

Section of major I-95 highway in Philadelphia that collapsed after tanker truck caught fire underneath could take months to repair, officials say

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See what the collapsed section of I-95 looks like

Editor's Note: [Find the latest story here.](#)

CNN —

A section of northbound I-95 in Philadelphia that [collapsed after a tanker truck caught fire](#) underneath the highway Sunday morning could take months to repair, snarling regional commutes and cutting off a major East Coast artery, Pennsylvania officials said.

The commercial tanker truck, which was carrying a petroleum-based product, is still trapped under the collapsed highway, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said at a Sunday afternoon news conference.

Authorities are working to identify any individual or individuals caught in the fire and the collapse, which occurred around 6:20 a.m., the governor said. Officials have not reported on any injuries.

Restoring the highway will likely take “some number of months,” Shapiro noted. He said his office was “looking at alternatives to connect the roadway beyond detours” and working with federal partners on the matter.

The destroyed portion of the highway is “likely the busiest interstate in the commonwealth,” seeing around 160,000 vehicles daily, according to Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Mike Carroll.

The fire is now under control, according to Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney. “We are advising residents to please avoid the area and plan for alternative routes of travel,” he said at the news conference.

“In addition to road closures, we expect delays of trash collection and SEPTA bus routes in the area,” he said, referring to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, which runs buses in Philadelphia.

The governor described witnessing “remarkable devastation” during a flyover of the scene.

“I found myself thanking the Lord that no motorists who were on I-95 were injured or died,” he said, adding it was a “devastating site – one that our first responders, law enforcement and others contained very, very quickly.”

Cause of truck fire under investigation

The cause of and circumstances surrounding the fire remain under investigation, according to officials.

Earlier on Sunday, Derek Bowmer, battalion chief for the Philadelphia Fire Department, said, “It looked like we had a lot of heat and heavy fire underneath the underpass.”

Explosions around the highway collapse were caused by “runoff of maybe some fuel or gas lines that could have been compromised by the accident,” said Bowmer. “We have fire coming out of those manholes.”

Photos and videos from the scene showed huge plumes of smoke billowing from the interstate, which runs north to south from the Canadian border in Maine to Miami, Florida.

While the exact cost of repairing the crucial roadway remains unclear, the governor told reporters Sunday afternoon that US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg “made it clear that whatever resources needed to rebuild I-95, in a safe and expeditious manner, will be provided” to the state.



City of Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management/Reuters

A side view shows the partial collapse of Interstate 95 after a fire underneath a Philadelphia overpass.

While the collapse has not affected the city’s drinking water quality, [according to a tweet from Philadelphia Water Department](#), the US Coast Guard is looking out for possible water pollution.

“A station Philadelphia 29-foot boat was launched to the scene to observe any pollution to the waterways. They reported that there is a sheen on the water but it seems to be confined to the cove,” the Coast Guard’s statement read. “The substance is gasoline

and the tanker has a potential to spill 8500 gallons. However, it has been reported to us that clean up efforts are mainly shore side, meaning on land.”

Collapse will have ‘significant impacts’ on regional travel

The collapse and resulting closure of the highway will have serious ramifications for travelers in the region who depend on the crucial roadway, officials cautioned.

On Sunday, SEPTA General Manager Leslie Richards said the authority will add extra capacity and service to other transportation routes and evaluate all options to assist travelers in the wake of the collapse.

“We ask employers to be flexible with their workforces,” she said. “It’s going to take longer than normal to get to work tomorrow.”

Buttigieg also said to expect “significant regional traffic impact.”

“This is a major artery for people and goods, and the closure will have significant impacts on the city and region until reconstruction and recovery are complete,” Buttigieg said [on Twitter](#). “Our department will be there with support throughout the process of I-95 returning to normal.”

President Joe Biden has been briefed on the collapse, [according to a tweet from White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre](#).

A spokesperson for the Federal Highway Administration said administrator Shailen Bhatt would be in Philadelphia on Monday to “offer federal support and assistance.”

Additionally, the National Transportation Safety Board [tweeted on Sunday](#) that it would send a team to Philadelphia to investigate the collapse.

CNN’s Ross Levitt contributed to this report.