

Five things you need to know today Edinburgh



Forth Road Bridge reopens to cars today

Public banned from Calton Hill

Flybe looking forward to Christmas

Festival Theatre in 2016

Church provides Christmas hampers



The Forth Road Bridge will be open to vehicles except HGVs from this morning.

Operating company Amey confirmed that temporary repairs had been completed. Transport Minister Derek Mackay praised the team involved in the repair work who have worked around the clock to get the bridge reopened.

The main points from the update on Forth Road Bridge repairs are as follows:

- Bridge to reopen to all vehicles bar HGVs and abnormal loads from 6am tomorrow (Weds)
- Installation of steel splint to repair the cracked member is complete
- Detailed load testing of the bridge is complete
- HGVs account for 32 per cent of the weight the bridge normally carries despite making up approx 9 per cent of overall traffic
- Splints continue to be installed at other seven truss end links as a precautionary measure – this work can be safely completed with the bridge open
- Full inspection of FRB is 90% complete with no material

defects detected – remaining inspection will continue until early January and can be safely completed with the bridge open

Work has been completed to repair the cracked member through the installation of a steel splint, as planned. As previously announced, this splint repair was always intended to be interim in order to allow the bridge to be safely re-open to traffic pending a permanent repair being carried out. Since completion of the interim repair, the member in question has been thoroughly load tested, monitored, and results gathered through the use of strain gauges. These sophisticated devices have been installed for the first time on the bridge and provide live and accurate data on strains, stresses and rotations within this area of the bridge.

The results from this monitoring show the bridge can now be safely reopened to all traffic, except HGVs and abnormal loads. This means that the bridge will be open to over 90 per cent of the traffic that uses it. Independent engineering experts have analysed the findings and agree with Amey's assessment that loading the bridge with HGVs could result in stress to the truss end link. They agree the best way to mitigate against this risk is to exclude HGVs from using the bridge until the permanent repair is in place. This will take around six weeks to complete and, subject to favourable weather conditions and no further defects being identified, the bridge should reopen to HGVs in mid-February. Ministers and officials will now discuss with hauliers the operational support that can be offered to them during the period when they cannot access the bridge.



Transport Minister Derek Mackay said:

“I am pleased that we are now able to reopen the bridge to 90 per cent of traffic, well ahead of schedule. Following rigorous testing and inspection of the temporary repair,

experts have recommended the bridge is now ready to open to all traffic except HGVs. With the temporary solution now in place, the remaining work to install the long term repair can safely proceed without the need for a full closure. The repairs will be carried out with overnight lane restrictions on the bridge.

“For the complex and detailed interim repair to have been completed in this timeframe is a tribute to the highly skilled and dedicated staff who have worked 24/7 since December 3rd. Since the closure was put in place, weather conditions have been mainly favourable and the team have been able to complete the repair work in good time.

“This has been an unprecedented challenge. We can’t lose sight of the fact that many people have been inconvenienced by the closure. While that is deeply regrettable, I would like to thank the transport operators who pulled out all of the stops to put on extra services. In fact, I am pleased to announce that ScotRail have decided to continue the additional 05:52 Fife train given the popularity of the service, for as long as demand is evident.

“We have said all along our focus was on reopening the bridge as soon as possible and so today’s news is very welcome. However we understand that there will be considerable disappointment that the bridge will require to remain closed to HGVs for a few more weeks. While HGVs account for 9 per cent of overall traffic on the bridge, they represent 32 per cent of the weight the bridge carries. We therefore have no choice but to accept the recommendation of the engineers. However, we will now work with hauliers to discuss what operational support will be available to them during the period when they cannot access the bridge. Engineers predict that following the permanent repair at the failed north east tower location, and subject to favourable weather and no further defects being identified, the bridge should reopen to HGVs by mid-February.

“In addition to the interim repair on the cracked member, splints are being installed on the other seven members as a precaution. Of these, work is already complete at four and the remaining three will be completed, subject to weather, by the end of December. There is no reason for the bridge to remain closed while this work is completed. The other seven members have also been inspected and load tested and no issues have been discovered. However strain gauges will also be attached to these members to gather accurate data on their performance.

“Since closure of the bridge was put in place it has also undergone a thorough health check. A painstaking inspection has been carried out involving over 65 rope access inspectors and drone footage to identify any other defects. The inspection is 90 per cent complete and no material defects have been identified. It will be concluded by early January and there is no reason to keep the bridge closed while this is completed.”



There will be no public access to Calton Hill on 31 December as part of arrangements for [Edinburgh's Hogmanay](#) 2015/16.

The decision has been taken by The City of Edinburgh Council with the support of Police Scotland and Unique Events, who produce Edinburgh's world-famous Hogmanay celebrations on behalf of the Council.

In recent years, an increasing number of spectators have chosen to visit Calton Hill throughout the evening of 31 December, and in particular to watch the Midnight Fireworks. However the hill is unlit and uneven under foot and the closure will ensure members of the public are kept safe on the night.

In addition, Calton Hill is used as a firing site for the

secondary midnight fireworks display. Edinburgh's Hogmanay Fireworks are best seen from a distance and event organisers recommend that people select a suitable vantage point.

Councillor Richard Lewis, Festivals and Events Champion for the City of Edinburgh Council, said: "Edinburgh is famed for its midnight-moment fireworks and we are lucky to have so many fantastic vantage points from which to enjoy them.

"The draw of spectators to Calton Hill is understandable and the view undeniable – which is why the Torchlight Procession to herald the start of the three-day Edinburgh's Hogmanay festival entices 10,000 torch bearers and 20,000 visitors on 30 December. Edinburgh's Hogmanay invests in stewarding and additional lighting to help people stay safe during the Torchlight Procession and this year's display will be just as dazzling.

"New Year's Eve is the busiest night of the year in our city centre. The safety of the public is our key priority and as Calton Hill is used as a fireworks zone, it will be closed during the Hogmanay celebrations. The gates will shut at around 7pm on Hogmanay through to 1am on 1 January.

"There are plenty of other vantage points in the city to view the fireworks from Inverleith Park to the Meadows but the best place to soak up the New Year atmosphere and to view the display remains the official Edinburgh's Hogmanay Street Party. Tickets are disappearing quickly so people planning to attend should book fast."

The charitable [Torchlight Procession](#) is led by the Lord Provost and follows torch carriers as they illuminate the city through the city centre to a spectacular fireworks finale on Calton Hill on Wednesday 30 December. Vouchers for Torches are available to purchase in advance priced at £12 including booking fee from [Edinburgh's Hogmanay](#).





Given the extensive and widely publicised planned rail shutdowns that will not only severely impact travel across the UK but also add to the usual chaos on gridlocked roads over the upcoming holiday period, Flybe, Europe's largest regional airline is gearing up for a particularly busy time as people seek alternative ways to quickly and conveniently travel to their destination.

December 25th will also mark another important milestone for the airline when it operates for the first time on Christmas Day, with 12 flights in total from Birmingham and Manchester to Amsterdam and Paris Charles de Gaulle to meet public demand for these two popular European routes.

Regional customers instead are seeking alternative options of travelling via Flybe's London City services from Aberdeen, Belfast City, Edinburgh and Exeter or direct into London Gatwick from Cornwall Airport Newquay to ensure making their longer haul connections.

Book your FlyBe flights [here](#).



At the Festival Theatre in 2016, the season's dance programme starts on 22 January with the welcome return of **balletLORENT** and their dark, seductive take on the story of **Snow White**. **Phoenix Dance Theatre** take to the biggest stage in Scotland on 5 March; **Northern Ballet** are here with their dance adaptation of Orwell's **1984**; the incredible **Netherlands Dans Theater 2** are back in April, the impressive **BalletBoyz** are back in May, and **Scottish Ballet** are set to thrill with David Dawson's production of **Swan Lake**.

More details here on the [website](#).





A local church is preparing Christmas hampers for dozens of people in need.

Members of Central Church in Tollcross, Edinburgh, have been busy assembling food and gifts for the families it helps through the CAP Debt Centre, run in partnership with UK charity Christians Against Poverty.

“It has been a bit of a military operation these the past few days,” said CAP Centre Manager, Mairi Giles.

“We’ve had people shopping, gift wrapping and packing 50 boxes. People of all ages have been involved the production line which has been great fun and we’ll be working on the distribution to make sure everyone on our list gets some treats delivered.

“We know it’s hard on a strict budget especially this time of year but we hope this helps people feel something of the real Christmas – which is a message of love for all of us.”

In the past year, the debt centre has helped 34 new families all of whom were struggling to pay their creditors.

CAP Centre Manager Mairi Giles said: “Unless you’ve been there yourself, or you’ve known someone close in crisis debt, it’s hard to describe just how difficult it can be.


“Debt rarely comes along by itself. It’s often accompanied with a loss of job, health problems, relationship breakdown along with no heating or no food, depression or even suicidal feelings.

“It can be a long road to recovery but our hope is these hampers will help our clients to feel encouraged along their journey to debt freedom.”

To donate to CAP’s hamper appeal see capuk.org/Christmas

To get help with problem debt, contact CAP on 0800 328 006 or via capuk.org



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