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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

Verrazano Getting Ready For Worldwide Closeup As Nyc Marathon Sunday Nears

Anyone who's ever hosted a dinner party or special event knows the amount of planning and prep work needed to be a good host. Now imagine doing it for 45,000 people. That's what a team of managers and workers at the Verrazano–Narrows Bridge must do each year to get ready for Marathon Sunday.

"It's like our Super Bowl," said General Manager Daniel DeCrescenzo, who, along with a team of supervisors and managers, begins planning for the event months before the ING NYC Marathon takes place. Always held the first Sunday in November, this year's event is Nov. 7th.

The bridge's soaring 693–foot towers and graceful network of steel suspended cables has been the starting point for the race since it became an all–borough marathon in 1976. Now in its 41st year, the race has grown from a field of 127 runners to 45,000, and is seen by a worldwide television audience of about 315 million.

To make sure the bridge is ready for its worldwide close–up, DeCrescenzo, like any good host, begins his annual marathon preparations by making a detailed "to do" list, which ranges from regularly scheduled tasks like filling in potholes, fixing broken delineators and cleaning roadway drainage areas to special race day items including readying electronic message signs and temporarily removing guiderails near the toll plaza to give runners easy access.

A week before the race, the familiar blue, green and orange start lines are painted across the toll plaza. (The start lines will be 12–feet more to the east to make up for a difference in the dimensions of the new Willis Avenue Bridge.)

But the bulk of the work begins the night before when the upper level of the bridge is closed at 11 PM so maintenance crews can cover the bridge's finger joints with masonite boards, which are strong and slightly bendable, so runners and wheelchair racers have a smooth surface. Finger joints are the metal intertwined joints that allow the bridge's roadway decks to expand in summer months and contract in winter. Crews secure the 3–foot wide by 33–foot long boards to four locations from beneath the upper level roadway.

At the same time, Operations personnel are setting up checkpoints, reconfiguring toll plaza lanes so traffic can get across the bridge before it is closed for the race, and coordinating with other agencies and race organizers to set up the toll plaza for the start of the race.

Hours before the race begins the toll plaza comes alive with activity. Operations personnel are escorting a convoy of buses filled with race participants, dozens of trucks carrying the runners' personal gear to the finish line in Central Park, and U.S. Army vehicles transporting cannons that will be used to signal the start of the race, slowly across the bridge to make sure the newly covered finger joints are not disturbed. Temporary MTA and NYPD command centers are set up and the bridge gets a final sweeping around 6 AM.

At 7 AM when the lower level of the bridge is closed, crews quickly tape down 16 mats to cover the finger joints in four separate areas on the lower level. (They use mats because they can't get below the roadway to secure boards).

Wheelchair participants are the first over the bridge beginning at 8:30 AM, followed by the rest of the runners who are sent across the bridge in three waves of 15,000 each. The last runner normally leaves the bridge by 11:30 AM, and right behind that person are more Verrazano crews, whose work is still not done.

Using everything from front–end loaders and mechanical sweepers to workers with shovels and plastic garbage bags, the crews begin scooping up the discarded warm–up jackets and pants, water bottles, towels and other debris left behind by the runners.

"As the last runner is making his or her way across the bridge, we're literally right behind them already cleaning things up so we can open the bridge to traffic as soon as possible," DeCrescenzo said. Once the concrete barriers, guiderails, cones and delineators – removed for the race – are all back in place, the bridge is reopened to traffic, normally by 3 PM.

"As the starting spot for one of the world's premier races, a tremendous amount of behind the scenes work is necessary, but we are proud to show off our bridge and be part of the New York City Marathon," DeCrescenzo said.

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



Maintenance workers from the Verrazano-Narrows cover finger joints, (seen uncovered in front of picture), on the lower level of the bridge in preparation for the 2009 NYC Marathon.



Let the clean up begin! Clothing and water bottles left lying on the toll plaza once runners depart are cleaned up by Verrazano workers as soon as the last runner is over the bridge.