Closure of Zorgowee bridge and detour

Background summary:

• The bridge of Zorgowee has several times in the past been subject to damage, but has successfully been re-opened by local quick repairs.
• A commercial truck caused further damage on 30 May and fell through part of the decking and off to the side.
• Bridge of Zorgowee is currently officially closed due to the damage, with no news on when it will open. It has been observed that motorcycles, light vehicles and an empty truck passed over, but according to reports the bridge is now so damaged that this is not advisable.
• Humanitarian actors have several times offered to repair the bridge by replacing the wooden decking.
• The offer has been refused by Ministry of Public Works (MPW), which wants a concrete decking. MPW is for now saying they will do the concrete decking (estimated time-frame about 2 months). MPW is presently informing that they will be responsible for this construction (funding and supervision).
• MPW has asked for funds (USD 2,900) from the humanitarian community to create a wooden bypass bridge while work on the concrete decking is ongoing. For now this bypass bridge also to be MPW implemented project. MPW estimated time-frame for completion of bypass bridge is two weeks. Current design of bypass bridge is to carry 11mt and MPW said they will engage local police to control the traffic.
• The LogSector has on behalf of the humanitarian organizations, and as discussed in the LogSector Coordination meetings, stressed the fact to MPW that we are in an emergency operation, where timely access to deliver aid to refugees and host population is crucial. Although, we have understanding for MPW’s wish to upgrade all infrastructure in Liberia, it has been underlined that major work on one of the key roads leading to the emergency affected area was not a desirable option right now and that from a humanitarian perspective we would recommend to quickly re-deck the current bridge instead of doing a major re-decking with concrete which will probably take over two months. MPW is for now still insisting on concrete decking and full closure of the bridge while work is ongoing. Discussions are still ongoing, also involving the Government refugee agency, LRRRC, and the humanitarian coordinators office.
• An assessment of the bridge has also been done (see separate document). This assessment also puts technical questions marks on the feasibility of putting in place a concrete decking.

Note as many of the issues above are under discussion, the situation is subject to change.

Detour to bypass the Zorgowee bridge:

The only confirmed currently possible bypass of the Zorgowee bridge is via Zortorpa and Gpapa airfield. A WFP mission assessed the alternative route on 1 June by landcruiser and WFP has, starting 2 June, had several truck convoys passing through this detour. Please see map in separate file (also including an assessment done by UNMIL last month).
WFP assessment:

From Zorgowee town, the road goes via the only real settlement along the road, the town of Zortorpa. For the first estimated 10 km, the road is narrow and there is dense vegetation; however, all the vegetation is “young growth” and can be pushed aside by either the trucks themselves, minor work with machetes and in the longer run with simple side brushing. The road itself for those first 10 km is in pretty decent condition with only one small dip/hole that should not cause any significant problems for trucks. During these ten kilometres, there are two or three spots where it would be possible for a truck to pull to the side in order to allow another vehicle to pass.

The next ten kilometres present bigger challenges, as the road continues to be narrow, but there is much more dense vegetation. Again, most of the vegetation can be pushed aside with trucks, but more intense side brushing is needed. At one point there is a small bridge going over a water stream. The road is quite narrow and there is a small drop on both sides where the large metal culvert is visible. Any driver would have to pay careful attention and it would need to be re-assessed after heavy rains. There is also one dip/hole where trucks would have to slow down, but should present no major problems with a four wheel drive vehicle. During this stretch of road, there is only one place where a truck can pull to the side to let another vehicle pass.

The remaining 5-6 kilometres before the junction at Laibala are very good; the road is fairly wide and in good condition. From Laibala to Seykimpa, a distance of approximately 21 km, the road is maintained by a mining company. The road is wide and well compacted. From Seykimpa there is approximately 3 km to Saniquelle.

It took 1 hour and 25 minutes to complete the trip from Zorgowee to Saniquelle in a Land Cruiser; for a truck it would take an estimated 2 hours and 30 minutes. The distance is about 50 km. Note heavy trucks might have difficulties passing through, but smaller trucks should for now be OK.

If any other organizations have additional information on this bypass road or other possible routes, your inputs would be much appreciated so the information can be distributed to the humanitarian community.

Please also note that name of places might differ a bit on different maps or depending who is asked, so some of the locations mentioned above might go by another name.

The use of the road from Bahn to Karnplay is currently not possible by truck due to restrictions from the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) and the private contractor doing road works on that stretch of road. MPW does not have a date for when this road can be opened up for trucks.