

# Skidders Falls Bridge PEL Study

## Frequently Asked Questions

### SURVEY

1. **Can the public input to the survey be extended?** The deadline for answering the questions and adding comments to the online survey has been extended to **June 1, 2021**. Please encourage friends and neighbors to complete the survey at <https://bit.ly/SFBsurvey>. Or request a hard copy by calling the project hotline (610) 234-5148.

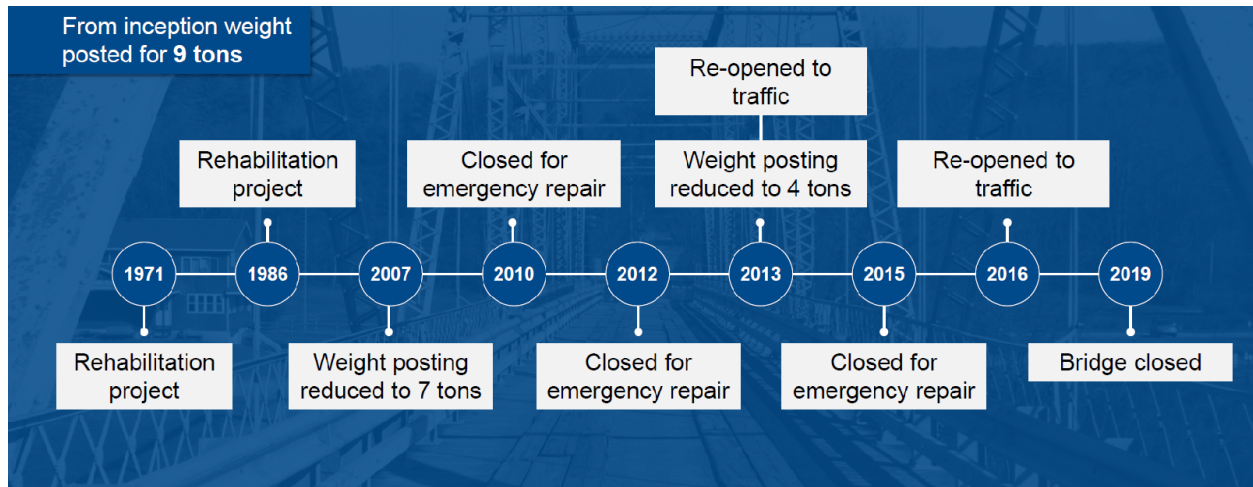
### PEL STUDY AND NEPA

2. **What is a Planning and Environmental Linkages Study?** The Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) process is an approach used to identify transportation issues and environmental concerns, which can be applied to make planning decisions. For Skidders Falls, a PEL study allows PennDOT to conduct early research and analyses that can be used to inform the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. All Federal Agencies must comply with NEPA when undertaking a federally funded action. These planning studies will inform the NEPA process.
3. **How will the PEL Study be used in determining the future of the Skidders Falls Bridge?** The Skidders Falls Bridge PEL Study is conducting stakeholder and community outreach as well as performing data analysis to identify local transportation needs. The final product will be development of a defined “transportation purpose and need” that can be used to move forward with the Skidders Falls Bridge Project and inform the NEPA process.
4. **What is a Transportation Purpose?** The purpose statement is comprised of one or two sentences that articulate a project’s primary objective(s). The purpose is not a solution, but the reason why an agency is proposing a certain project, and what it plans to accomplish with the project.
5. **What is a Transportation Need?** The transportation need describes the key problem or problems and the cause of those problems. Project needs are based on technical information and analyses, such as measures of traffic flow, congestion and travel demand. The transportation need is the background to justify the public use of the funds for transportation repairs or improvements.
6. **What happens after the PEL Study is complete?** PennDOT will use the transportation purpose and need developed in the PEL Study to identify and analyze potential alternatives to meet the transportation needs. The alternatives analysis will be conducted in accordance with Federal regulations in NEPA. NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of their proposed actions prior to making decisions.

Under NEPA, a range of reasonable alternatives will be considered based on the defined purpose and need. The analysis will identify the anticipated impacts of each potential alternative, including social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts. It will also consider appropriate mitigation of identified impacts. The process will include interagency coordination and consultation and ongoing public involvement, including opportunities to participate and comment.

## **BRIDGE USE AND TRAFFIC VOLUMES**

7. **Why is the bridge closed now?** A Customer complaint and subsequent District Bridge Unit inspection on October 16, 2019 identified timber deck and lateral truss bracing deterioration requiring the bridge be closed.
8. **It seems like PennDOT had delayed maintenance on the bridge in order to justify removing it. Why?** As demonstrated by the below graphic, PennDOT has provided regularly scheduled maintenance and rehabilitative efforts for the structure. In addition to regular maintenance, PennDOT has performed inspections of the structure every 6 months since 2013 to monitor the condition of the bridge and ensure public safety.



9. **What was the traffic count on the bridge before it was closed?** Based upon recent traffic counts on both the Pennsylvania and New York side of the bridge, approximately 400 vehicles a day used the bridge when it was open.
10. **We only need the bridge for personal vehicles and ambulances. We have no need for larger trucks on a one-lane bridge. Why are they being included in the discussion?** We are currently evaluating past traffic data, inviting public feedback, and gathering input from the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), the National Park Service (NPS) and Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers which will all be used to determine what types of vehicles used the bridge in the past and the type of vehicles that may need to use the bridge in the future. This data will inform the purpose and need.

Past counts taken between 1998 and 2017 demonstrate that larger vehicles and trucks – up to 40 tons – were crossing the bridge. This is above the weight postings on the bridge which was reduced to 4 tons in 2013. The “headache” bars were installed in 2016 to restrict the size of vehicles using the bridge. However, the bars have been repeatedly vandalized to allow trucks larger than the posted weight limit to continue to utilize the bridge. The chart below summarizes the traffic count findings including those exceeding the posted weight limit.

Year	Volume	Volume of Vehicles > 10 Ton	Volume of Heaviest Truck Counted
July 27, 2017	379	13	13 (2-axle w/ 6 tires) 8+ tons
July 18, 2012	384	29	1 (4-axle) 30+ tons
September 6, 2007	412	39	3 (5-axle semi) 40+ tons
September 10, 2002	368	37	3 (5-axle semi) 40+ tons
July 15, 1998	913	83	7 (5-axle semi) 40+ tons

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

- 11. Is the Skinners Falls Bridge listed in the National Register of Historic Places?** Yes, the Skinners Falls Bridge and the Milanville Historic District are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- 12. What protections are afforded to resources in the National Register?** A listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) requires that federal agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), consider the effects of their undertakings on properties that are listed or eligible for listing in accordance with [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](#). The Section 106 process also provides for the solicitation and participation of [those interested](#) in the effect of the project on historic properties. Projects funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation that affect NRHP properties are also subject to [Section 4\(f\) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act](#). Section 4(f) requires FHWA to analyze project alternatives to determine if there is a prudent and feasible alternative that avoids the use of historic properties (as well as other Section 4(f) resources). As noted, the documented historic properties within the PEL Study area are the Skinners Falls Bridge and the Milanville Historic District, which encompasses the bridge, including it as a contributing resource. Potential impacts to historic resources will be considered during the Section 106 process.
- 13. Is the Skinners Falls Bridge a National Historic Landmark?** No, the Skinners Falls Bridge is not a National Historic Landmark.
- 14. What is the difference between a structure in the National Register of Historic Places and a structure designated a National Historic Landmark?** National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) are places of national significance, designated as such by the National Park Service (NPS). For example, as the oldest cable suspension bridge in the United States, the Roebling Aqueduct has been designated an NHL. The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) recognizes historic properties of national, statewide, regional, and local significance. Anyone can nominate a resource for inclusion on the NRHP. Coordination regarding the effects of federally funded projects on NRHP resources follows the Section 106 process. For federally funded projects that may have an effect on an NHL, the federal agency is required to minimize impacts to the historic property, and coordinate with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Secretary of the Interior if adverse effects cannot be avoided. The Skinners Falls Bridge is in the NRHP, but is not an NHL.
- 15. If I am interested in the historic significance of the Skinners Falls Bridge, how can I have my thoughts and opinions included?** Organizations or individuals with a demonstrated interest in the Skinners Falls Bridge project, such as local governments, property owners, historical societies, and preservation organizations, may request to become a Section 106 consulting party member via PennDOT's cultural resources public consultation web site [PATH \(Pennsylvania Transportation and](#)

[Heritage](#) . Consultation is built upon the exchange of ideas and does not mandate a specific outcome for NRHP resources. Rather, it is the process of seeking views on the project's effect on historic properties and, if adverse effects cannot be avoided, how those effects should be resolved through minimization and/or mitigation. The [PATH](#) website also has information on how to become a consulting party along with information pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of a consulting party.

**16. Why doesn't the PEL Study survey include questions related to the historic character of the Skinners Falls Bridge?** The purpose of the PEL Study is to determine the transportation purpose and need for the bridge. The survey questions are focused on how the bridge was used in the past and anticipated transportation needs in the future. The historic, scenic, and cultural nature of the bridge will be factors in the environmental analysis conducted under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

**17. PennDOT completed the Historic Truss Bridge Management Plan in 2017. Was the Skinners Falls Bridge considered by the plan?** The Historic Truss Bridge Management Plan was developed as a planning tool to examine which National Register-eligible/-listed metal trusses were likely able to be rehabilitated to meet transportation needs while retaining the character-defining features making them significant. PennDOT assigned a preservation priority to each bridge in the plan – moderate, high, or exceptional – and developed assessments analyzing if the bridge may be rehabilitated to carry 15 tons while keeping its integrity of materials, design, and workmanship. Bridges that were part of active, programmed projects, such as Skinners Falls, were not included in the plan.