bridge Commission as a toll facility and opened to traffic on November 11, 1936. Tolls were removed from the crossing on November 11, 1948, when the highway departments of Kentucky and Illinois took over maintenance of the structure.

The Cairo-Wickliffe Bridge is at Ohio River navigation mile point 980.4.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) and Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) are planning the construction of a new bridge at this site. For more info on the new bridge planning process go to <https://us51bridge.com/>.

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