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## LATEST NEWS

# WVU supply chain expert breaks down the commerce implications of the Baltimore bridge disaster

March 28, 2024 5:16 pm by Jim Bissett, The Dominion Post

**W**hat does the collapse of a bridge in Maryland have to do with a coal mine in West Virginia? More than you might realize, a WVU supply chain expert said Thursday.

John Saldanha, who is the Sears Chair in Global Supply Chain Management in the university's John Chambers College of Business and Economics, has been doing some deconstruction, as it were – in the wake of Tuesday's cataclysmic collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore.

Said bridge, which spanned the Port of Baltimore, was brought down Tuesday, just seconds after it was struck by a fully laden cargo ship that had experienced a total power failure.

The port is a major thoroughfare for commerce.

Besides all those ships steaming underneath, the bridge carried 30,000 vehicles a day, with the sizable bulk of that traffic coming in the form of tractor-trailers delivering a full range of products.

With volumes like that, a destroyed bridge can't help but make for delivery delays.

And that might mean waves of implications for West Virginia-produced coal and the utilities that depend on it.

"In the case of both container-shipping and automobiles headed for car dealerships in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, there may be minor inconveniences and cost increases," Saldanha said.

"On the other hand, regional coal producers in the Mid-Atlantic, including West Virginia, that export to the Port of Baltimore, will face significant disruptions."

That's because the Maryland city's principle aquatic avenue is second in the U.S. in exports of coal, he said.

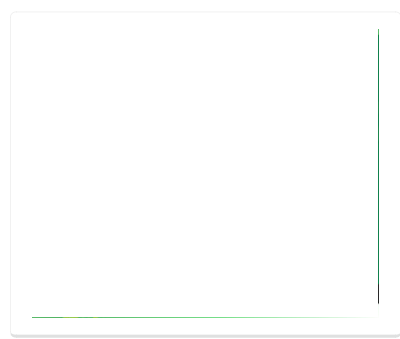
For now, operators will have to truck their coal by way of Norfolk, Va., and other circuitous surface routes – opposed to simply bisecting the bay – until the span is rebuilt.

While the transportation situation is daunting right now, it's still also doable, the professor said.

That's because of infrastructure pragmatics and dynamics, he said, not to mention lessons learned from COVID.

In this product instance, the business professor said, smaller might be better.

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**MORGANTOWN WEATHER** **50°F**  
 moderate rain

Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
64°F 39°F	41°F 37°F	41°F 32°F	43°F 32°F	55°F 34°F	66°F 43°F	72°F 50°F

“Baltimore is a relatively small port for container shipping – only a quarter of the size of the Port of New York and New Jersey,” he said.

“That is fortunate,” Saldanha said, “because as we all witnessed when the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach could not keep up with the volume of imports during the pandemic, container shipping is one of the key drivers of the U.S. economy.”

A smaller port means less ships, the professor said, which can be diverted to neighboring ports along the Eastern Seaboard that can accommodate the added traffic before the summer shipping peak.

Meanwhile, the Francis Scott Key Bridge remains one over – and in – troubled water.

Eight workers on a crew repairing potholes on the bridge at the time of the collision and collapse early Tuesday morning also went into the water.

Two were rescued and the bodies of two others were recovered. The remaining four are still missing and presumed dead, according to authorities.

The vessel, the Dali, was also carrying 56 containers of hazardous materials, including corrosives, flammables and lithium batteries, authorities said – with a sheen on the water suggesting that some of those containers were breached.

Right now, however, officials said, the compromised cargo doesn’t appear to be a biological threat to residents nearby or salvage workers.

Meanwhile, the Dali cleared a U.S. Coast Guard inspection in September and the 47-year-old Francis Scott Key Bridge was deemed to be in “fair condition” after a once-over by federal inspectors last June.

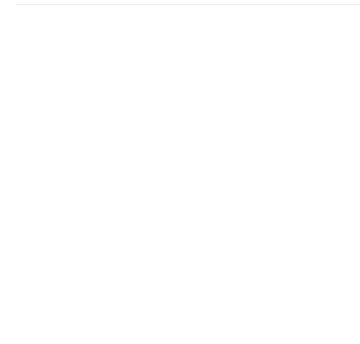
Following the collapse, though, some safety professionals said the bridge didn’t have the pier support or other in-place safety measures to ever withstand the impact of a collision from a ship that size.



**Author: Jim Bissett, The Dominion Post**



**WVU Medicine Video**

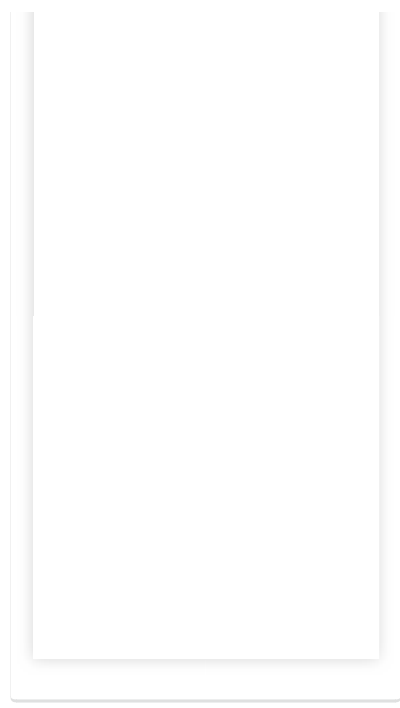


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