



The Skinnners Falls Bridge, spanning the Delaware River since 1902, has been closed since 2019 due to its deteriorating condition. PennDOT has decided to dismantle the suspension bridge in the coming weeks, before the onset of winter out of concern for public safety. The bridge links River Road in Milanville, Damascus Township, Wayne County, Pennsylvania, with Route 97 in the Town of Cochecton, Sullivan County, New York. The bridge is seen from the Pennsylvania side on Oct. 5, 2024. PETER BECKER/TRI-COUNTY INDEPENDENT

PennDOT: Skinnners Falls Bridge to be dismantled this fall

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USA TODAY NETWORK

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has announced plans to dismantle the historic but deteriorated Skinnners Falls Bridge out of concern for public safety, according to a Nov. 7 press release.

The Upper Delaware Council (UDC) has reported that this is a dismantling as opposed to a demolition, with the aim to potentially rebuild the structure spanning the Upper Delaware River.

The one-lane 1902 suspension bridge has been closed down to all vehicular and pedestrian traffic for five years, awaiting a determination of its ultimate fate. It carries Route 1002 over the Delaware River from Milanville in Wayne County, Pennsylvania, to Skinnners Falls in Sullivan County, New York.

To explain to the public the reasoning behind this action, PennDOT will host a public online meeting on Thursday, Nov. 14, at 2 p.m. Attendees can log into the Microsoft Teams meeting through <https://bit.ly/SkinnersMeeting>. It will be recorded and posted on the PennDOT website.

On Aug. 2, the UDC notified PennDOT that an inspection of the bridge was urgently needed as heavily rusted metal parts had been seen falling into the river. PennDOT announced Aug. 29 that it would be removing loose bridge components, a project that is to continue through this fall.

On Nov. 7, following a recent bridge inspection, PennDOT announced that “out of an abundance of caution,” the bridge “must be dismantled in the interest of public safety, specifically for Delaware River boating and recreational traffic.”

“PennDOT will work with our federal and state agency partners, along with those in New York, to begin dismantling the bridge this calendar year, as it is critical that the bridge be removed before the onset of winter,” the PennDOT announcement reads.

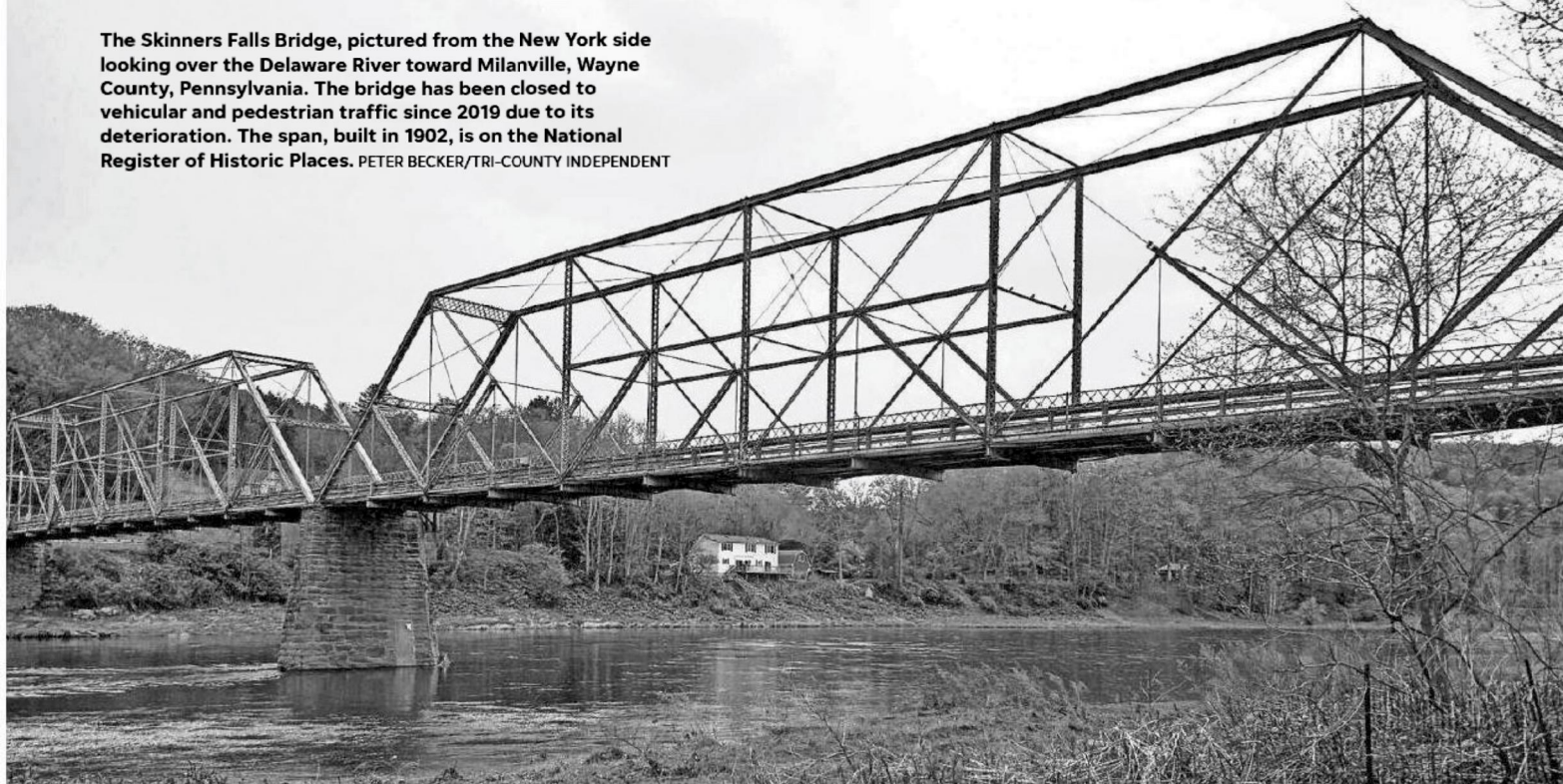
The matter sparked a spirited discussion at the Nov. 7 UDC meeting in Narrowsburg, New York.

UDC Executive Director Laurie Ramie said that the press release was “immediately misinterpreted” because it does not mention what happens after the bridge is removed.

Ramie said Susan Hazleton, assistant district engineer for design at PennDOT, called that morning and shared with the UDC and the National Park Service that “it is indeed supposed to be dismantled but the parts

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The Skinners Falls Bridge, pictured from the New York side looking over the Delaware River toward Milanville, Wayne County, Pennsylvania. The bridge has been closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic since 2019 due to its deterioration. The span, built in 1902, is on the National Register of Historic Places. PETER BECKER/TRI-COUNTY INDEPENDENT



Bridge

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will be saved and catalogued, and stored so that there is still the possibility it could be reassembled and rehabilitated.”

Ramie said that outcome may be a “long shot,” but PennDOT will explain at the virtual meeting what the emergency inspections revealed and what the engineers say. Ramie related from Hazleton that “the urgency is that they are afraid it could collapse into the river before it could be rehabilitated” and the freeze/thaw cycle of winter could make it worse.

Permits from multiple jurisdictions must be obtained, an “Aids to Navigation” plan set and a causeway put into the river, Ramie related. It also may require a substantial conformance review by the UDC to make a recommendation to the NPS, as the state project is within the federally zoned river corridor.

Ramie said that PennDOT also intends to have an in-person meeting before the Damascus Township supervisors at 7 p.m. Nov. 18.

NPS Upper Delaware Superintendent Lindsey Kurnath said that PennDOT wants everything approved so that they can start on Dec. 1. “We’re trying to be good partners. The last thing anybody wants is the bridge to fall down and hurt somebody or be damaged so much it never could go back up,” Kurnath said.

Kurnath said that NPS has a lot of “big questions” to resolve before Dec. 1, connected with what is allowed under the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Act and the bridge’s listing as one of the National Park Service’s “Outstanding and Remarkable Values” that NPS seeks to protect.

She said PennDOT also wants to avoid interrupting the spring river recreation season.

Sundry questions and comments swirled among the UDC representatives. Al Henry, Berlin Township representative, questioned how much it will cost to put back together what he likened to a “big jigsaw puzzle.”

“Once that comes down, you’re never going to see it put together again,” Henry added.

Henry also cautioned disaster could happen if the river ice breaks. “That causeway will be down in Darbytown,” he said, about six miles downstream).

“It’s borderline insane,” said Aaron Robinson, Shohola Township representative. “If you’re going to reassemble it, will you reassemble it with fatigued, rusted, aged steel or are going to duplicate it with new fabrication?”

Ramie said there would likely be a “lot of angry people demanding answers” on the virtual meeting. She expressed thankfulness that PennDOT contacted UDC directly. “We do not want the outcome of the bridge coming down, but we also are cognizant of public safety,” she said.

The bridge had undergone emergency repairs over the previous several years, and its weight limited was lowered twice. Closure of the span cuts off immediate access to emergency services from the New York side as well as use by the public. During these past five years, public meetings and a survey have been conducted by PennDOT. The UDC has strongly advocated to save the bridge, calling for its rehabilitation and preservation of its historic character.

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