

Picture: Andrew Ritchie



Just build a better bridge & get over it

Report reveals ignored calls for critical upgrade

EXCLUSIVE CHARLTON HART

Perth's busiest and most important river crossing is at risk of a catastrophic infrastructure failure, which could cause widespread traffic chaos, as warnings about the need for critical repairs were ignored for years.

A secret report prepared by Water Corporation in February 2024, and obtained by The West Australian, detailed the urgent need to replace hundreds of pipe hangers on the Narrows Bridge, which are close to 20 years past their useful life and corroding.

"The 'do nothing' option is not recommended based on the findings that the majority of hangers suffered from known corrosion since they were first identified in 2015 (eight years ago) and a complete failure in 2023," the report states.

"Similar failure to other hangers is catastrophic in

nature given the Narrows Bridge location and will impact the pipeline and traffic services to the public."

The internal report was based on a drone survey taken of the water infrastructure on the bridge in 2023 after a section of pipe gave way and failed, causing significant disruptions.

Before the incident Water Corporation had known about the deteriorating pipe hangers.

"It is evident that there has been a progression of corrosion, with corrosion observed to be worse in 2023 compared to 2015," the agency said.

"Based on the drone inspection findings, it appears that 95 per cent of hangers require repairs within five years and 50 per cent within three years.

"The fact that hangers have passed their estimated 50-year economic service life, it is recommended to further investigate the hangers' condition to

fine-tune the timing of hanger maintenance and replacement."

Almost two years after the report was completed, the Water Corporation has not started any replacement works on the hangers, which were installed in 1958.

It also can't say when any works will start.

"In the course of replacing a damaged hanger, others were physically inspected and deemed to be of a condition requiring replacement within five to seven years," a spokesperson for Water Corporation said.

"A capital project has been established to deliver this work, the value of which is commercial in confidence owing to future tender processes.

"Timeframes are subject to further assessments to be carried out in 2026."

The Narrows Bridge is one of the city's busiest thorough-

fares, carrying almost 200,000 cars every day across the Swan River.

Opposition Leader Basil Zempilas said the lack of progress in replacing the pipe hangers was another sign the Cook Government had the wrong priorities.

"The decision not to invest in repairs to critical infrastructure like the Narrows Bridge, while pouring \$217.5 million into a racetrack at Burswood and \$100m into an NRL team, demonstrates the contempt this government has for West Australians," Mr Zempilas said.

Water Minister Don Punch confirmed the full scope of the replacement works was still unknown and funding would not be secured until after this process was complete.

"Work is not overdue and remains within advised timeframes based on physical inspections," he said.