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WHEN CREDIBILITY MATTERS

EDITORIAL: Solution to trucks striking low bridges proves oddly elusive

There are plenty of ways to reduce this problem

By Gazette Editorial Board | [September 24, 2019](#)



PHOTOGRAPHER: PETER R. BARBER

A tractor-trailer at the Glenridge Road bridge in 2016

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It's only taken 57 trucks smashing into a low railroad bridge in Glenville over the past several years to get the state to admit there might be a problem and to look into possible solutions.

Good thing it wasn't serious until now.



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aren't paying close attention when they approach bridges that are lower than the height of their trucks. They're supposed to know how tall their truck is, and if it's taller than the bridge, not to drive under it.

Yet drivers still hit them, even though most low bridges, including the 10-foot-11-inch railroad bridge on Glenridge Road between Glenville and Clifton Park, are clearly marked as such.

Judging from past experiences in other places, a single change isn't going to stop it from happening.

State officials have had problems with this issue for years, particularly downstate, where trucks regularly crash into low bridges on the Hutchinson River Parkway and other highways not designed to handle today's modern tractor-trailers.

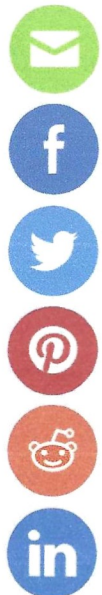


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cases by technology.

For example, some non-commercial GPS systems direct drivers to the shortest and fastest routes without factoring in whether the road can accommodate a truck's height.

Some GPS systems do list bridge heights, but the information can be incomplete or out of date, especially in rural areas.

So drivers who trust and rely on the technology can still find themselves striking bridges.

Some truckers still use old-fashioned map books that list bridge heights along routes. But drivers who don't consult the maps regularly or who don't plan their routes on paper don't benefit from this.

Even if some drivers use technology such as apps on their cell phones, not all drivers do, and not all use the most effective and up-to-date technology.

Any solution, experts say, has to involve a combination of technological tools and physical warning devices installed on or near the approach to the bridge.

Downstate, they've tried devices that shoot an electronic beam across the road at the bridge height well before the bridge. If a truck is too tall, a loud alarm goes off or the driver is alerted on his electronic device. That works to some extent, but not always because truckers ignore them or don't respond quickly.



bridge on the road itself, presuming that drivers might pay more attention to words on the pavement right in front of them than to a sign or even a flashing light by the side of the road or attached to the bridge.

Some communities have installed rumble strips across roadways to slow vehicles down as they're approaching bridges. They've been proven effective in many ways at slowing down motorists, alerting drivers and preventing crashes.

They're best accompanied by signs to let drivers know what the rumble strips are alerting them to.

One simple and inexpensive solution, suggested by some readers in recent letters to the editor, involves hanging a sign or plastic chains across the highway at the bridge height. Trucks too tall for the bridge harmlessly strike these objects before they get to the actual bridge, alerting drivers to stop.

These devices aren't pretty, but they've been effective where used in Boston and other places.

Some state lawmakers, frustrated by struck bridges in their districts, have even proposed legislation to limit access to certain roadways by certain vehicles through signage and physical barriers. That probably won't work on roads with unrestricted access, however.

As one trucker stated in an online forum on TruckersReport website recently, "there's no substitute for using your eyes and your brain."



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appear to use neither, they need tools to help them.

While no solution or combination of solutions will 100% guarantee that trucks won't continue to hit bridges, there are multiple solutions available that are well-known and proven effective that could significantly reduce crashes.

The state has money available for them.

How much more study does this issue need?

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