

Bascule Bridges



Photo 5-65. Ortega River Bridge, Duval County (No. 720005)

Ortega River Bridge

Duval County

FDOT #720005, 8DU11167

The Ortega River Bridge consists of 27 concrete girder spans joined to a double-leaf, rolling lift bascule main span operated by an electric motor. Crossing the Ortega River, sometimes referred to as McGirts Creek, the 1,143-foot-long structure replaced a wooden bridge in the 1920s. Bentley and Sons Construction Company of Ohio built the structure between 1924 and 1927, with the rolling lift span supplied by the American Bascule Bridge Company of Pensacola. High tides and difficult working conditions contributed to a long construction period. The Ortega River Bridge opened to traffic in early 1927.

On July 1, 1929, the City of Jacksonville accepted the bridge as a "gift" from the Duval Board of County Commissioners.

The Ortega River Bridge is the largest of a group of six bridges that were designed by the Duval County bridge engineer T.B. Carrick during the Florida Boom period in the 1920s.¹³⁰ It was designed to provide better access to the southern suburbs of Jacksonville, such as Ortega and Venetia. Although it utilizes standard concrete girder spans, the bridge possesses interesting architectural details. Each panel in the concrete railing features two stylized Maltese crosses (**Photo 5-67**). The railings themselves extend outward along the bridge on cantilevered floor beams that support the deck. Ornamental sentry booths with pyramidal roofs stand at each entrance and at each corner of the bascule span, one of which serves as the tender station.



Photo 5-66. Detail of Maltese Cross Motif.

In 1978, this bridge underwent minor alterations including rehabilitation of the machinery, the renovation of the tender station, and replacement of its grating. However, the bridge continues to maintain a high level of integrity and has undergone further rehabilitation work aimed at the restoration of its principal historical features. Despite these alterations, the Ortega River Bascule Bridge retains its integrity. It was determined eligible for listing in the NRHP by the Florida SHPO in 1995. It is significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its role in the development of the City of Jacksonville. The bridge is located adjacent to the NRHP-listed Old Ortega Historic District. It is also eligible under Criterion C in the area of Engineering as it embodies the distinguishing engineering characteristics of a mid-twentieth century rolling lift bascule design, a design historically significant for its

¹³⁰ Stevenson, Linda, Bridges on Old Kings Highway, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1993.

associations with William Scherzer. It is further distinguished in the area of Architecture/Aesthetics for its historical associations with notable bridge engineer T.B. Carrick, whose trademark was the Maltese cross design. It is the largest of the six Carrick-designed bridges. Its age, design, and role in the development of Jacksonville contribute to its importance.

Bridge of Lions

SR-A1A over Matanzas River
St. Johns County
FDOT #780074, 8SJ2460

As one of Florida's best known bridges, often used to advertise the state to tourists, the Bridge of Lions is one of the most highly visible and distinctive bridges. The historical value of the Bridge of Lions has been recognized by its listing in the NRHP in 1982. Also known as the Matanzas River Highway Bridge, it consists of 23 approach spans and an 87-foot, double-leaf, rolling lift bascule main span. The bridge totals 1,538 feet in length and carries SR-A1A over the Matanzas River, or the Intracoastal Waterway, to link St. Augustine with Anastasia Island.



Photo 5-67. Bridge of Lions, St. Johns County (No. 780074)

Architectural qualities were emphasized in all parts of the bridge design, from the graceful steel arched-girder approaches to the features meant to beautify the superstructure. The reinforced concrete roadway is lined by a classically-styled concrete railing that uses urn-shaped balusters set in panels. At the ends of the panels stand short, square columns that project above the railing. These columns serve as end posts for the balustrade, delineate the concrete piers, and support ornamental lampposts. The most prominent features on the structure are four towers, one used as a control house, that mark the corners of the bascule span. The towers reflect a Mediterranean Revival style through their octagonal shape and tiled roofs. Two large Carrera marble lions, donated by a local citizen, guard the west end and account for the more popular Bridge of Lions name.

Discussions began as early as 1917 on the need to replace an 1895 wooden bridge located on the site. Greater urgency for the project came with the booming expansion of Florida in the 1920s, when St. Augustine hoped to share in the rising tourist trade and the new resort industry, particularly with the development of Davis Shores on Anastasia Island. In 1925, the public approved building a bridge that could fit the historical character of St. Augustine, but also provide downtown with a new centerpiece and a modern transportation facility. The project, undergoing changes during construction, cost \$1,008,735, an enormous expense for a small community.

The highly regarded engineering firm of J. E. Greiner in Baltimore provided plans for the structure, designed to serve both promotional needs and artistic purposes. The city awarded the construction contract to the P. T. Cox Company of New York City, who selected the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company to fabricate and install the rolling lift bascule. Construction was completed in February 1927 after 21 months, which included the challenge of placing the timber pile supports in the Matanzas River. The "million dollar bridge" almost at once became a prominent local landmark and a new symbol for the "oldest city."