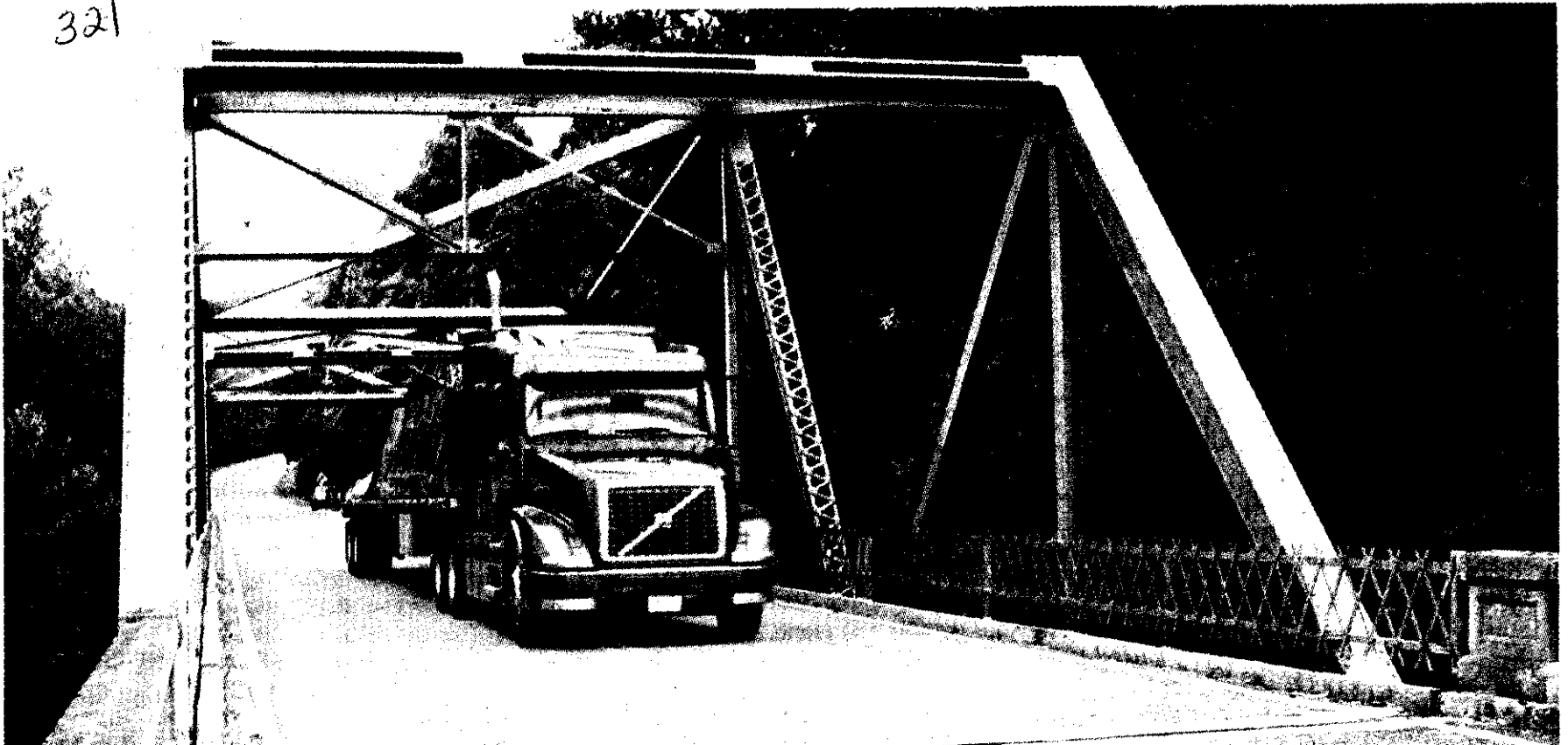


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THE BUFFALO RIVER BRIDGE just north of Flatwoods on Highway 13, was recently downgraded by TDOT officials to a five ton rating. Pictured above, a loaded tractor trailer crosses the deteriorating structure. Below left, problems like the one pictured are obvious on the surface, but the real trouble lies in the 1939 bridge's steel system. See story for more details.



TDOT Studying Ways To Strengthen Bridge

An aging and deteriorating Buffalo River bridge near Flatwoods was recently downgraded to a five ton load limit, causing transportation problems for the school system just weeks before buses begin to roll.

Director of Schools Gil Webb said he and Transportation Supervisor David Trull had been working in recent weeks to reduce the number of miles covered by Perry County buses in an effort to cut transportation costs. During this process, they learned that the bridge had been downgraded.

Around twenty children ride the bus to and from school on the route that crosses the bridge. Now, with the lower five ton rating, buses will no longer be able to cross the bridge unless repairs are made that satisfy state officials.

Director Webb told the County Commission on July 17, that buses would have to be re-directed, adding 25 or 30 miles to that particular route. The situation will also come into play during athletic seasons when games are scheduled in counties to the south.

Kim Keelor, Public Information Manager for the Tennessee Department of Transportation

(TDOT), told the *Review*, "The issue with the bridge is that following the latest inspection and evaluation, the bridge was posted for a five ton maximum load capacity due to the deterioration of some of the steel elements in the structure."

According to TDOT, a 2002 inspection revealed a "fair" rating and no reduction in its weight posting. In 2004, the inspection revealed some deterioration and a posting of ten tons was imposed. The most recent inspection was performed last month.

Keelor reported, "The bridge was built in 1939, according to our records, and is state maintained. The replacement bridge is still a couple of years away. With this inquiry from county officials, TDOT is trying to respond to their concern in a timely manner."

Keelor said TDOT Structures Division supervisors dispatched an evaluator and repair engineer to "investigate and develop solutions to increase the load carrying capacity." The team met to discuss a possible repair plan.

"Our goal is to improve the posting limit so as to be able to carry school buses," Keelor said.