

# Cracks force closing of part of Pajaro Bridge

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Newly discovered cracks in the Pajaro River Bridge have meant the closing of one lane while officials consider whether to repair or replace the bridge.

Since Monday, southbound motorists have found the left-turn lane of the 350-foot span over the Pajaro River at the south end of Main Street in Watsonville barricaded and have used the middle lane to head east. That might be a situation the 34,000 vehicles that cross the bridge connecting Monterey and Santa Cruz counties will have to contend with for a while, officials predict.

"There definitely are problems," said Hank Hein, design and traffic engineer for Monterey County. "What ultimately is going to be done is up in the air."

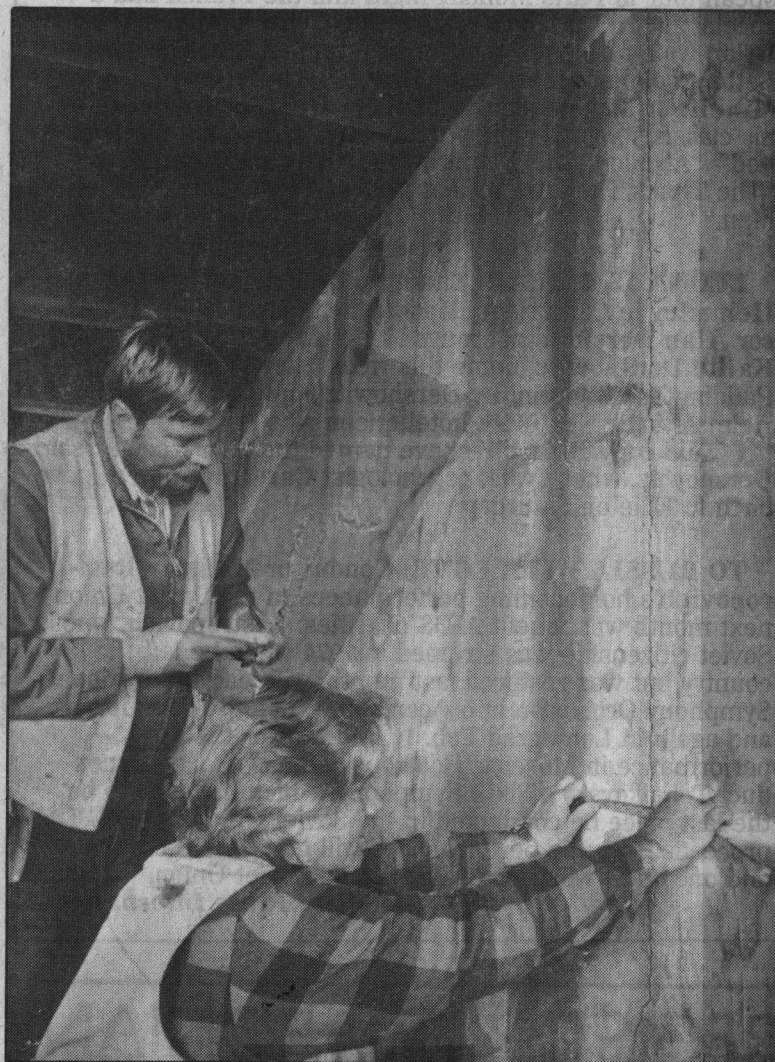
Soon after crews completed minor repairs from damage sustained by the bridge during the Oct. 17 earthquake, a crack was discovered in one of the supports beneath the turn lane.

Since consultants hired to study the problem determined no vehicles weighing more than five tons could safely use the turn lane, Monterey County and Watsonville city officials decided to close it off.

A copy of the consultant's report has been forwarded to the California Department of Transportation, the agency with jurisdiction over improvements to the structure.

"Caltrans holds the purse strings on bridges," Hein said.

Hein said it would cost about \$1.5 million to repair the 40-year-old bridge and about \$3 million to build a new one.



Kurt Ellison

**Monterey County surveyors Rick Meyer, left, and Jerry Combs measure a crack this morning in the Pajaro Bridge.**

"I can't make a commitment one way or another what we're going to do with it," he said.

Nevertheless, Aromas officials figure the Pajaro River Bridge is a high priority item that could affect their proposal to replace the damaged Rogge Lane Bridge and are now ask-

ing that their structure be given repair consideration instead.

Last night the Aromas Tri-County Fire District Board of Directors voted unanimously to amend a previous proposal to replace the bridge connecting

Aromas with Highway 129. Officials estimate it would cost \$2 million to replace the bridge, which since last summer has enforced a weight restriction of eight tons, and only about \$200,000 to replace its most severely damaged pier.

French, who is anxious for a resolution because his large fire engines are too heavy for the bridge restriction, has forwarded the request to Caltrans. He said he has considered purchasing a surplus engine and portable garage to keep on the highway side of the bridge so that when a major fire is reported, his trucks won't have to lose response time by taking a circuitous route.

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
January 31, 1990