

SEARCH

Search

The Francis Scott Key Bridge carries Interstate 83 over the Patapsco River and Baltimore Harbor in Baltimore and Baltimore County, Maryland. The main span collapsed on March 26, 2024, following a strike by a passing ship.

History

In the 1960s, the Maryland State Roads Commission concluded that there was a need for a second Baltimore Harbor crossing after the Baltimore Harbor Thruway & Tunnel opened in 1957. It began planning for a single-tube, two-lane tunnel under the Patapsco River downstream from the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel between Hawkins Point and Sollers Point in the Outer Harbor.¹ Plans were also underway for a drawbridge to the south over Curtis Creek to replace an earlier c. 1931 drawbridge carrying Pennington Avenue over the waterway and for a tunnel under the Harbor for Interstate 95 near Fort McHenry.

The Outer Harbor Crossing and associated approaches were planned as a two-lane freeway with provisions for dualization as traffic counts increased.¹ Contractors took bearings of the outer harbor bottom and ship channel in the spring of 1969 while other crews constructed causeways for the future tunnel portals. The tunnel was advertised for construction in early 1970, and the bids were received on July 30, 1970. Unfortunately, the bids came back substantially higher than engineering estimates, leading the Commission to consider alternate plans, including a conventional four-lane bridge.

The bridge, which was estimated to cost \$50 million, represented the best alternative because it allowed for more traffic lanes and lower operating and maintenance costs than a tunnel.¹ It was also \$15 million less expensive than the tunnel option.² It would also provide a route for vehicles transporting hazardous materials as those vehicle types were prohibited from tunnels.¹

The substructure contract was let in August 1972 to a joint venture between the Balf Company and Savin Brothers and to Whaling City Dredge & Dock Corp. for the low bid of \$19.5 million, which was \$1.1 million under the engineer's estimate.² It involved building all the reinforced concrete vertical piers, from the foundations up to the top of the piers. The J. E. Greiner Co. of Baltimore was hired as the prime engineering consultant for the bridge project and the designer of the main piers and the main and auxiliary spans.² The approach spans were designed by Singstad, Kehart, November & Hurka of New York City.

Pittsburgh-DeMoines Steel Co. was awarded the low bid of \$30.7 million, 5% above the engineer's estimate, for the superstructure construction in October.³ The project involved building all the spans of the bridge across the tops of the piers built in the substructure contract, including the 2,644-foot-long continuous Warren through truss main span, the plate girder approach spans, and the reinforced concrete roadway deck.

The 11-mile Outer Harbor Crossing project, which included a four-lane, 9,091-foot bridge over Baltimore Harbor, a two-lane, 3,379-foot crossing over Curtis Creek that included a drawbridge, a 3,907-foot, two-lane high-level crossing of Bear Creek, and a viaduct over Bethlehem Steel's Sparrow Point operations, was completed at the cost of \$136 million, with the Harbor bridge costing \$50.2 million.⁴ It opened to traffic on March 23, 1977, and was originally signed as Maryland Route 695 as it did not meet interstate highway standards.

Upon opening, the bridge was named for Francis Scott Key.⁶ Historians believed that the bridge passed within 200 feet of the location in the Harbor where Key was detained on a cartel boat when, during the bombardment of Fort McHenry on September 12, 1814, he was inspired to write the words of the song that became the American national anthem.^{6,7}

The Outer Harbor Crossing was widened to four lanes between the MD Route 10 interchange and the western approach to the Baltimore Harbor Bridge, which involved adding a parallel drawbridge over Curtis Creek between 1980 and 1983.^{4,5}

Construction to widen the last remaining segment of the two-lane Outer Harbor Crossing, a 3.6-mile stretch from the eastern approach to the Baltimore Harbor Bridge to MD Route 151, began in 1996.⁵ It involved expanding the 3,907-foot Bear Creek Bridge to four lanes, removing the viaduct over the Bethlehem Steel Sparrows Point complex, and reconstructing the MD Route 151 and MD Route 157 interchanges. The project was completed at the cost of \$89.5 million on November 6, 1999.^{1,4} The widening of the Outer Harbor Crossing to four lanes brought the roadway up to interstate highway standards and allowed for the entire Baltimore Beltway to be signed as Interstate 695.

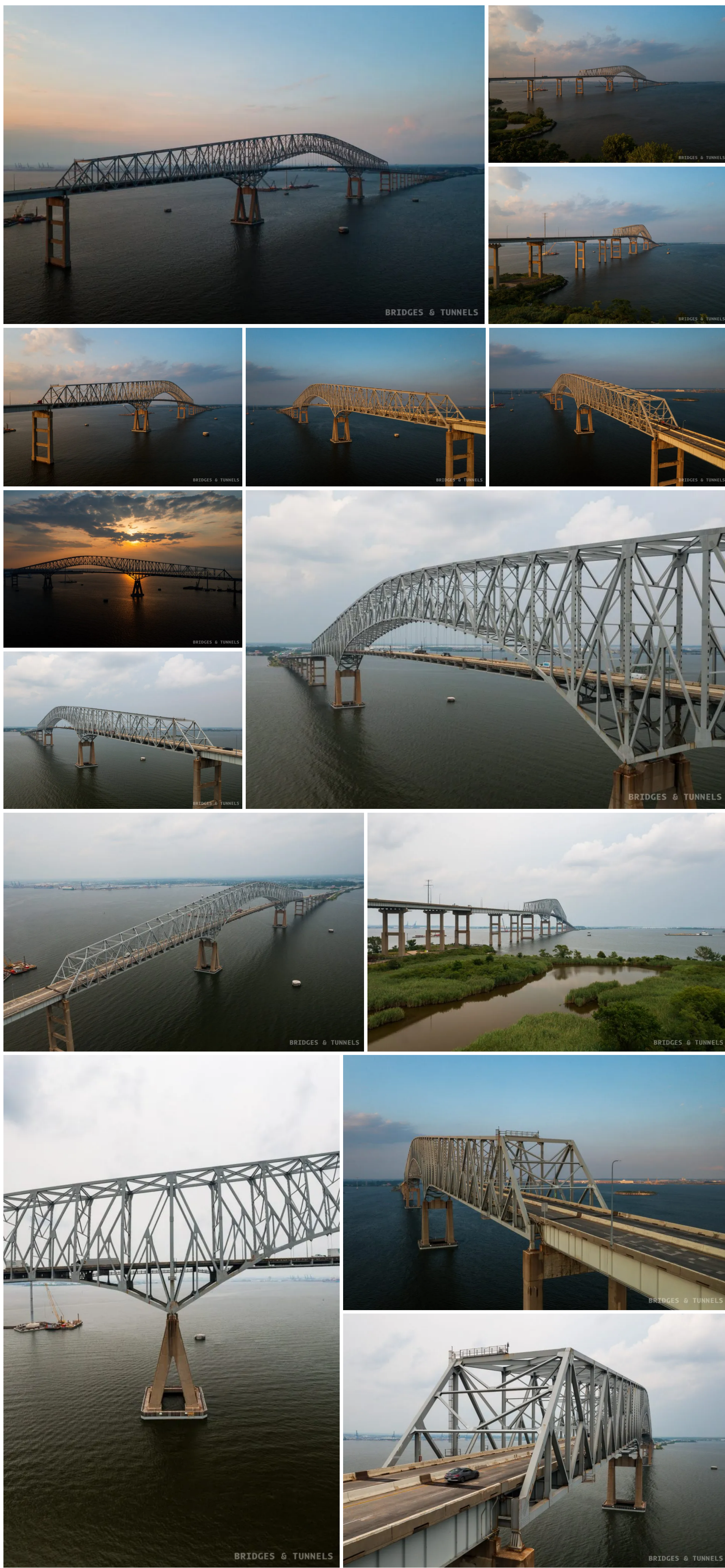
Collapse

At 1:27 am on March 26, 2024, the main span of the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed after a collision with a pier caused by the Singapore-flagged container ship *Dali*.⁹ Before the incident, the container ship, which had lost power, was adrift at 9 mph. The ship's crew notified authorities and issued a "mayday" as they approached the bridge. This alert allowed the Maryland Transportation Authority Police to prevent much of the traffic from entering the bridge.

The collapse resulted in several cars on the bridge and six construction workers who were repairing potholes on the structure falling into the Patapsco River.⁹ Two people were rescued, one of whom was briefly hospitalized, while the other declined hospitalization.

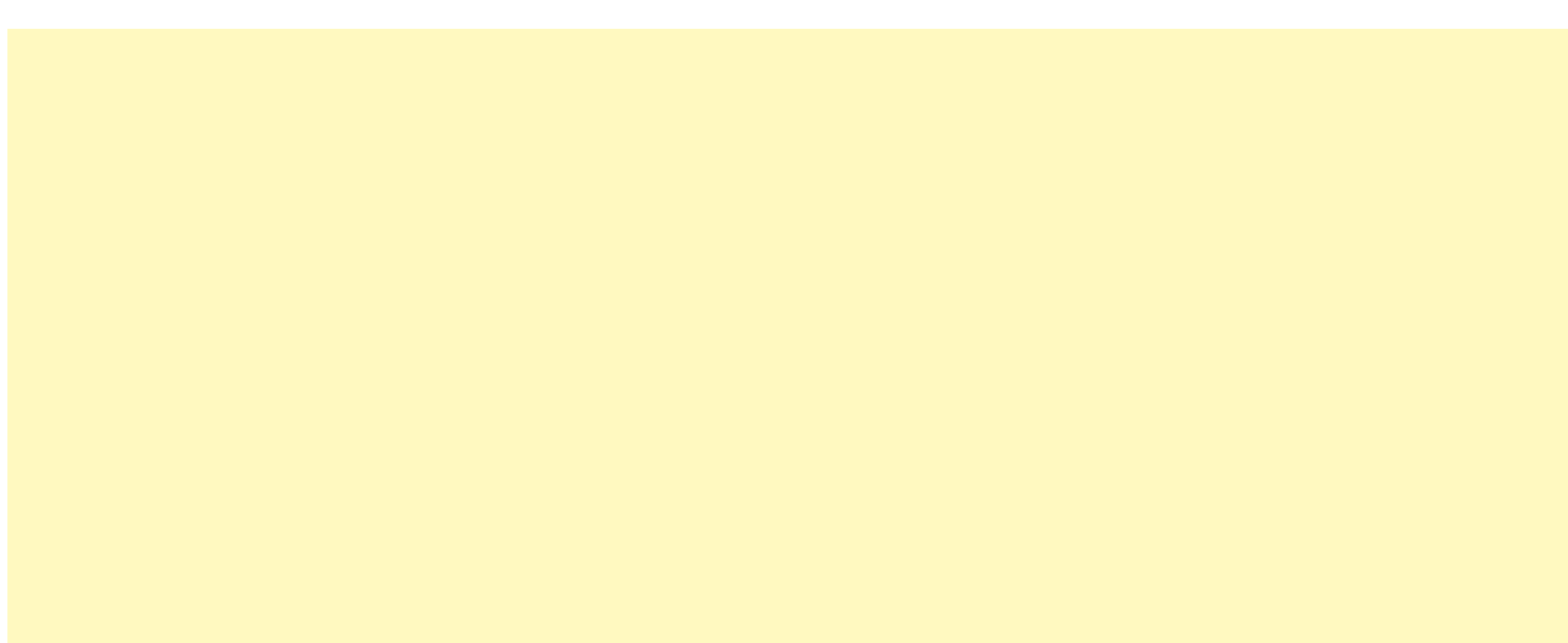
Both the mayor and governor declared states of emergency in response to the incident.⁹

Gallery



Information

- **State:** Maryland
- **Route:** Interstate 695
- **Type:** Arch, Warren Through Truss
- **Status:** Active - Automobile
- **Total Length:** 9,091'
- **Main Span Length:** 1,200'
- **Deck Width:** 58'



Sources

1. Kozel, Scott M. "Francis Scott Key Bridge (Outer Harbor Crossing)." *Roads to the Future*, 14 Jan. 2006.
2. "Substructure under Estimate for Baltimore Harbor Bridge." *Engineering News-Record*, 24 Aug. 1972, p. 16.
3. "High-level bridge bid near estimate." *Engineering News-Record*, 19 Oct. 1972, p. 14.
4. Atwood, Liz. "Baltimore Beltway coming full circle." *Baltimore Sun*, 6 Nov. 1999, pp. 1A-6A.
5. Anderson, Steve. "Baltimore Beltway." *DCRoads.net*
6. Rehert, Isaac. "Patapsco Neck people want bridge named for Key." *Baltimore Sun*, 8 Apr. 1975, p. B1.
7. Hull, Reuben. "Civil Engineering Almanac – Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge opens." *Civil Engineering Source*, 23 Mar. 2021.
8. "Francis Scott Key Bridge (I-695)." *Maryland Transportation Authority*.
9. Gardner, Hayes, and Christine Condon. "The main span collapsed on March 26, 2024, following a strike by a passing ship." *Baltimore Sun*, 26 Mar. 2024.

3 thoughts on "Francis Scott Key Bridge"

[Pingback: Photographing Fort Carroll From Afar - Abandoned](#)

[Pingback: Francis Scott Key Bridge Collapses - Bridges and Tunnels](#)

[Pingback: Poetry: Cry of Tin by Gregg Wilhelm | JMWW](#)

Leave a Reply

Ponderings from the Road: Relics of a Fading Era - Abandoned on Blaine Hill Viaduct

Knobs of Kentucky - Abandoned on Valley View Ferry (KY 169)

Michigan's First Network Tied-Arch Bridge – The Bridgehunter's Chronicles on Michigan's First Network Tied-Arch Bridge

Sherman Cahal on Gordie Howe International Bridge

JOURNAL CATEGORIES

Select Category

JOURNAL TAGS

[abandoned](#) (15) [bridge](#) (77)
[collapse](#) (1) [construction](#) (3) [covered](#) (1) [dam](#) (4)
[Demolition](#) (5) [Highway](#) (3) [Illinois](#) (2) [Indiana](#) (3)
[Kentucky](#) (29) [Maryland](#) (2) [Michigan](#) (4)
[Mississippi River](#) (1) [Missouri](#) (1) [Monongahela River](#) (1) **[New York](#) (5)** **[Ohio](#) (27)** [Ohio River](#) (6) [Ontario](#) (2) [Pennsylvania](#) (1) [Rehabilitation](#) (1) [Road](#) (1) [suspension](#) (1)
[tunnel](#) (9) [Virginia](#) (4) **[West Virginia](#) (27)**

JOURNAL ARCHIVES

Select Month

