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Mackinac Bridge south tower repainting to resume next week

May 7, 2020 -- The final season of a four-year process to repaint the two towers of the Mackinac Bridge is expected to begin next week.

Contractor Seaway Painting of Livonia, which completed the 2017-18 project to strip the north tower down to bare metal and repaint it, also was awarded the latest low-bid contract to repaint the bridge's south tower. Work is expected to resume Monday, May 11.

As with the north tower, this is the first time the south tower has been completely stripped and repainted the iconic ivory color. Painting of the south tower began during the 2019 season and is scheduled to be completed by this fall.

"This painting work is weather dependent, and the weather has now improved to where the project can resume," said Mackinac Bridge Authority Executive Secretary Kim Nowack. "As has been the case the last three seasons, this work will require lane closures on the bridge near the tower, including some intermittent closures while Seaway stages equipment, so we ask that customers use extra caution when crossing."

Closures on the northbound lanes will be lifted on Fridays and on southbound lanes on Sundays during peak traffic weekends. Lane closures also will be removed as needed for other high-traffic volume times, such as holidays.

The south tower repainting began with stripping and painting on some of the tower's interior "cells," along with installation of an enclosure for painting the outside of the tower. The portions of the tower below the bridge deck are expected to be painted this year.
The original paint is lead-based and Seaway is required to contain 100 percent of the paint as it is removed and ship it to an appropriate landfill facility. The new paint, which is zinc-based, is expected to last at least 35 years, with periodic maintenance.

The south tower contract is for just less than $6.5 million and Seaway is required to complete the project by Dec. 31, 2020. The contract to repaint the north tower was just less than $6.3 million.

Until the 1970s, the bridge authority hired contractors to spot paint the bridge towers as needed. Since the late ’70s, MBA employees have handled that task.

Construction on the Mackinac Bridge began in May 1954 and the completed structure was opened to traffic on Nov. 1, 1957. The MBA's sole source of funding is from tolls and fees collected, with all revenue used to maintain, operate and protect the bridge. More information about the bridge can be found at www.MackinacBridge.org.

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