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Press Release

March 15, 2010

[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

RFK Bridge's Harlem River Lift Span Big Paint Job, Done Deal

After looking like a huge gift-wrapped present at various times during the past year-and-a-half, the Harlem River span of the 74-year-old Robert F. Kennedy Bridge is finally ready for its close-up, all shiny and freshly painted. Various parts of the intricate steel vertical lift span bridge have been covered with containment material throughout the complex paint job.

The \$28 million project, which included the approach ramps, started with abrasive blasting to remove all older coatings, including lead paint under total environmental containment, indicated by the shroud-like coverings. Following a thorough cleaning, three fresh coats of blue-gray ("battleship gray") paint were applied over approximately 1.2 million square feet of steel. All tallied, some 13,000 gallons of paint were used. The coating consists of an organic zinc-rich epoxy, a high-build epoxy, and a polyurethane gloss finish, which is designed to protect the steel structure from the elements.

While the billowy containment material used to cover work scaffolding at each 210-foot high steel tower presented a dramatic sight (*see photo*), the 310-foot long center lift span, the machinery rooms, approach span steel, and other miscellaneous components were also cleaned and painted in similar fashion. Much of the original paint contained heavy metals, so the work of removing it—as is the case with all the Authority's facilities—was done within a covering engineered to maintain negative pressure and air flow to protect the workers and the surrounding environment.

"We do this work in strict accordance with New York State regulations. All old paint, debris, and abrasives are collected, stored, and disposed of in a carefully executed procedure," explained Michael Leote, Manager of the agency's painting program.

Ahern Painting Contractors of Woodside, New York was the contractor for the painting work, which began in 2008 and is part of an overall ten-year \$275 million rehabilitation project for the bridge.

The MTA's cleaning and painting of the lift span and its Manhattan ramps required a temporary halt to marine lifts granted by the U.S. Coast Guard, which regulates use of the waterways. Normal conditions have since resumed at the lift span, which has an average of 50 lifts annually. Much of recent marine traffic consists of construction barges destined for the RFK's next-door neighbor to the north, the Willis Avenue Bridge, a swing span crossing operated by the NYC Department of Transportation that is in the midst of a major reconstruction project.

The total process of each lift can take up to 35 minutes and requires the involvement of 12 to 14 people: two in the control room operate the vertical lift via a control panel linked to a system of counter weights and electrical motors, one in each machinery room monitors the motors and brakes, and eight-to-ten Bridge and Tunnel Officers (BTOs) and maintenance personnel stop traffic on the bridge ramps, walkways and toll plaza, as well as guard against any unsafe activity during the lift. The resting position of the lift section is approximately 55 feet above water depending on the tides. When the lift span is raised, much like an elevator, to its full height, clearance is approximately 135 feet above water.

According to Raymond Bush, RFK General Manager: "Our lift crew, BTOs and staff are well-trained in this clockwork operation. They work efficiently and quickly to minimize disruption to our customers." When possible, advance notice of a lift is sent to the media, to registered customers via email alerts, and posted on the Bridges and Tunnels webpage at mta.info.

The Harlem River (Manhattan) lift span links the Harlem River Drive, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Drive and 125th Street to Queens and the Bronx. The sprawling three-span Triborough Bridge, which opened to traffic on July 11, 1936, was renamed after the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy in November 2008. The bridge carries a total of more than 160,000 vehicles daily to Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx; the Harlem span handles approximately 84,000 vehicles daily.

MTA Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, which connect the five boroughs of New York City, are the Robert F. Kennedy, Bronx-Whitestone, Henry Hudson, Verrazano-Narrows, Cross Bay Veterans Memorial and Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Bridges, and the Queens Midtown and Brooklyn-Battery Tunnels.



Tower of RFK Bridge's Harlem Lift Span under environmental containment for paint removal.



And after the paint job, tower with a fresh coating of "battleship gray."