

SEPTA Proudly touts rebuilt bridge

BY Chris Brennan
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SEPTA today will unveil a new \$5 million railroad bridge in the suburbs, built in just 35 days.

But the transit authority is still saying it takes 18 months to replace easy-to-pick \$172 locks on the doors of motormen's booths on the city's Broad Street Subway.

Those locks became a point of heated debate last week after the death of Kyle Harris, a 12-year-old from North Philadelphia who somehow entered a motorman's booth during a ride home on July 11 and was killed when he stuck his head out the window of the moving train.

The ensuing controversy has put SEPTA and the company hired to replace the locks at odds.

SEPTA says James L. Howard & Co. declined its repeated requests last week to speed up the lock replacement.

Fred Rotondo, vice president of the Bloomfield, Conn., company, on Thursday claimed he knew nothing about the problem.

That drew a quick rebuke Friday from SEPTA spokesman Richard Maloney. "We had several conversations with him over the course of the past week asking if the process could be expedited," Maloney said. "We offered to pay a premium price on it."

Rotondo and other company officials did not return messages left for them at their homes and office. The company today starts its annual two-week vacation, which will further delay changing the locks. SEPTA has known since 1999 that the 165 locks on the Broad Street line were easy to pick.

It started switching them in September and hopes to finish by February. The \$172 locks will cost SEPTA \$28,487.

Maloney said the job of making the new locks, which were originally manufactured by James L. Howard & Co. and have 30 to 40 moving parts, can't be handed off to another company for faster servicing.

"It would be virtually impossible to find any other company that could replace these any faster because of the unique design that this company has in making these locks," Maloney said.

He also said it is unfair to compare the pace of the lock changeover to the replacement of the R5 Regional Rail line bridge in Fort Washington that was washed out last month during Tropical Storm Allison.

"They're completely different subjects," he said.

SEPTA proudly said on Friday that 114-foot bridge "was completed in only 35 days, more than a week ahead of schedule."

[Tom Kline](#), an attorney hired by Kyle's family, said SEPTA's statements about its concern for safety with the locks should be equally backed with quick action.

"If SEPTA means what they say, then they'll fix the locks in 35 days," Kline said. "If you can build a bridge in 35 days, you can fix the locks on the doors in 35 days."*