

Rehabilitation of the National Trails Highway(Route 66) in the Mojave Desert By The County of San Bernardino

(Adapted from <https://dpw.sbcounty.gov/operations/nth-route-66/>)

Route 66, also known as “the Mother Road”, “Will Rogers Highway” or “the Main Street of America”, was constructed in 1926 from Chicago, Illinois to Santa Monica, California.

However, the road’s origins travel even further back in time before it was paved as one of the country’s first transcontinental highways “National Old Trails Road”. The road has served this country well as families left the Dust Bowl and headed west to California during the Great Depression; moving troops and supplies during World War II; and becoming a destination in itself to travelers seeking freedom of the open highway.

Today, in excess of 250 miles of National Trails Highway (Route 66) can be found in the County of San Bernardino and the County Department of Public Works maintains nearly 150 miles from Needles to San Bernardino as shown on their interactive maps. And although Route 66 is no longer a main route across the country, it is a national treasure to be preserved and enjoyed for generations to come.

The information on the County website pertains to the reach from the easterly edge of Barstow (Nebo Street) to the Mountain Springs Road/I-40 entrance. This section of the roadway has 128 timber bridges that were built more than eight decades ago, and all are displaying the negative impacts of many years of weather, flash floods, truck traffic, erosion, earthquakes, animal life and other factors. By reconstructing and rehabilitating the aging bridges, the safety, vitality, historical preservation, and accessibility of one of America’s greatest treasures will be reinstated.

Ninety-seven timber bridges are over 20 feet in length and 33 bridges that are 20 feet and less in length that need to be replaced. The 33 bridges that are 20 feet and less in length (see link below) are not eligible for Highway Bridge Program (HBP) funding. Special grant funding such as TIGER and BUILD are being pursued for construction. 35% design is complete and moving through the environmental approval phase. The remaining 97 bridges that are over 20 feet are eligible for HBP funding. More about HBP funding at the following Federal websites:

[DOT Announces Historic Bridge Investment Under Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/dot-announces-historic-bridge-investment-under-bipartisan-infrastructure-law)

<https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/dot-announces-historic-bridge-investment-under-bipartisan-infrastructure-law>

[Bridge Investment Program](https://www.transportation.gov/rural/grant-toolkit/bridge-investment-program)

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In January 2015, the Department of Public Works hired a consulting firm to evaluate all of the bridges and to develop a funding strategy over a multi-year period. The bridges have been grouped and prioritized and the first 3 groups of bridges over 20 feet in length have been submitted for HBP funding. This funding is not guaranteed and the County must compete with other agencies state wide for the federal funds.

It is critical to the entire length of the highway that the remaining 126 timber bridges on the alignment in San Bernardino County are rehabilitated or rebuilt in order to provide safe passage for the many tourists and open-road travelers from around the globe who come to this country to make the drive of a lifetime on such an historic roadway. The two fastest growing markets focused on heritage travel on the highway are China and Brazil. Every day, besides growing numbers of domestic travelers, visitors from throughout Europe, the Pacific Rim and the Americas can be found on Route 66. They contribute to the economic development of the businesses and communities along the way. Much-needed improvements will prevent additional road closures and eliminate recent weight restrictions to accommodate all modes of travel and the movement of goods.

On Thursday February 15, 2024 Caltrans notified San Bernardino County Department of Public Works that during a scheduled routine bridge inspections it was found that Bridge Number 77 on National Trails Highway between Amboy Road and Kelbaker Road was deficient and recommend immediate closure to all vehicle traffic. County Public Works staff immediately followed up on the Caltrans inspection and discovered that the structural pilings which hold up the bridge were degraded by 50%. Due to safety concerns for the traveling public County Public Works agreed with the Caltrans recommendation and immediately closed the bridge to all vehicular traffic.

The bridge is a wooden trestle bridge, built in 1930, making it a 94-year-old bridge. The wooden piles are exhibiting severe decay and deterioration which in turn has impacted its structural integrity. The deterioration has substantially compromised both the load-bearing capacity of the piles as well as the overall strength and serviceability of the bridge.

Construction of alternatives like a by-pass (shoofly) take time due to the requirements in obtaining environmental clearances from regulatory agencies. By the time these clearances would be received, and construction of a by-pass was completed, the ongoing repairs will be completed, and the bridge re-opened. County Public Works has provided alternative routes during the closure. Electronic Messages Boards indicating the alternative routes have been placed in various locations in the area and public notices have been placed on all social media as well as on the County Public Works Website. Public Works – Public Works (sbcounty.gov)

The closure on the National Trails Highway is from Bridge 70, on the Eastern edge of the town of Amboy, to Kelbaker Road.

[Final Environmental Impact Report by Caltrans and the County of San Bernardino](#)