

# Evening News



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THE NEWS THAT MATTERS

# MILLIONS TO BE SPENT ON FORTH BRIDGE

**R**AILTRACK was today ordered to spend millions to restore the rusting Forth Bridge.

In a snock report, Government experts said they have found serious deterioration of the historic structure.

By **JAMES MCGHEE**  
*Environment Reporter*

The Health and Safety Executive warned Railtrack to repair the damage by the end of next year and improve maintenance - or face court action.

The report represents a stunning rebuke to Railtrack

bosses. For a year they have repeatedly insisted the 106-year-old bridge's shabby appearance was purely superficial.

And it was hailed today as full vindication of the Evening News Paint Our Bridge campaign.

The inspectors say that although the bridge is safe to



REPORT: Government inspectors at the Forth Bridge today

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# 'Railtrack have



## 'We're scared to live under rusty bridge'

PEOPLE living in fear beneath the rusting rail bridge have welcomed the hard-hitting report.

And commuters crossing the bridge today called for urgent work to be carried out immediately.

Homes in North Queensferry have been bombarded by chunks of rusting debris from the crumbling Forth crossing.

Paul Cherry (21), of Helen Place, described how his mother had a narrow escape when a piece of metal from the bridge fell to the ground beside her.

"It's about time Railtrack did something about the bridge," he said.

"It was starting to look as if someone would have to get badly injured before action was taken but maybe that will change."

We launched the successful Paint Our Bridge campaign only weeks after a lump of rusting metal narrowly missed pensioner Mary Guichan (72), of Forthside Terrace, as she stood in her garden.

Her neighbour Nicola Hardie (18) said her family had collected a box full of metal from the bridge.

"It's definitely dangerous at the moment," she said.

"The bridge is falling to pieces and nobody seems to be doing anything about it."

Another neighbour, Kim McMahon (29), added: "I've not been hit but I've found bits of rust, metal and wood in my back garden."

### Pressure

"The bridge needs to be properly maintained and the report will hopefully put more pressure on Railtrack to do something."

Today rail commuter Ewan Woodward (46), a management consultant from North Queensferry, said: "I still feel safe but am concerned about the look of the bridge. It no longer looks safe."

Fellow rail passenger Ena Little (56), hotelier from North Queensferry, said: "It will probably cost a fortune but work needs to be done as it is horrible to see the bridge going to waste."

Crawford Conochie (51), said: "It would make sense to go back to all-year-round maintenance."

Colin McKenzie (46), a Royal Mail worker from Aberdeen, said: "We are very concerned travelling across every day."

Ironically recent repair work on the bridge caused problems when resident Gary Bald just missed being crushed by falling scaffolding early this month.

Steel tubes and wooden



FEARS: Ewan Woodward



CARE: Crawford Conochie

planks crashed 120ft into the yard of a North Queensferry haulage firm, missing Mr Bald (29) by a few feet.

He said: "I welcome anything that could help make the bridge safer."

Kathleen Porter (51), of the Dingle, recalled how the back window of her car was shattered by falling debris just months ago.

### Terrified

She said: "A plank of wood fell from the bridge and crashed through my car window. Luckily it was during the night or I could have been in it."

"What makes me laugh is that there are signs warning workmen to wear hard hats under the bridge."

"I've got grandchildren who come to visit me and I'm terrified something will fall on them."

THE Forth bridge is in a serious rusty state and urgent action is needed to save it for future generations.

With these two key findings, the Health & Safety Executive today confirmed what any day-tripper with an ounce of common sense could see.

It's exactly what the Evening News Paint Our Bridge campaign and a panel of distinguished experts said when we took them out on a boat beneath the bridge a year ago.

And it's exactly what Railtrack would not admit. It has taken this long for the truth to prevail and today leading bridge campaigners applauded the report which should secure the future of Scotland's proudest monument.

"This report confirms everything we have been saying all along," said Tam Dalyell MP. "Day in and day out, I will go on nagging Railtrack and the Government to ask what progress they are making in carrying out these recommendations."

He said: "The Evening News has had a very honourable campaigning role in saving the bridge for the Scottish people."

Brian Donohoe MP said: "There has been a virtual cover up on the state of the bridge."

### Decay

"If one reads between the lines, it is clear the bridge is in a fairly advanced state of decay in sections and Railtrack are now being brought to book."

Douglas Smart, Scottish Railway Development Society honorary secretary, said: "If money has to be spent on saving the bridge then I would accept Railtrack might not be able to find it."

"The money should come from the Scottish Office roads budget".

Colin Aston, captain of the Maid of the Forth ferry, said: "I'm delighted the HSE has established that the bridge has suffered, and is suffering, serious damage."

"Railtrack has had its backside kicked by the HSE. The findings of the report are in line with what we suspected all along."

### Exchanges

The probe leading to today's report was ordered in March last year after rusting metal falling from the bridge's northern end sparked furious Commons exchanges.

Transport Minister Steven Norris told the HSE to report on the structural integrity of the bridge, identify parts of the structure which would have serious consequences if they were to fail or distort and make recommendations on a maintenance regime to ensure its future.

In their detailed report

News Special  
by JAMES McGHEE  
MARK CAMPANILE  
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# Now get on with repair job!

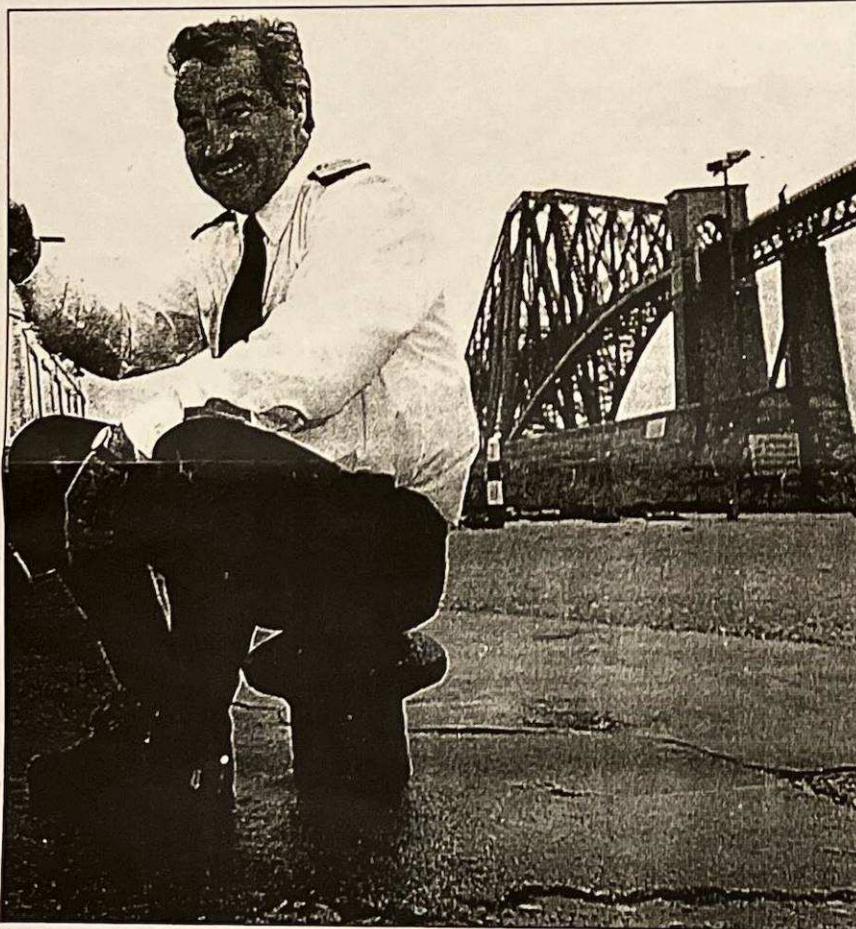
revealed at a South Queensferry Press conference today, the HSE makes a series of key recommendations.

The Executive state Railtrack should:

- Finish a structural assessment and an overall survey of the bridge's condition;
- Get a full understanding of how the worn and corroded flexible joints (bearings) between bridge sections operate;
- Prepare an action plan for necessary restoration and repairs - paying particular attention to corroded and damaged sections and faulty bearings;
- Prepare a maintenance plan to cover its future upkeep and monitoring of its condition;
- Repair and provide suitable access to allow maintenance work;
- Reassess its capacity to carry traffic loads before changing operating conditions.

## 'There has been a virtual cover up on the state of the bridge'

# had their backsides kicked, it's what we suspected all along'



DELIGHTED: Collin Aston Captain of the Maid of the Forth is delighted work will be done on the bridge

## Points on the way to action

TODAY'S revelations come almost one year to the day since the Government was forced to order an independent investigation into the state of the rotting Forth Bridge.

- On February 3 last year, the Scottish Office said: "It's up to Railtrack."
- On February 22 Transport Minister Steven Norris told the Commons an independent inspection had given the bridge the all clear but later made a U-turn saying there had been "some misunderstanding" and ordered an HSE probe.
- On April 12 the Evening News launched our Paint Our Bridge campaign.

- Throughout April, there was widespread support for the News suggestion that an independent trust should take over the bridge.
- On September 6, soon-to-be-privatised Railtrack announced profits of £189 million and the Evening News front page headline told them: "You've no excuse now."
- On October 12, Railtrack announced it was doubling its annual painting budget.
- On February 8, following delay after delay in publishing the crucial HSE report, Brian Donohoe MP demanded more urgency. And on March 12 scaffolding narrowly missed Gary Bald, (29).

# MILLIONS TO BE SPENT ON BRIDGE

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carry its present amount of rail traffic, years of inadequate maintenance has caused "significant deterioration".

Stan Robertson, HSE's chief inspecting officer of railways, said: "We were not alarmed, but we were dissatisfied, disappointed and concerned to find parts of the bridge which had been left to deteriorate."

Maintenance had been poor for many years, since before Railtrack took over in early 1994, and there was a great shortage of maintenance records, he said.

"Railtrack has no choice but to accept responsibility," Mr Robertson said.

"They have responsibility to maintain it in a safe condition."

He added: "I acknowledge that Railtrack already has work in hand to deal with some of our findings and welcome this.

"However, we have already given Railtrack's directors formal notice of our intention to issue Improvement Notices to ensure that they tackle the most important issues by the end of December 1997."

### Rust

Mr Robertson said the bridge was so well built that it was still structurally sound, despite neglect.

But he said the structure would be at risk in future years if nothing was done.

Railtrack director, Paul Prescott, said hours before publication of the

report that it had told the HSE of a significant increase in maintenance spending.

"Our view was that not only would the bridge continue to be perfectly safe, but that over time our plans would permit its appearance to improve too," he said.

Later a Railtrack spokesman said they already planned to spend more than £3 million on the bridge in the next financial year.

"We too have carried out an in-depth analysis and we are preparing a maintenance plan which will preserve the bridge indefinitely," he said.

Civil engineering expert, Professor Roland Paxton, of Heriot-Watt University, said: "I and others said a year ago, when the Evening News launched its campaign, that the rust problem was getting away from Railtrack and this report confirms what we said then."