

Bridge only inspected once, TIPC says

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Taiwan International Ports Corp chairman Wu Chung-rung, center, reacts as Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-lung, left, speaks at a question-and-answer session at the legislature in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Peter Lo, Taipei Times

The Nanfangao Bridge (南港高橋) in Yilan County's Suao Township (蘇澳), which collapsed on Tuesday, was only inspected once — by the county government — in the 21 years it was open, said Taiwan International Ports Corp (TIPC) chairman Wu Chung-rung (吳中興), whose resignation was provisionally accepted yesterday.

After construction of the bridge was completed in 1998, it was turned over to the Keelung Port Bureau — the predecessor of the TIPC's Port of Keelung — Wu told the Legislative Yuan's Transportation Committee in Taipei.

State-run TIPC was created in 2012, but since then the bridge was only inspected “that one time” by Taoyuan's Chien Hsin University of Science and Technology, he said, referring to an inspection commissioned by the Yilan County Government and carried out by the university in 2016.

Of the 17 bridges under the company's jurisdiction, one is the Nanfangao Bridge, three were built last year, five have been inspected and eight have never been inspected, he said.

The company is to inspect the eight bridges, all of which are in central or southern Taiwan, within three months, he said.

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Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-lung (林錫山) said that he had accepted Wu's resignation.

While he has accepted the resignation, the company "has its own administrative procedures that we must also respect," Lin said.

"Right now, our top priority is to ... deal with the aftermath," he said. "No matter what the cause [of the incident] was ... we must express our apologies to the nation's people and take responsibility," he told the committee.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Yeh Yi-jin (葉宜津), who is a convener of the committee, proposed a bureau under the Ministry of Transportation and Communications to integrate the management of Taiwan's bridges.

There are 29,811 bridges in Taiwan — 3,698 managed by the Directorate-General of Highways, 2,753 managed by the Freeway Bureau, 21,526 managed by local governments, 17 managed by TIPC, 1,797 managed by the Taiwan Railways Administration and 20 managed by Taiwan High Speed Rail Corp, Yeh said.

Of the bridges, she is "more concerned" about the 21,526 under the jurisdiction of local governments, Yeh said, describing them as "untimed bombs."

She does not want to see any further bridge incidents resulting in death or injury, she said.

Integration is needed regardless of whether a bridges' bureau is formed, she said.

Lin said the ministry would consider the proposal.

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