



Mayor Daley toured the Monroe St. bridgehouse Saturday. He said the city needs state funds for future projects. | JOHN J. KIM/SUN-TIMES

1919 all over again

CHICAGO RIVER | Monroe bridgehouses rebuilt to original grandeur

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Commuters: If you can take a tiny break during your rush from the Metra trains Monday morning, take a look at the bridgehouses on Monroe at the Chicago River. They now look like they did when they were brand new in 1919.

The city rebuilt both bridgehouses, a job that took 14 months and \$4.3 million in state and federal funds.

Bridgehouses shelter the equipment needed to raise and lower Chicago River bridges to allow the passage

of sailboats going to and from Lake Michigan during the spring and fall.

Key part of network

The Monroe Street bridgehouse on the east side of the river was crumbling so badly that the city worried it could be dangerous. So it was taken out and replaced by a homely plywood structure in 2002. The west bridgehouse had also started to crack and deteriorate.

Now both bridgehouses have been rebuilt as they looked in 1919, with granite bases, terra-cotta outer walls, wood paneling inside, warning bells and a terra-

cotta ornament or "acrotoria" on the top, as well as electrical and mechanical upgrades.

"Bridges are an integral part of our transportation network, and projects like this help keep them in top shape," said Chicago Department of Transportation Commissioner Thomas Byrne.

Breakdown in trust

Mayor Daley was there for the dedication Saturday, and he took a tour through the restored west bridgehouse. Below street level, the area under the bridge is like being inside a giant's pocket watch,

with enormous cogs and wheels to raise the street and sidewalks.

Chicago is hoping for capital money from Springfield for future infrastructure projects and the CTA, but legislators and the governor still haven't been able to agree on a bill. Daley called the situation in Springfield "a complete stalemate."

"We're all praying for a capital bill in Springfield," Daley said. "The problem is trust — once that breaks down in a legislative body, it's very, very difficult and challenging."

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