

Frequently Asked Questions: Brigsteer and Underbarrow bridge closures

What is a half joint bridge?

Half-joints are used on multi-span bridges where the ends of the adjacent spans do not align with the supports. Typically, a cantilever extension of the side span (or pier crosshead) terminates in a half-joint, providing support to the central “drop-in” span.

When were we first aware of this risk?

We received the report at the beginning of week commencing 3 June which advised the need to close the bridges in a planned and managed way for precautionary safety assessments.

What have we been doing to maintain the bridges?

The Council’s reinforced concrete half joint bridges require and receive bespoke and detailed assessments that are carried out during an extended period of time to ensure that they benefit from ongoing continuous review in line with national guidance.

Bridgsteer and Underbarrow have been subject to an annual visual monitoring regime since 2014. In 2022, we commenced the processes set out by National Standards to risk manage and assess the half-joint and post-tensioned aspects of these structures as a result of potential risks highlighted to Highway Authorities. This is a staged process, which has led to our current position.

Why now for the closure, especially given we are at the start of summer and tourist season?

Having received this recommendation, we are duty bound to act as soon as practicable.

Why can’t we use weight limits or single file traffic management?

In order to carry out detailed precautionary safety assessment, we must remove any access to vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.

Why are other authorities like National Highways taking a planned approach to their renovation whereas we appear to have been caught out?

We have not been “caught out”. Our decision to close both bridges is a culmination of a thorough established assessment process. Other organisations have followed the same national standards as we have. The outcomes for different bridges will obviously vary.

How long will the bridges be closed?

At this stage it is not possible to ascertain the duration of closure. However, the nature of the problems with the bridges would indicate that the bridges will remain closed for a significant period of time.

How long with the precautionary safety assessment take?

We are currently focussing our efforts on making the situation safe. At this stage it is not possible to set out the next steps following closure. However, over the coming months we will be considering the following actions:

- Implementation of a further comprehensive monitoring regime, including specialist non-destructive testing.
- Commissioning further analysis of the bridges to seek any possible improvement on the assessed value.
- Commissioning an options appraisal for the long-term solutions for the bridges.

The above won't be a quick process, and there is therefore the requirement to ensure the closure is in place as an interim safety measure.

What is the anticipated cost of repair(s)?

At this early stage the possible options for remedial works have not yet been established.

Can you promise that our bridges will be restored?

The Council recognise the importance of the highways to the local community. We are committed to reopening these roads through the most appropriate solution.

Are temporary metal bridges like Pooley and Langwathby not an option?

All feasible solutions, both temporary and permanent, will be considered during our options appraisal.

Will there be any compensation for our extra travelling and/or for local businesses?

The general rule is that there is no compensation if a business is affected by road works. Successive governments have taken the view that businesses should not have the right in law to any particular given level of passing trade, and that traders must take the risk of loss due to temporary disruption of traffic flows along with all the other various risks of running a business. There is no statutory provision for compensation by the highway authority (as opposed to a utility) if a business is affected by road works. Where land is not being acquired, compensation for loss of business attributable to road works carried out by a utility is payable only where the relevant statute authorises it.

Owners of businesses have no right in law to a maintained level of passing trade. Temporary or permanent reductions in traffic flow are considered to be part of the risks of running a business. The owner of a business would only have a claim against the highway authority for road works (the Secretary of State in the case of trunk roads and the county council or unitary authority in the case of local roads) if the loss of business was a result of negligent action by the highway authority or contractor.

Is it still safe to travel on the A591 as the route passes under both bridges?

The A591 will remain open and is safe for road users to continue travelling on the route. By acting on the findings of the specialist report and closing off access to both Brigsteer and Underbarrow bridges, the safety of the A591 will not be compromised.

What signed diversion route will be put in place for the closure?

The Underbarrow Bridge diversion is via the C5048, U853 Queens Road (Kendal), A5284 Windermere Road (Kendal) , B5284, C5059 and C5048.

The Brigsteer Road Bridge diversion is via C5062, U782, U583 Queens Road (Kendal), A5284 Windermere Road (Kendal) , B5284, C5059 and C5062.

What's the length of each diversion?

The length of the Underbarrow diversion is 9.5 miles and the Brigsteer diversion is 12.7 miles.