Engineer warned of Florida bridge crack

Crushed cars lie under a section of the collapsed pedestrian bridge near Florida International University in the Miami area.

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Florida’s Department of Transportation says an engineer left a voicemail two days before a catastrophic bridge failure to say some cracking had been found at one of the concrete spans.

However, the agency says the voicemail left on a landline wasn’t heard by a state government DOT employee until Friday local time, a day after the bridge collapsed, because the employee was out of the office on an assignment.

The pedestrian bridge at Florida International University collapsed on Thursday, killing at least six people. Authorities are slowly removing the debris, looking for more victims.

Authorities say there could be more fatalities beyond the six deaths already confirmed in Miami.
In a transcript of the voicemail released on Friday night, Denney Pate with construction company FIGG Bridge Group says the cracking would need repairs “but from a safety perspective we don’t see that there’s any issue there so we’re not concerned about it from that perspective”.

The construction company involved in this week’s fatal bridge collapse in Florida was accused previously by a subcontractor of failing to properly design a bridge construction system after an accident in Virginia.
The allegations were made in a lawsuit that was later settled. A confidentiality agreement bars the release of details.

The lawsuit stemmed from FIGG Bridge Group’s building of the Southern Norfolk Jordan Bridge in 2012. During construction in Chesapeake, a 90-tonne segment fell onto railroad tracks below.

The railway sued. FIGG and a subcontractor, Lane Construction Corporation, argued over responsibility.

Lane claimed FIGG failed to properly design the bridge’s construction system. FIGG claimed Lane was in charge of installing the segment.

The company also designed the new Interstate 35W bridge in Minnesota, after the old span collapsed more than 10 years ago.
In 2007, the Interstate 35W bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, killing 13 people and injuring 145. After that tragedy, FIGG was selected to design the replacement bridge that’s currently in use.

Miami-Dade Police Director Juan Perez told reporters on Friday he expected additional victims to be found as the massive concrete structure is removed. Mr Perez also said the main priority was getting to the victims in crushed vehicles under the rubble as quickly as possible.

Authorities also said one victim is confirmed to be an FIU student. No identities of those killed have been released.

The National Transportation Safety Board is at the site to investigate what caused the bridge to collapse on Thursday afternoon.

Ten people were also injured when the 950-tonne span pancaked onto a six-lane road.

Miami-Dade County Fire Chief Dave Downey said on Thursday night that his crew was using hi-tech listening devices, trained sniffing dogs and search cameras in a race to find anyone still alive in the rubble.

A worker uses a saw next to a crushed car under a section of the collapsed pedestrian bridge.

The $US14.2 million ($18.4m) pedestrian bridge was supposed to open in 2019 as a safe way for students to cross the busy road. It linked the
community of Sweetwater with the campus of Florida International University.

Aerial footage at the site showed a trained dog running atop fallen concrete and sniffing in the crevices for any victims.