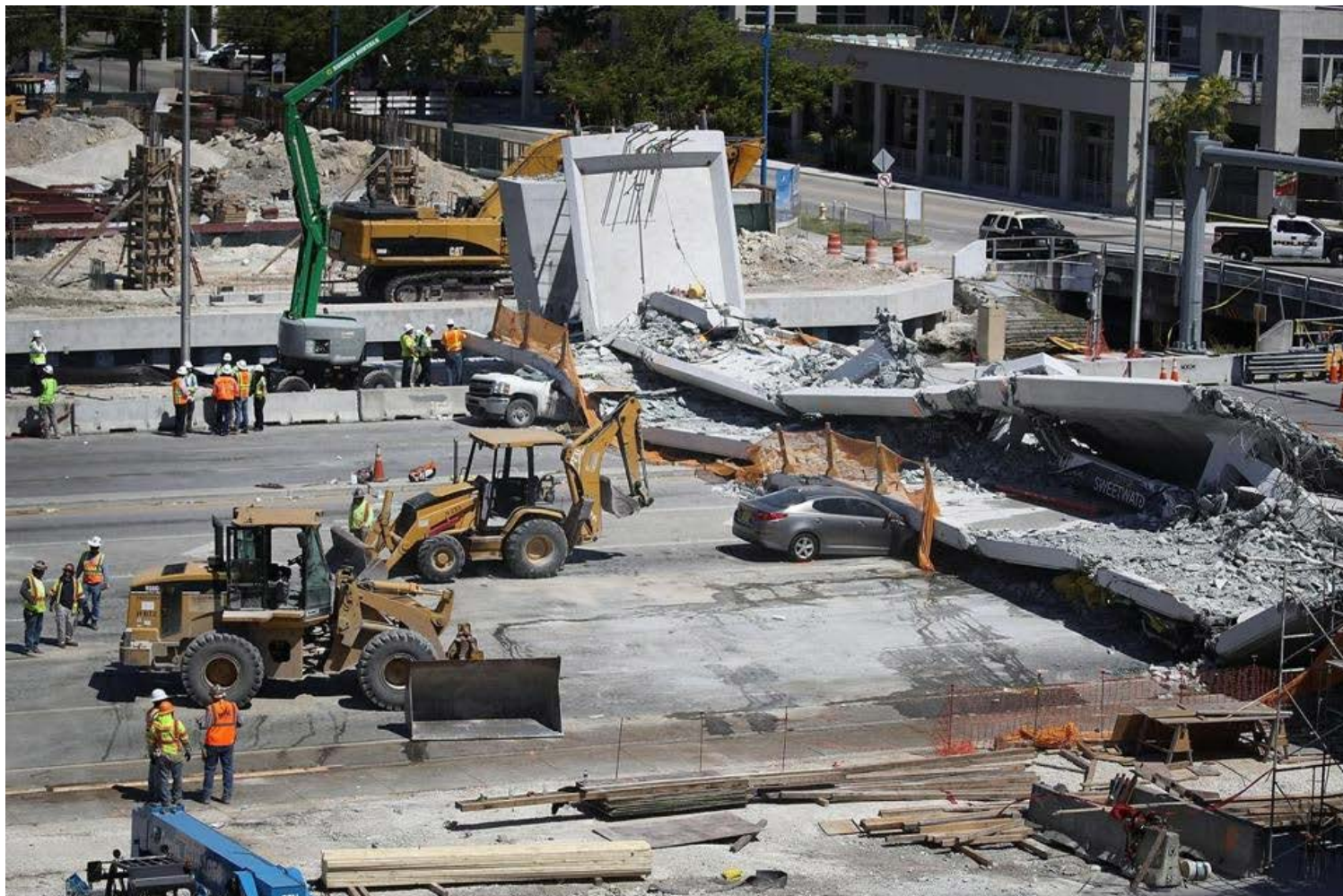




Mass. transportation officials 'confident' bridges are safe after Miami collapse



JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

A pedestrian bridge collapsed Thursday, a few days after it was built over a busy thoroughfare near Florida International University in Miami.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 16, 2018

In the wake of a deadly pedestrian bridge collapse in Miami, Massachusetts transportation officials say they are “fully confident” that bridges here are safe.

Officials at the state Department of Transportation said that once the investigation into what happened in Miami is complete, they will closely review the results to see whether there are lessons to be learned.

In the meantime, they will continue to conduct inspections on a regular basis and in line with federal safety standards.

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“MassDOT has a robust bridge inspection program,” department spokesman Patrick Marvin said in a statement. “And MassDOT Highway Districts regularly conduct maintenance on bridge decks, supports and other features.”

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State transportation officials said that if any pressing safety concerns are discovered upon inspection, they either make immediate repairs or close the bridge.

The pedestrian bridge collapse in Miami — which killed six people Thursday, falling only five days after it was installed — has raised questions about the safety of building bridges at an accelerated pace, which has become fairly common in recent years, including in Massachusetts.

For example, accelerated construction techniques are being used on the [Commonwealth Avenue Bridge](#) replacement project in Boston, which is in the midst of the [third of five construction stages](#). Accelerated techniques were also used during last year's [replacement](#) of two Route 3 bridges at the Braintree split and for the [2011](#) installation of [14 bridges](#) along Interstate 93 in Medford.

It's unclear whether accelerated bridge construction played a part in the collapse in Miami.

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“A wide range of work has been done on different types and sizes of bridges,” Hajjar said. “Certainly, there have been instances where this approach has been used and proved to be quite safe.”

Massachusetts transportation officials said there are multiple layers of oversight for bridge construction projects and that materials such as steel and concrete are extensively tested before being used.

But bridge collapses in general are rare, and many bridges have been built without issue using accelerated construction methods, experts say.

“The basic approach is to design a bridge in ways that allow major components to be fabricated off-site and brought on site in a way that dramatically shortens the timeline,” Hajjar said. “It provides the potential for much less disruption, fewer logistical issues, potential cost savings, and perhaps even opens up opportunities for replacements that would otherwise have been difficult.”

But experts caution that there needs to be a balance. Building projects with cutting-edge techniques designed to save time and money can’t come at the risk of safety.

Robert Bea, a professor of engineering and construction management at the University of California, Berkeley, [said](#) it was too early to know exactly what happened, but he called it a risky move to use what

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Accelerated construction has grown in popularity because it can provide significant benefits.

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the Miami bridge builders called an “innovative installation” over a heavily traveled thoroughfare. “Innovations take a design firm into an area where they don’t have applicable experience, and then we have another unexpected failure on our hands,” Bea said after reviewing the bridge’s design and photos of the collapse.

Materials from the Associated Press were used in this report. Danny McDonald of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele).

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