

Merrill Bridge Temporary Closure Starting June 14

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The Merrill Bridge is being temporarily closed again by the Mississippi Office of State Aid while awaiting a new federal/state bridge inspection of recent repairs, according to County Community Development Director Ken Flanagan.

A year ago, the County finalized substantial repair and rehabilitation work to the bridge's foundation and support system. Since completion, these repairs have already passed two independent inspections, Flanagan said.

As part of a years, long effort to reopen the through-truss bridge spanning the Pascagoula River at Merrill, Thomson Engineering was paid \$60,000 to establish a load rating. Thompson Engineering, according to Havard, gave the bridge a rating of 16,000 pounds or eight tons after the county paid Vice Construction nearly \$1.2 million to do rehabilitation work on the bridge.

The work Vice Construction performed included new pilings, trusses and repairs to the superstructure. That work was in accordance to engineering designs by Volkert Engineering.

A third engineering firm, Batson and Brown was paid by the county to oversee the project.

When the design work was finally completed last summer, Havard posted the bridge with a six-ton weight limit, well within the recommendation made by Thompson. It was never officially e-opened pending the federal, and final bridge inspection although some local traffic has been crossing the bridge.

District Four Supervisor Larry Havard received the official state closure notice late Friday afternoon. County road crews placed temporary closure signs on the Merrill Bridge on Monday morning.

"I'm requesting residents and drivers to again be patient on this closure. We will wait the outcome of this third inspection and see what comes from it. I know what an awful inconvenience this detour is for Salem, Merrill, and residents in District 4 and 5. We will resolve this as quickly as possible," said Havard.

The 90-year-old bridge was closed to all traffic in 2012. The county has worked to get the money together for the needed repairs since that time. The bridge is important as it is one of only two bridges in George County spanning the Pascagoula River. The other bridge is on Hwy 26 and requires a substantial detour for some residents on the west side of the river.