

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



Commander  
United States Coast Guard  
First Coast Guard District

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16600/ 15-039  
October 26, 2015

Mr. Kevin R. Kotelly, P.E.  
Regulatory Division  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
696 Virginia Road  
Concord, MA 01742-2751

Dear Mr. Kotelly:

I write to you regarding the current condition of the Northern Avenue Bridge over Boston's Fort Point Channel. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issued a Letter of Permission (LOP), dated March 13, 1989, to the City of Boston allowing the Bridge to be locked in the open position in perpetuity, thereby removing the structure from the Coast Guard's jurisdiction. This LOP also required the City of Boston to develop a plan for the preservation of the structure.

Although the Northern Avenue Bridge is no longer classified as a bridge for the purpose of Coast Guard permitting, the Fort Point Channel, the waterway over which the former bridge spans, is a navigable waterway serving recreational vessels and commercial passenger vessels.

The Northern Avenue Bridge and its ancillaries have become a hazard to navigation. Originally built in 1908, the bridge is at an advanced age with unabated degradation of all parts of the structure. As such, the bridge is at risk of collapsing into the channel. Based on an engineering analysis provided to the First District Bridge Branch by the City of Boston in December 2014, the structure's load rating is zero tons. In February 2015, the city locked the bridge into the closed position to support the bridge's swing deck due to concern that snow would collapse the structure. Having made no improvement to the condition of the bridge, it appears to be the city's intent to continue to close the bridge during significant snowfalls. This action will block the navigational channel and change the bridge's status from the permanently open position allowed by the USACE. Further, the dilapidated fendering system and the temporary pilings and fenders the city installed have caused navigational difficulties for commercial vessels operating in the area, to include being identified as a causal factor in a July 2015 bridge allision.

In addition to numerous lower-level phone conversations and meetings, the First District Bridge Branch has written the City at least four times since 1997 to request engineering condition reports or action to address the structural condition. The Coast Guard has consistently urged the City to address the hazard to navigation presented by the disrepair of the structure. Though the City has considered options to resolve the matter, they have not yet provided an acceptable plan of action. I request that the USACE direct the City to make immediate repairs to or demolish the hazardous portions of the remaining structure. Most importantly, the center swing span superstructure should be removed promptly.

I look forward to working with the USACE and with the City of Boston to resolve this issue. Mr. Chris Bisignano, First District Bridge Program Manager is my primary point of contact for this matter and can be reached at (212) 514-4331 or [Christopher.J.Bisignano@uscg.mil](mailto:Christopher.J.Bisignano@uscg.mil).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. L. Black".

B. L. Black  
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard  
Chief, Prevention Division

Copy: City of Boston  
CG SECTOR Boston