

Manchester motorway rises up to revitalise 50-year-old bridge

Highways England is repairing the 200-metre-long bridge which carries the M60 over the River Mersey and Palatine Road near Didsbury, and is lifting the motorway by five millimetres – about the thickness of an iPhone – so the work can take place.

Bridge specialist Mabey Hire has been brought in to create temporary structures to support the motorway while workers carry out repairs to the 15 concrete columns that the M60 bridge currently rests on.

Two of the columns were repaired last year and work has now started on the next phase of the project involving two columns at the east end of the bridge.

Around 800 tonnes of motorway – equivalent to the weight of five blue whales – will be lifted above each column using 44 remotely-operated hydraulic jacks, which can be controlled with a tenth of a millimetre precision.

Around 80,000 drivers will be able to continue to use the stretch of motorway over the River Mersey every day with no visible sign of the major engineering work taking place beneath them.

Mark Mosley, project manager at Highways England, said:

The bridge over the Mersey has been there since the motorway first opened in 1974 as part of what was then the M63, and it's beginning to show its age.

We'll be using teams of specialists to lift up the motorway by a few millimetres and then carry out concrete repairs to the bridge columns, and will be able to keep the road open to drivers throughout the project.

The repairs will help keep the bridge safe for decades to come, so tens of thousands of drivers can continue to use it every day on a key route across the Mersey.

The bridge was originally constructed using reinforced concrete in the early part of the 1970s and some of the steel inside the concrete has now begun to rust. Once the hydraulic jacks are in place, contractors will begin work on repairing the bridge columns.

The motorway was lifted away from a column under the anticlockwise carriageway last week and will be raised above another column overnight on Thursday 12 March.

The anticlockwise carriageway will be closed from 10pm until 6am between junction 5 (Didsbury) and junction 3 (Cheadle) with a diversion taking drivers along the A5103 Princess Parkway, A560 and M56.

Mabey Hire has been awarded a contract to design and install the temporary structure for the bridge repairs. The company's chief executive, Gordon MacDonald, said:

Following the success of our previous involvement on the Palatine Road Viaduct project, we are delighted to have been chosen to supply the temporary propping and monitoring works for the next phase.

It's really great to be working once again on a piece of vital infrastructure in this booming city.

Richard Bailey, director of the scheme's principal contractor, Balvac (Balfour Beatty), added:

We are delighted to be able to provide Highways England with our extensive expertise and specialist team of engineers to carry out this critical project. Our innovative approach to repair works will help deliver this project with minimal delay and disruption to the travelling public.

Work on the Palatine Road bridge will be carried out in phases and all the repairs are due to be completed by 2023.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.