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DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF

The demolition of the Casey Overpass has caused significant traffic increases.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF JUNE 16, 2015

It's less than 2 miles from Mary Pierce's home in Forest Hills to the heart of Jamaica Plain. But traffic has been so bad lately, it might as well be the other side of the world.

"You can't just go running into JP Centre anymore," said Pierce, 39, who recently stopped calling her regular baby sitter because it takes so long to pick her up. "If it's the wrong time of day, and you're on the wrong side of it, it's really rough."

Pierce is among thousands of drivers hamstrung by frustrating traffic after last month's closure of the Casey Overpass. Average afternoon rush-hour commute times have risen sharply, and on one recent evening, many motorists spent more than an hour trying to trek just 2 miles.

Officials had warned of delays during the two-year state construction project to replace the bridge with a network of new roads. But drivers who have made the commute in the weeks after the overpass's closure said they never expected traffic to be this bad.

Until recently, it took between 13 and 14 minutes on average to travel on weekday afternoons along two key corridors that intersect each other: a 1-mile stretch between Shea and Murray circles; and a 2-mile stretch along Hyde Park Avenue and Washington Street.

But comparable afternoon commutes are now between 22 and 23 minutes on average, according to city estimates collected as part of a new traffic program.

There's some consolation: The average weekday morning commute time for drivers on the Shea-Murray stretch has only taken about two minutes longer on average, while average morning drive times on the Hyde Park-Washington corridor have risen by a minute.

Transportation officials attribute most of the delays to the construction.

For instance, the closure of one traffic lane along part of the Shea-Murray corridor creates a bottleneck. The lane will likely reopen by September, officials said.

The state Transportation Department, which is overseeing the project, also expects congestion to improve in

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coming weeks as drivers get used to the new layout. Some may adjust commute times or decide to take different routes. Commute times last week improved by an average of one to six minutes over the previous work week.

“Any time a new traffic pattern is put into place, that’s when it tends to be more disruptive,” said MassDOT spokesman Michael Verseckes.

In the meantime, Boston officials are using the closure as a proving ground for their latest effort to combat citywide traffic headaches using GPS data collected anonymously from users of the Google-owned map application Waze.

Before recently partnering with Waze, the city could only measure traffic by watching video feeds from several hundred traffic cameras and by fielding reports from drivers.

“What [the city] hears all the time is ‘Traffic is horrible, traffic is horrible,’ but it’s very difficult to identify particular places and to identify how horrible it is,” said Matthew Maryl, deputy chief information officer in Boston’s Department of Innovation and Technology.

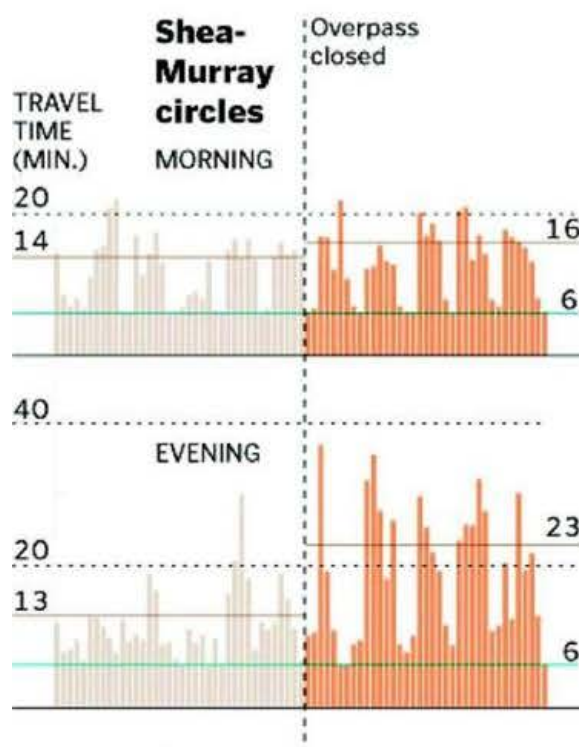
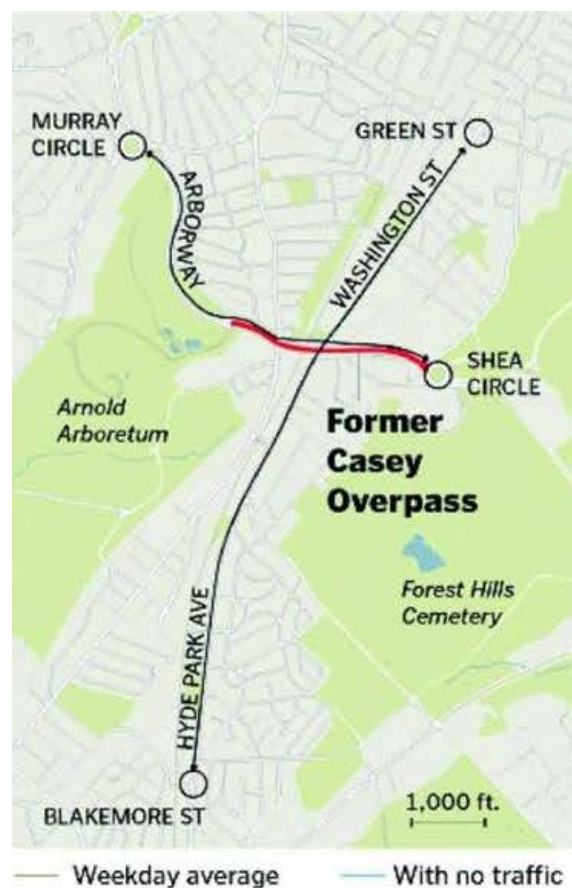
With the new data, he said, the city expects to more quickly adapt as problems occur. Workers may install signs to better prepare drivers for the new traffic patterns, for instance, or they can remotely make minute-to-minute adjustments to the timing of stoplights.

The state Transportation Department is conducting its own studies of Casey-related traffic but says it will also examine the new city data as it judges the project’s effect. Officials say they do not expect the street-level problems to linger after the construction.

The city analysis says traffic was at its worst on May 11, the Monday after the bridge first closed in one direction, as drivers on the Hyde Park-Washington corridor sat in traffic for more than an hour.

Along the Shea-Murray stretch, it took motorists 37 minutes on average to make their way through.

Factors unrelated to the work can also play a role. James Gillooly,



deputy commissioner of the Boston Transportation Department, explained how on one morning a parking attendant at a surface lot along Hyde Park Avenue called in sick, causing a line of cars to form outside the lot's entrance.

No matter the cause, the delays take a toll on those who get stuck in them.

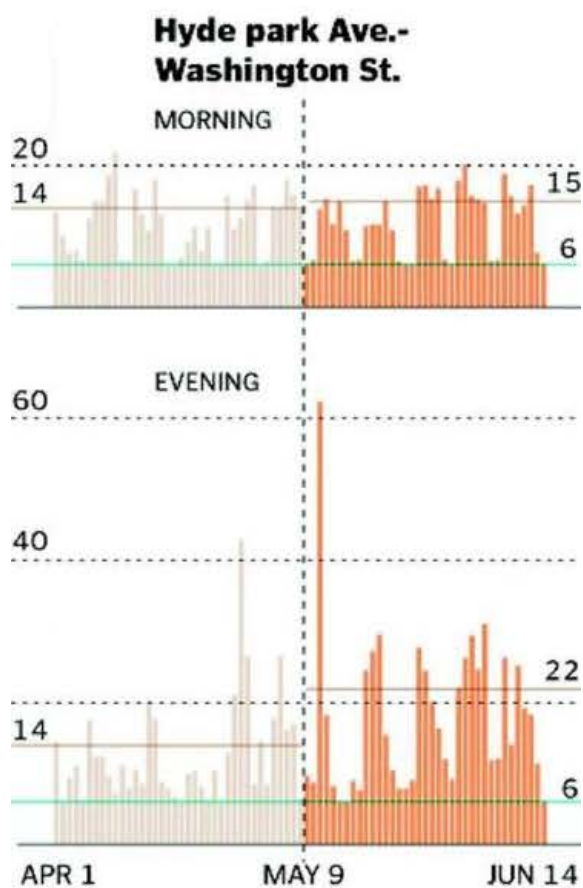
Hadi Kasrawi said that driving from his home in Forest Hills, dropping his son off at a nearby day care, and getting to his office in South Boston took about 30 minutes before the bridge closed. Since then, it has typically taken an hour.

"I have to be at work at an exact time. If I'm late I'm penalized," said Kasrawi, who said traffic has made him late to work, and his son's day care, a couple times already.

He said he's never experienced such gridlock since he moved to the area 18 years ago.

"It's a total mess and it's painful," he said.

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SOURCE: City of Boston analytics team
DAVID BUTLER/GLOBE STAFF

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