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Volgograd Bridge, Shaken by Winds, Is to Reopen

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The Volgograd bridge that sent cars into the air as wind gusts shook the seven-kilometer construction last week has not been damaged and will be reopened Tuesday morning, Governor Anatoly Brovko said.

Vibrations on the bridge reached an amplitude of more than one meter on Thursday, throwing cars into the air and turning them around.

The bridge spanning the Volga River was tested over the weekend by a fleet of KamAZ trucks and ultrasonic devices as inspectors checked for signs of damage, Brovko told reporters Monday. The tests concluded that the bridge was "structurally sound," and it will reopen to passenger cars at 6 a.m. on Tuesday, he said.

A commission formed by the Prosecutor General's Office on orders from President Dmitry Medvedev will still inspect the bridge, however. The commission was ordered to investigate

the incident, which occurred for about half an hour, and make sure that all construction rules were followed prior to the bridge's opening.

Users on a local Volgograd forum wrote that they would still use the bridge, which can shorten some trips by as much as 67 kilometers. "I will use it as needed, but I will keep the seatbelt unbuckled and won't lock the doors," one woman wrote.

Additional equipment will be installed on the bridge to monitor conditions and close off bridge access in case of repeated shaking, the regional administration said. Experts who inspected the bridge after the incident also recommended installing wind shields that could change the bridge's aerodynamics.

The vibrations "show the high aerodynamic stability and reliability of the structure," Volgomost, the company behind the bridge's construction, said in a statement Monday, RIA-Novosti reported. The company called the vibrations "the first of their kind" anywhere for beam-type bridges.

The Volgograd bridge was opened after several delays in 2009, following 13 years of construction at a cost of 12.3 billion rubles ($395 million).

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