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VISITING CAPE COD

Beating the Bourne Bridge: Best Times to Cross to Cape Cod

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



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If you're driving to Cape Cod via I-195 or Route 28 from the south, the Bourne Bridge is your gateway — and in summer, it can be either a smooth five-minute crossing or a 90-minute parking lot depending entirely on when you show up.

This guide covers the actual mechanics of the Bourne Bridge crossing: the rotary at the base, the drawbridge openings, the back-road bypass options, and the exact windows when crossing is painless versus punishing.

How the Bourne Bridge Actually Works

The Bourne Bridge spans the Cape Cod Canal on Route 28 between Buzzards Bay (mainland) and Bourne Village (Cape side). It's a vertical-lift drawbridge, meaning vessel traffic on the Canal can trigger bridge closures — something the Sagamore Bridge, which carries Route 6, does not deal with in the same way.

The approach from the mainland funnels through the **Bourne Rotary**, a traditional rotary intersection where Route 28, Route 25, and MacArthur Boulevard converge. The rotary is the real chokepoint on peak travel days — not the bridge itself.

Key facts: - Route: I-195 East → Route 25 → Bourne Bridge → Route 28 into Bourne Village - Canal crossing length: ~635 feet - Height clearance: 135 feet (for vessels; this triggers lift openings) - The Bourne Rotary is immediately south of the bridge on the mainland side

Best Times to Cross the Bourne Bridge

Arriving on Cape (Southbound — Mainland to Cape)

Optimal windows: - **Early morning: Before 9:00 AM** — Traffic is light, the rotary moves freely, crossing takes under 10 minutes from Exit 2 on Route 25. - **Mid-morning: 9:00–11:00 AM on weekdays** — Still manageable, especially Monday through Thursday. - **After 7:00 PM on Fridays** — The worst of the Friday wave has passed. Wait out dinner if you're leaving from Providence or Boston.

Avoid: - **Friday: 1:00–7:00 PM** — Peak arrival window. The rotary backs up onto Route 25. Budget 45–90 minutes of extra time. - **Saturday morning: 9:00 AM–noon** — Weekend arrivals overlap with Saturday day-trippers. - **Holiday weekend Fridays from noon onward** — Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day weekend arrivals are in a category of their own. Plan to arrive Thursday or very early Friday.

The Bourne Rotary: The Real Bottleneck

Most visitors blame the bridge for traffic delays, but the rotary is the actual constraint. The Bourne Rotary is a traditional yield-entry rotary, not a signalized intersection, which means flow depends entirely on gaps in circulating traffic.

On peak Friday afternoons, vehicles queue down the Route 25 offramp and back onto the highway. The bridge itself may be clear while cars sit for 20–40 minutes at the rotary.

Local tip: If you're coming from the south via Route 195 and you see backup on Route 25 before Exit 2, get off at the earlier exit and approach via MacArthur Boulevard (Route 28 connector through Buzzards Bay). It adds a few

minutes of local road driving but bypasses the worst of the rotary backup.

Drawbridge Openings: What You Need to Know

The Bourne Bridge operates as a moveable drawbridge to allow tall vessels to transit the Cape Cod Canal. The Army Corps of Engineers manages the Canal and publishes a vessel transit schedule.

What this means for drivers: - Bridge lifts take approximately 15–20 minutes including approach, lift, transit, and lowering - Openings are most common during daylight hours in summer when recreational boating and commercial barge traffic peaks - You cannot predict an opening from traffic apps — they don't track bridge lifts

If you hit a lift: - The gate arms lower on both sides of the bridge - Traffic backs up rapidly on both approaches - Once the bridge reopens, the queue clears within 10–15 minutes for most cars - There is no alternate route over the Canal at the Bourne end — you wait

The Army Corps publishes a vessel transit schedule at its Cape Cod Canal website. Checking it before a peak-day crossing won't eliminate the risk, but it will tell you if large commercial traffic is expected.

The Sagamore vs. Bourne Decision

If your final destination is in the mid- or Lower Cape (Hyannis, Chatham, Orleans, Provincetown), the **Sagamore Bridge on Route 6** is the faster route regardless of bridge traffic — Route 6 is a limited-access highway that takes you straight across the Cape without a rotary.

The Bourne Bridge makes more sense if: - You're heading to Falmouth, Woods Hole, Mashpee, or Bourne Village - You're catching the Steamship Authority ferry in Woods Hole or Falmouth - Your rental is in the Upper Cape and Route 28 is your most direct approach

For most first-time Cape visitors, the Sagamore is the better choice — see our companion guide: **Beating the Sagamore Bridge: Best Times to Cross to Cape Cod**.

Back-Road Bypass: The Bourne Village Route

If you're already in Buzzards Bay and the rotary is backed up, there's a local option:

1. From MacArthur Boulevard, turn onto **Perry Avenue** or **Main Street in Bourne Village** and approach the bridge from the side streets rather than the rotary.
2. This doesn't eliminate the bridge crossing, but it skips the rotary queue entirely on some days.
3. GPS will not suggest this — locals use it instinctively on bad Fridays.

Note: This only works if you're already off Route 25 and approaching from the Buzzards Bay side. It won't help if you're queued on the highway.

The Railroad Bridge: Not an Option for Cars

The green vertical-lift **Railroad Bridge** nearby is pedestrian and bicycle access only — it connects the Army Corps Canal bike path on both sides. It is not a vehicle crossing and cannot be used as a bypass. It's a beautiful structure worth stopping to see, but don't mistake it for an alternate route.

Worst-Case Scenario: What to Do If You’re Stuck

If you hit the rotary backup on a Friday afternoon and the bridge is also lifting:

1. **Don’t try to U-turn on Route 25** — it’s illegal and dangerous at the exit ramps.
2. **Get off at Exit 2 (Sandwich Road / Bourne)** and wait at a gas station or restaurant in Buzzards Bay. The backup typically clears by 7:00–7:30 PM on Fridays.
3. **Herring Run Recreation Area** off Route 6 near the Bourne Bridge has a picnic area and Canal access — a reasonable place to kill 45 minutes.
4. **Check Google Maps for the Bourne Bridge segment** specifically — when the color shifts from red to orange on the approach, it’s clearing.

Quick Reference: Bourne Bridge Timing

Day	Best Window	Worst Window
Friday	Before 11 AM or after 7 PM	1 PM – 7 PM
Saturday	Before 9 AM or after 6 PM	9 AM – 2 PM
Sunday	Before 8 AM	3 PM – 7 PM (outbound worst)
Weekday	Anytime before 3 PM	4 PM – 6 PM (locals commuting)
Holiday Friday	Before 10 AM only	All afternoon

Times are for the inbound (mainland to Cape) direction. For outbound Sunday traffic, see our guide to [Leaving Cape Cod](#).

Local Knowledge: What Regulars Actually Do

- **Second-home owners** who use this bridge weekly drive through on Thursday evenings (light) or leave before 8 AM Friday.
- **Ferry passengers** heading to Woods Hole allow an extra 45 minutes buffer on summer Fridays — missing your sailing because of the rotary is a real and expensive mistake.
- **Day-trippers** from Providence heading to Falmouth beaches come early (8–9 AM arrival) and leave by 3 PM Sunday to beat the outbound wave.
- **Contractors and tradespeople** working summer jobs on the Cape take MacArthur Boulevard instinctively on any Friday afternoon.

Certified Local Businesses in Bourne

Cape Cod Certified recommends these verified local spots:

- **Cataumet Light Mini Golf** — 4.3★ (302 Google reviews)
- **The Chart Room** — 4.3★ (884 Google reviews)

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