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Stabilization and Rehabilitation Recommendations for Skinners Falls Bridge from Wrought Iron Bridge Works

Offered by Damascus Citizens for Sustainability

Enclosed is a package of material from Wrought Iron Bridge Works (“WIBW”) that identifies how the Skinners Falls Bridge can be stabilized in a way that is non-destructive, and less costly than the proposed demolition. WIBW also has the capabilities and expertise to restore the entirety of the Skinners Falls Bridge in phases, which will spread out funding needs and reduce impact on recreation.

WIBW’s team can stabilize the bridge faster than it can be destroyed, meaning that the “emergency” can be dealt with faster with the methods WIBW is proposing.

Why? Because of the techniques WIBW uses, the team does not need to, for instance: get extensive permits for waterway work, or for disturbing freshwater mussels or archeological resources, or otherwise jump through as many regulatory hoops that PennDOT has to because PennDOT is proposing a significant disturbance to the ecological, archeological, and historical resources of the area.

Once stabilization occurs, or even before it is complete, we must have a discussion and commitment to full rehabilitation. Such discussions may include ownership changes that, if the agencies support rehabilitation, may open up funds that are presently either unavailable or not being used.

As it stands, PennDOT’s conduct in circumventing the Section 106 process, and its history of neglect of the Skinners Falls Bridge, threatens to cut *off* funding for the bridge demolition because 54 U.S.C. § 306113 prevents disbursement of federal funds in instances such as these. In addition, PennDOT still has no plan for what will come after demolition, leaving the river communities in danger of being cut off from each other.

PennDOT’s attempt to secure funding to destroy the bridge shows that funding *can* be found – just not through PennDOT’s normal channels.

PennDOT has been applying a modern infrastructure perspective – which the system is designed for, and PennDOT is good at – to this historic bridge. Instead, because this is a historic bridge context, PennDOT needs niche experts like WIBW that have experience with how to correctly evaluate the current condition of the bridge, and to develop strategies to address its specific challenges.



WIBW's recommendations are an attempt to avoid all parties from continuing to butt heads, and instead, provide a path forward for (1) bridge stabilization, (2) a commitment to full rehabilitation, and (3) related support needs – all of which will save public money in the long run, retain tourism, reduce environmental/archeological/historic impact, keep river communities connected, and ensure that the valuable historic resource of the Skinners Falls Bridge remains for future generations.

Mr. Suckewer can and is willing to talk to agencies about WIBW's recommendations and approach, and he already has been. We need those meetings to be arranged and for a holistic solution to be advanced, instead of the continued slog toward demolition that creates more problems than it solves.

Enclosures:

- January 25, 2025 Letter from Wrought Iron Bridge Works (signed by Art Suckewer) re: capabilities and strategy for stabilizing and restoring the Skinners Falls Bridge
- *Via Adobe PDF Portfolio, available here:*
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/2jktawkvs839j9t6k17wp/Portfolio-of-WIBW-Work-and-Credentials.pdf?rlkey=7demiaulv69xurwua1e95mcwu&st=cr4p8rg4&dl=0>
 - Project engineering plan and concluding report for a project (Red Mill Road Bridge, Cambria County, PA) with similar challenges using similar techniques (e.g. use of non-destructive falsework for stabilization instead of large cranes or dynamite)
 - a “Prior Projects” document that shows several projects (before, during, after, today) of significant metalwork restoration.
 - *Note from A. Suckewer: the faded paint is regular DOT spec that tends to fade. WIBW specifies a higher grade of paint for historic truss bridges that exceeds DOT requirements for the metal protection qualities, but also doesn't fade like the DOT spec does. This means that the bridges look nicer for far longer, with less repainting (lower maintenance costs) needed, which keeps the historic attraction “attractive.”*
 - Wilson Bridge rebuild information
 - Short form bios for Jim Barker, P.E. (also technical editor of NPS guidelines on historic covered bridge restoration) and Daniel Kurdziel, P.E.
 - A brochure from their company Kurdziel Barker Bridge Engineering