



Why Preserve the Lake Champlain Bridge?

The Champlain Bridge is the most significant work of bridge engineering in the Adirondack-Lake Champlain region and it should be preserved and rehabilitated. The rehabilitation alternative is also the least costly, would result in minimal disruption in traffic during reconstruction, could be brought to completion the quickest of any alternative, and is consistent with New York State's policies regarding the preservation of its engineering legacy.

Rehabilitation preserves an important historic structure

The Champlain Bridge is a nationally significant engineering landmark, which extends more than 2,186 feet across a narrow reach of Lake Champlain, between Crown Point, New York, and Chimney Point, Vermont. The Lake Champlain Bridge Commission was created to design, build, and manage the bridge and, to their credit, the commission asked its engineers to develop an aesthetically appropriate design for the bridge, one that would complement the area's remarkable

setting. Fay, Spofford and Thorndike met the challenge admirably and produced one of the country's most inventive and sophisticated designs of the 1920s. The crossing served as a prototype for adapting continuous truss technology, developed for railroads during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to long-span highway bridges in America during an era of increasing automobile travel. The result is a bridge that incorporates structural efficiency, increased rigidity, economy of materials, cost-saving construction methods, and aesthetic appearance at scenic locales beset by automobile traffic. In particular, the Champlain Bridge is the first American bridge to employ a continuous truss that swings gracefully from its Warren deck-truss approach spans to a channel-span through truss with curving upper and lower chords. This very successful design was quickly copied at other important crossings, and Fay, Spofford and Thorndike immediately joined the ranks of America's most innovative engineering firms.

Built as a link between northern New York and New England, the bridge opened with celebratory fanfare on August 26, 1929, establishing a new route linking New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine for the growing legions of America's automobile travelers. The bridge has been determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and formal nomination to the National Register, and as a National Historic Landmark, is underway.

Rehabilitation preserves an important regional landmark.

The Champlain Bridge is also an important regional landmark. It is a beautiful and highly visible structure and its image is used in numerous tourism publications, in other written materials, and within regular television broadcasts. When the bridge opened in 1929, it was hailed as the "New Gateway between the Adirondacks and Green Mountains" and, since then, it has continued to be a key transportation link in the region and a symbol of the region's vibrant tourism economy and high aspirations. It is anticipated that the bridge and the adjoining Champlain Lighthouse will be key visual elements in nationally promoting *Celebration Champlain* in 2009, the 400th anniversary celebration of Samuel de Champlain's first visit to the lake. It is hard to believe that any new bridge in this location (Corten steel, earth-filled approaches) could be designed to even remotely achieve the same kind of aesthetic appeal.



Rehabilitation would allow the bridge to be open to traffic during most of the construction period.

An initial assessment of how such a rehabilitation project might proceed indicates that, for much of the project, the bridge could remain open, at least to one lane of traffic. This would minimize the disruption of traffic between New York and Vermont and would ensure that the bridge's important transportation and economic link remain in place.

Rehabilitation is the most economical solution.

Initial construction estimates of the various alternatives being explored by the Department of Transportation show that the rehabilitation option is the least expensive of all the alternatives.

Rehabilitation requires the least amount of environmental review and, therefore, would be the quickest solution.

Because the rehabilitation alternative would not disrupt sensitive archeological areas (as would replacement on new alignment) or require the acquisition of new property (like new construction in different location) or require the building of new roads (like new construction in a different location), this alternative would require the least environmental review, the least amount of bureaucratic red tape, and, therefore, would be the quickest alternative to bring to completion.

Rehabilitation and preservation is supported by the language and intent of New York State's *Historic Bridge Management Plan*.

Between 1999 and 2002 the Department of Transportation undertook a major initiative to identify, study, and evaluate the historic bridges in its jurisdiction. The culmination of this work was the preparation of the *Historic Bridge Management Plan* in 2002. The *Plan* states DOT's intention to "provide state-owned historic bridges with the greatest possible chance of survival, consistent with transportation needs. NYSDOT's objectives are two-fold: to promote maintenance and to encourage rehabilitation." Given that the existing bridge appears to meet the future transportation needs of this crossing, it is clear that rehabilitating the bridge is consistent with and actually exemplifies the new state policy regarding the treatment and preservation of its historic bridges. If not here, on what is likely a National Historic Landmark structure, then where? Given the extraordinary historic, engineering, regional, and community significance of this bridge, NYSDOT should not treat this as a business-as-usual project but rather see it for its multi-state significance and bring to the project the resources, engineering talent, and imagination commensurate with its stature.



Adirondack Architectural Heritage is the private non-profit, historic preservation organization for the Adirondack Park with a mission to promote better public understanding, appreciation, and stewardship of the region's built environment through education, technical assistance, partnerships, and advocacy. For more information about AARCH, contact us at: 1790 Main Street, Civic Center, Suite 37, Keeseville, NY 12944 or (518) 834-9328 or by email at steven@arch.org or at www.arch.org.



The Preservation League of New York State is dedicated to the protection of New York's diverse and rich heritage of historic buildings, districts, and landscapes. For more information, see www.preservenys.org or contact them at 44 Central Avenue, Albany, New York 12206-3002 or by phone at 518-462-5658 or 518-462-5684 (FAX) or at info@preservenys.org