

Changes to dates for Kingsferry Bridge summer closures

April 23, 2024



Network Rail's planned repairs to Kingsferry Bridge this summer have been rescheduled to avoid a clash with school exams taking place in mid-June and a bike ride involving thousands of cyclists that is set to cross the bridge on Saturday 22 June.

The 1950s structure will close to motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and maritime traffic from 2200 Friday 7 to 0500 Monday 10 June, 2200 Friday 28 June to 0500 Sunday 7 July, 2200 Friday 12 to 0500 Monday 15 July and 2200 Friday 19 to 0500 Sunday 28 July – the replanned week.

Last trains will depart the island around midnight on Fridays when the bridge closes. First trains will run from approximately 0543 on the days when the bridge reopens.

The repairs are needed after routine inspections revealed that the condition of some of the 40 steel ropes, which support the bridge when it lifts for maritime traffic, has deteriorated.

The ropes were last replaced in 1995 and are reaching the end of their life. While regular testing ensures bridge users are kept safe, if the rope condition worsens it could result in an unplanned closure which would cause significant disruption to bridge users until repairs can be made.

David Davidson, Network Rail's Kent route director, said: "We've taken the difficult decision to reschedule

the work that was due to take place from 16 to 22 June to late July.

“Rescheduling the work means that students can get to their exams without being disrupted by the Kingsferry Bridge closure. It also means the Chase the Sun bike ride, involving thousands of people, can go ahead and participants and support staff can get to and from the island safely via rail.

“While changing the dates of one of the closure weeks removes some challenges, we know that the other planned closures of Kingsferry Bridge, combined with the impact of existing roadworks in the area, still mean longer journeys for people coming to and from Sheppey. We’re working closely with Southeastern, National Highways, Kent County Council, Swale Borough Council and emergency services to manage the impact on local people and services.”

Scott Brightwell, Southeastern’s operations and safety director, said: “We want to get our customers where they need to be during the bridge closures, and a regular bus service will be running between Sheerness, Queenborough and Kemsley stations.

“It will take a bit longer by road and our advice is to check before you travel and leave more time for your journey. I’d also like to thank our customers in advance for bearing with us while this essential safety work is carried out.”

Why have the dates changed?

The work that was due to take place from 16 to 22 June has been rescheduled to late July. After discussion with schools in the area there was concern that the increased congestion on the alternative Sheppey Crossing and surrounding road network, when Kingsferry Bridge is closed, could result in significantly longer journeys for secondary school students making their way to exams.

Thousands of cyclists and support staff are also due to come onto the island on Friday 21 June and cross Kingsferry Bridge on the morning of Saturday 22 June. While Network Rail could have found an alternative way to get cyclists and support staff across the bridge, thousands of people and cyclists with their bikes trying to use replacement buses to get to the island on Friday 21 June could lead to serious capacity and safety challenges on buses.

Why can’t you replace the ropes at another time?

While Network Rail’s regular testing of the ropes ensures bridge users are kept safe, if their condition worsens it could result in an unplanned closure and cause significant disruption to bridge users. The work cannot be pushed back any longer.

To reduce the risk of a sudden closure and take advantage of favourable summer weather and tides, all 40 ropes will be replaced between June and July this year. By doing the work in summer the risk of Sheppey Crossing, the alternative route to the island, closing due to high winds is also significantly reduced.

Staggering the repairs not only reduces the impact on local communities, allowing them to plan around the closures, but also on vital maritime traffic which contributes billions of pounds to the national economy.

What are the alternatives when Kingsferry Bridge is closed?

When Kingsferry Bridge is closed, motorists are advised to use Sheppey Crossing but to leave more time to travel as congestion due to existing roadworks means journeys may take longer.

People are reminded that pedestrians, cyclists, motorcycles/mopeds under 50cc, and horses/animals are not allowed to use Sheppey Crossing.

Network Rail will publish details of alternative arrangements for transporting pedestrians, cyclists and motorcycles/mopeds under 50cc in the coming weeks.

Trains will not run between Sittingbourne and Sheerness when work is being carried out. During the closures, a regular rail replacement bus service will be running between Sheerness, Queenborough and Kemsley stations.

People using replacement buses and local buses are also being advised to leave more time to travel as journeys will take longer.

More information about the closure is available www.networkrail.co.uk/KingsferryBridge