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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

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## Bay Area bridge tolls are rising, going up to \$11.50 by 2030. Here's what they'll pay for

At 88, the Bay Bridge's western span is aging gracefully — though parts of it are starting to deteriorate.

The paint on its towers is peeling. Its cables have to be turned inside out for inspections. Its fenders, at the base of the piers, should be replaced. Officials hope to raise \$2.3 billion in the next eight years to address these problems and make similar repairs on the region's six other state-owned bridges.

So they're asking drivers to open their wallets — again. Starting in January 2026, the

Metropolitan Transportation Commission will raise tolls on all state bridges by 50 cents annually for five years. By 2030, motorists with FasTrak accounts will pay \$10.50 to cross, while those who get invoices in the mail will pay \$11.50.

"It's important to recognize where that money goes," said Andrew Fremier, the commission's executive director, sitting on board a San Francisco Bay ferry boat Friday morning. At his side were state Assembly Member Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, and other leaders who gathered to



The Bay Bridge's western span will need several upgrades and repairs, including the fenders at the base of the piers.

Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle



The west span of the Bay Bridge remains in working condition, but parts of it are deteriorating, which is why tolls will be rising — to pay to keep it operable.

Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle



Assembly Member Buffy Wicks, left, listens to Andrew Fremier, center, executive director of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, during a ferry ride with other officials to look at the Bay Bridge.  
Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle

see the span up close — and learn about the efforts underway to maintain it.

As the ferry passed under the deck, Fremier gestured to a fender system designed to protect the structure from crashes, like a wreck in 2007, when a freighter struck one of the towers and spilled oil into the bay.

Immersed in salt water and briny air, the fenders have to periodically be checked and swapped, to ward off corrosion, said Peter Lee, assistant director of capital programs at the commission.

Absent billions of dollars to build new bridges, Bay Area transportation planners work relentlessly to preserve the existing spans, some of which are approaching their centennials. Oldest among them is the western side of the Bay Bridge, a workhorse and a survivor. During the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake a section of roadbed collapsed on the eastern side, prompting the state to build a new one decades later.

Currently, vehicles cross the Bay Bridge 100 million times each year, a throb of traffic that echoed Friday as Lee stood on the upper deck of the ferry boat.

Addressing the crowd of engineers, planners and politicians, Lee drew their attention to makeshift tarps and scaffolding atop the bridge's towers, where crews have launched another intensive project. One by one, they are unwrapping each suspension cable to examine thousands of wires



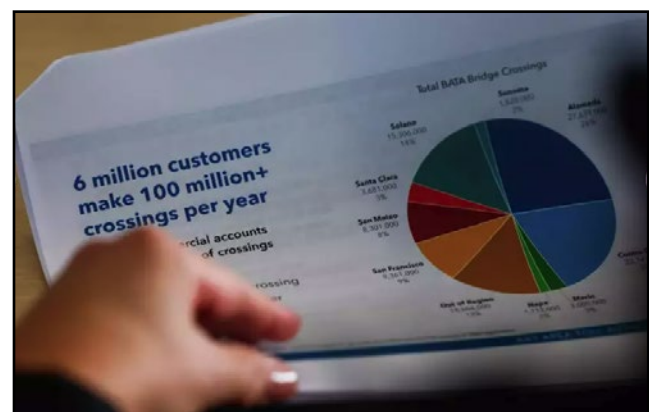
The east span of the Bay Bridge is only 11 years old, but it will need upgrades in the coming years.

Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle

inside it, all as thin as flower stems. They must complete this task every 25 years, Caltrans engineers said, to keep the spine of the structure intact.

Painstaking repair work, largely invisible to motorists who may balk at an \$11.50 toll, is the only way to keep traffic flowing from Oakland to San Francisco on a deck built in the 1930s, Lee and Fremier said. Now they're trying to tell that maintenance story to the general public, and explain why an old bridge can't fulfill its purpose without paint jobs to protect the steel frame, and occasional reconstructive surgery.

And the bills are piling up. Construction costs have risen in recent years, and the decline in traffic during the pandemic meant less toll revenue coming in. With more people crossing



An official looks at informational handouts during a ferry ride to look at the Bay Bridge and the parts of it that need repair.

Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle



The Bay Bridge's western span, seen through the windows of a ferry, is 88 years old.

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the bridge to return to their offices, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and its toll-managing arm — the Bay Area Toll Authority — are leaning on drivers to keep the span in good shape.

“Our plan is to keep this bridge going in perpetuity,” said John Goodwin, a spokesperson for the MTC. “So when this 88-year-old piece of infrastructure needs a hip replacement, it gets one. When it needs a heart replacement, it gets one.” Decades from now, Goodwin and others hope the Bay Bridge will look and function largely as it does today, with sturdy cables and a deck built to withstand an earthquake. It will still be gray, Goodwin said, just with new paint.



The Bay Bridge's western span, seen through the windows of a ferry, is 88 years old.

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