

Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge Collapse, Explained

Officials launched an emergency response after a container ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge, sending most of the structure and multiple people into the water.

By [Elliott Davis Jr.](#)

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STEVE HELBER|AP

A cargo ship is stuck under the part of the structure of the Francis Scott Key Bridge after the ship hit the bridge Tuesday, March 26, 2024, in Baltimore, Md.

Local, state and federal agencies are responding to the [collapse](#) of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, which fell into the Patapsco River below in the early morning hours on Tuesday and brought people and vehicles with it after a container ship collided with one of its pillars.

Officials said the bodies of two people were [found](#) late on Wednesday. Four others are still missing and [presumed dead](#), and two were rescued from the Patapsco River, according to The New York Times.

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The river runs next to the city's busy port, where the ship originated, and [operations](#) there have been shut down. [Maryland](#) Gov. Wes Moore declared a state of emergency on Tuesday morning and said in a [statement](#) that his office was working "to quickly deploy federal resources from the Biden Administration."

While more information will likely come to light about the circumstances around the collapse, a White House official [told](#) The Baltimore Sun that "there is no indication of any nefarious intent."

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Here's what else you need to know about the catastrophe in Maryland's largest city.

What Happened to Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge?

Around 1:30 a.m. on Tuesday, a Singapore-flagged cargo ship called Dali struck a column of the bridge, according to reporting by [The Baltimore Banner](#). The accident happened only about 30 minutes into what was to be a 27-day voyage to [Sri Lanka](#), according to VesselFinder, a ship tracking website.

Video footage shows the nearly 1,000-foot-long ship appearing to lose power prior to striking the pillar, and ABC News has [noted](#) findings from an unclassified government report which said the ship "lost propulsion" as it was leaving the port and its crew warned Maryland officials about a possible collision.

Although officials initially feared that occupied cars had fallen into the river, sources told the New York Times that the Dali's mayday call stopped traffic from entering the bridge before it collapsed. Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen told the

Times that vehicles used by workers fixing potholes were parked on the bridge and appeared to have fallen into the river.

Where Is the Francis Scott Key Bridge and How Long Is It?

The 1.6 mile-long bridge is part of Interstate 695, connecting different parts of Baltimore along the Patapsco River near the [Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore](#). The bridge is [named](#) for Francis Scott Key, who wrote “The Star Spangled Banner” as he watched the American flag wave above Fort McHenry during the War of 1812.

Have There Been Any Casualties?

Six people – all construction workers who had been working on the bridge when it collapsed – were presumed to have died after officials [ended](#) their rescue efforts late on Tuesday. An employee with the workers’ contractor [told](#) the Banner that the missing men are from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, and have spouses and children. Divers late on Wednesday recovered the bodies of two men – identified by police as Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes and Dorlian Ronial Castillo Cabrera – in a submerged truck, [according to](#) the Sun. Officials also [said](#) on Wednesday that search efforts had been stopped and will resume once debris has been cleared.

Responders [pulled](#) two survivors – including one who was in “very serious condition” – out of the river. The Dali’s 22 crew members, including two pilots, have been accounted for and “there are no reports of any injuries,” Synergy Marine Group, the technical manager of the ship, said in a [statement](#).

How Have Officials Reacted to the Collapse?

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, like Moore, [issued](#) a state of emergency on Tuesday. “This is a multi-jurisdiction, multi-agency effort with federal, state, and local resources mobilizing,” he [said](#) on social media.

President Joe Biden said in Tuesday remarks that it was a “terrible accident,” and that he planned to go to Baltimore as soon as possible. “We’re going to rebuild that port together,” the president said. “To the people of Baltimore, I want to say we’re with you. We’re going to stay with you as long as it takes.”

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg [added](#) in a statement that he had spoken with both Moore and Scott and offered the Department of Transportation's support. Buttigieg advised drivers in the area to "follow local responder guidance on detours and response."

What Does Infrastructure Data Show?

From 1960 to 2015, there [were](#) 35 major bridge collapses worldwide – including 18 in the U.S. – due to ship or barge collision, with a total of 342 people killed, [according to](#) a 2018 report from the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure.

In the 2023 edition of the [Best States](#) rankings, [Maryland](#) was No. 39 for [infrastructure](#), one of eight categories analyzed by U.S. News. The state performed better when it came to [bridge quality](#), ranking No. 14 for that metric. The Francis Scott Key Bridge was [assessed](#) as being in "fair" condition in 2023, according to the Federal Highway Administration's [National Bridge Inventory](#). Bridges can be [rated](#) as "good," "fair" or "poor."

But Joseph Schofer, a professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University's McCormick School of Engineering, said in an emailed statement that the bridge is otherwise "vulnerable because of its design." Engineers have also questioned whether the bridge's piers had fenders to block possible collisions, the Times [reported](#).

"The bridge requires total rebuild, which will be a long-term and expensive project," Schofer added.

Updated on March 28, 2024: This article was originally published on March 26, 2024, and has been updated to reflect more recent information.