



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: July 25, 2012

In reply refer to: M-12-04 and M-12-05

The Honorable Steve Beshear
Governor of Kentucky
700 Capitol Avenue, Suite 100
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating transportation accidents, determining their probable cause, and making recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. We are providing the following information to urge you to take action on the safety recommendations in this letter. The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

The recommendations address the maintenance of bridge navigation lighting in Kentucky. This safety issue arose during the investigation of the January 26, 2012, allision of the *M/V Delta Mariner* with the Eggner's Ferry Bridge at mile marker 41.7 on the Tennessee River. The accident completely sheared away a 322-foot span of the bridge. Fortunately, no fatalities or injuries resulted. The NTSB is participating in a formal U.S. Coast Guard investigation concerning the accident. While additional factors are being investigated in this accident, the NTSB regards the bridge lighting issue as critical, warranting that we issue a safety recommendation in advance of the final NTSB accident report.

The 287-foot-long *Delta Mariner* had been under way for about a day on its regular route from Decatur, Alabama, to Cape Canaveral, Florida, when the accident occurred. Shortly before 2000¹ central standard time on the evening of January 26, 2012, the *Delta Mariner* was heading downbound on the Tennessee River as it approached the Eggner's Ferry Bridge. The bridge has four navigable spans, one of which is designated as the main navigation span. *Delta Mariner* crewmembers on board said only one span of the bridge was lighted—two red lights marking the concrete bridge piers and a green light marking the center of the span. The Coast Guard-approved lighting plan calls for red and green lights to mark all four navigable spans as well as three white

¹ Time is given using the 24-hour clock; central standard time is UTC (Universal Time Coordinated) – 6.

lights in a vertical line to mark the center of the main navigation span. Crewmembers indicated that they steered towards the sole lighted span and eventually struck it.

Coast Guard regulations at 33 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Part 118 state that the bridge owner—in this case, the Commonwealth of Kentucky—is responsible for maintaining all bridge navigation lights or signals required by those regulations. The Eggner’s Ferry Bridge is located in Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) District 1 under the purview of the Traffic and Permits Division. Investigators interviewed the supervisor and several other personnel from this division following the accident. The interviews raised concerns about the ability of KYTC to effectively monitor and maintain the navigation lighting on state bridges in accordance with regulations.

The Coast Guard wrote a letter to KYTC about the Eggner’s Ferry Bridge on December 15, 2011, reminding the Cabinet of its responsibility for maintaining bridge lighting. In the letter, the Coast Guard stated, “Our office has received multiple reports from commercial mariners that the navigation lights are not operating properly or the lights are extinguished. The bridge, without the proper navigation lights, creates an unacceptable navigational hazard to river traffic.” Although this letter included a revised copy of the bridge lighting plan, the District 1 supervisor at KYTC was unfamiliar with the lighting requirements. In particular, he was unaware of the required white lights to mark the main navigation span. It is likely that the white lights had not been operational for at least a year and possibly much longer. The supervisor informed investigators that no formal policies or procedures were in place related to the maintenance of the bridge lighting in District 1. Although the lighting on the Eggner’s Ferry Bridge has been corrected, no formal training has been provided to acquaint personnel responsible for maintenance with the required bridge lighting in the district. Without knowledge of the proper lighting schemes, it is unclear how KYTC can maintain the lights in accordance with regulations. This issue may exist in some or all of the other 11 districts in the state. As a result, the NTSB is concerned that other bridges in Kentucky that span navigable waterways may be improperly lighted, creating a potential hazard to navigation.

The NTSB therefore recommends that the Commonwealth of Kentucky take the following action:

Verify the status and proper operation of navigation lighting on all Kentucky bridges over navigable waters in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard–approved lighting plans. (M-12-04)

Develop inspection and maintenance procedures so that bridge lighting functions reliably and is maintained in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard–approved lighting plans. Train Kentucky Transportation Cabinet personnel in these procedures. (M-12-05)

We urge you to take action on the safety recommendation in this letter. The NTSB would appreciate a response from you within 90 days addressing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement our recommendations. In your response, please refer to Safety Recommendations M-12-04 and M-12-05. We encourage you to submit updates electronically at

the following e-mail address: correspondence@ntsb.gov. If a response includes attachments that exceed 5 megabytes, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions. To avoid confusion, please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.

Chairman HERSMAN, Vice Chairman HART, and Members SUMWALT, ROSEKIND, and WEENER concurred in this recommendation.

[Original Signed]

By: Deborah A. P. Hersman
Chairman