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# *Bridge NRHP Eligibility Report*

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*Structure ID:* 142270026501034

*Disposition:* Conversion

*Year Built:* 1938

*Year Rcnst:* 0000

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<b>District:</b>	Austin	<b>Span Type:</b>	Simple Span
<b>County:</b>	Travis	<b>Roadway Type:</b>	Through
<b>Location:</b>	8.1 MI S OF JCT IH 35	<b>Member Type:</b>	Camelback Truss, Polygonal To
<b>Facility Carried:</b>	US-183 EB FRTG RD	<b>Main Span Length:</b>	0200
<b>Feature Crossed:</b>	COLORADO RIVER	<b>Structure Length:</b>	001221
<b>NRHP Det. Date:</b>		<b>Evaluator:</b>	

**Historical Significance:** 1 NR Listed

**NRHP Eligibility Determination Statement:**

This bridge is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This bridge is listed in the On-System Historic Metal Truss Bridge Task Force Report. Please see the Task Force Report for a discussion of recommended options regarding this bridge.

The Montopolis Bridge consists of five 200-foot Parker through truss spans and four 52-foot steel I-beam approach spans. The bridge carries the southbound frontage road of US 183 over the Colorado River in southeast Austin. In addition to serving traffic heading to Lockhart and points southeast on US 183, this crossing also links the Austin area with Bastrop, Smithville and La Grange, as well as Bergstrom Air Force Base, via State Highway (SH) 71 which intersects US 183 south of the river. Although the air force base closed in 1993, the site now serves as the new Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. Located in Central Texas on the eastern edge of the Texas Hill Country, Austin is the state capital and the Travis County seat. The area's economy is based primarily on education, state government, tourism, research and industry.

Texas Highway Department (THD) engineers developed a special design for the bridge's five riveted Parker through truss spans. These spans rest on reinforced concrete piers consisting of battered cylindrical columns in a dumbbell configuration. Arched concrete bents support four steel I-beam approach spans. The bridge's west side features a 5-foot wide pedestrian walkway with decorative steel railing. Six-inch steel H-beams are used for truss railing. A water level gaging station operated by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) is attached to the bridge's south side.

In 1937 and 1938, the Vincennes Steel Corporation built the Montopolis Bridge under contract to THD. From 1962 to 1963, THD undertook a project to turn the Montopolis Bridge into part of a one-way pair by constructing a companion bridge to serve northbound lanes. In 1995, THD constructed a new bridge to serve southbound lanes, employing the original truss bridge on the southbound frontage road. No other major alterations have been performed on the bridge. As such, it retains integrity of design, materials and workmanship. Because the bridge remains in place serving vehicular traffic on a state highway, it also retains integrity of location and association. Although construction of the new bridges has compromised integrity of setting and feeling, the truss bridge retains substantial integrity overall. Although no projects are currently planned for this bridge, its BRINSAP sufficiency rating as of May 1994 is 52.2, making the bridge eligible for rehabilitation, but not replacement, under the federal Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program (HBRRP).

The Montopolis Bridge was built from 1937 to 1938. This custom-designed Parker through truss bridge with five spans and special decorative features is significant under Criterion C for embodying the defining characteristics of a THD truss bridge. As such, it meets National Register Criterion C in the area of Engineering at a state level of significance.

Although it now serves traffic on US 183 (former State Highway 29), the Montopolis Bridge was built to carry State Highway (SH 71) over the Colorado River east of Austin at Montopolis. The village of Montopolis, since absorbed into Austin, was a small settlement southeast of Austin. SH 71 originated in downtown Austin along East 1st Street, now Cesar Chavez Street, paralleling the river for about a mile beyond the city limit before turning south to cross the Colorado River. The route continued southeast

towards the Gulf Coast through Bastrop, La Grange, Columbus and El Campo.

In the early 1940s, the Montopolis Bridge also began serving traffic on SH 29 (now US 183). SH 29, also known as the Middle Buster Highway, originally ran north-to-south through downtown Austin on Guadalupe Street and Congress Avenue, crossing the river at the Congress Avenue Bridge. The route continued south through Lockhart, Luling and Victoria to Port O'Connor on the Gulf Coast. In order to relieve traffic across the Congress Avenue Bridge, the route's river crossing was relocated to the Montopolis Bridge via East 1st Street. A few years later, in 1946, the rest of the route through Austin was relocated east of town to what is now Airport Boulevard, circumventing downtown altogether; the route continued to use the Montopolis Bridge crossing. By 1952, SH 29 had been improved and designated US 183.

The segment of highway in the vicinity of the Montopolis Bridge retained the shared designation SH 71/US 183 until 1974. SH 71 was relocated south of the Colorado River by 1961, but a business loop continued through town on East 7th Street and crossed the river at Montopolis. From about 1942 to 1974, the Montopolis Bridge served on two major routes through Austin. Although the bridge is now part of US 183, it continues to link the downtown area with SH 71 south of the river. This crossing is used by all traffic originating north of the river and heading east towards Bastrop.

THD built the Montopolis Bridge to replace the bridge washed out by a devastating flood in June 1935. As reported in the March 1938 Texas Parade, "It was the last of five bridges washed away by the high waters that caused severe damage to Texas roads and bridges." Regarding the replacement bridge, the article stated:

Julian Montgomery, State Highway Engineer, pointed out that Montopolis bridge is the last high water bridge that will be constructed by the state below the Marshall Ford Dam. The Marshall Ford is the third of a series of dams being constructed in the Colorado watershed above Austin which will adequately control the surging flood waters that battered the old bridge out and sent it whirling downstream. The original bridge, built by Travis County in the late 1880s, consisted of six truss spans of lengths varying between 110 and 280 feet. Texas Highway Department (THD) officials immediately went about planning for a replacement bridge and requested federal emergency relief funds. They also undertook a maintenance project to provide a temporary low water bridge. Although THD considered using a pontoon bridge, the extra cost of having round-the-clock guards to monitor the bridge made this option less desirable. The estimated cost for the temporary structure was \$15,000, of which Travis County paid half.

THD implemented three projects related to the construction of a replacement bridge. The bridge itself was covered by an emergency relief project funded under Section 3 of the Hayden-Cartwright Act of 1934. In addition to extending federal relief funding established under the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Hayden-Cartwright Act provided emergency funds for the repair or reconstruction of highways and bridges on the federal aid system "which have been damaged or destroyed by floods, hurricanes, earthquakes or landslides. . . ." A federal aid project encompassed the construction of a relocated segment of SH 71 extending from the eastern city limits to just past the bridge. THD engineers prepared the plans for these two projects, and because federal funding was involved, Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) engineers reviewed and approved them.

The third project was a state project covering the construction of a link between SH 71 and East 5th street. In a memo dated October 14, 1936, THD engineers informed Gibb Gilchrist, then State Highway Engineer: "The Division Engineer has recommended the construction of a short connection to be undertaken in conjunction with the adjacent 1937 Regular Federal Aid Project on Highway 71 near Montopolis, since considerable farm traffic will utilize 5th Street to reach the Community Market on 6th Street and thus relieve the congestion of traffic on East 1st Street."

Rather than use a standard design, THD bridge engineers developed a special design for the 200-foot riveted Parker through truss spans of the replacement bridge. Nine other Parker truss bridges specially designed by THD survive today. One of these, in Bell County, uses a similar design for its single truss

span (refer to nomination of State Highway 53 Bridge at the Leon River, BL0015-05-060, NRHP 1995). The Montopolis Bridge is one of only two bridges with five truss spans surviving on a Texas state highway. The bridge's six concrete piers, supporting the truss spans, were designed to rest on the uniform shale strata 15 feet below grade.

As part of an effort to improve the aesthetics of bridge design, particularly for structures in or near urban areas, THD bridge engineers incorporated several decorative elements into the design of the Montopolis Bridge. The bridge substructure exhibits arched concrete bents and concrete piers with beveled copings. In addition, decorative steel railing flanks a 5-foot wide pedestrian walkway. The posts are made up of H-beams placed vertically, then cut, bent and welded to form the curved top end of the post. The top handrail consists of 3-inch piping. Below, two rows of channels are placed between the posts, facing down. Small square steel pickets of varying lengths hang from the pipe handrail to fill out the railing. These pickets run through holes in the three rows of steel channels and are welded in place. The result is an elaborate and labor-intensive decorative steel railing. This is the most decorative type of steel railing used on THD bridges. The Montopolis Bridge is one of only three surviving THD truss bridges exhibiting a pedestrian walkway with this type of decorative steel picket railing.

Although the Montopolis Bridge projects were funded from three different sources, the projects were advertised as a group and incorporated into in a single construction contract. They were advertised in Austin, Houston and Dallas newspapers. The Texas Highway Commission held bidding for the three Montopolis Bridge projects in December 1936. After reviewing the 10 bids received, the commission awarded the projects to the low bidder, the Vincennes Steel Corporation of Vincennes, Indiana. Although all 10 bids came in below the THD's preliminary estimate of \$315,000, Vincennes Steel Corporation's bid of just under \$254,000 came to nearly ten percent below that figure.

Work on the bridge began on February 15, 1937. By summer, the project was under investigation for labor violations. The affair began when William Lee, who was employed as a night watchman on the bridge project, complained that he had been promised a salary of \$2.40 per day but only paid \$12 per week. In his July 8 letter to the BPR's District Engineer in Fort Worth, he further stated that the Vincennes Steel Corporation subcontracted the foundation work to the Clarence Jones Construction Company and that the payrolls the subcontractor submitted to the Vincennes Steel Corporation had been falsified.

THD officials dismissed the complaint regarding wages since Lee was paid the minimum rate THD required. However, the allegations about the unauthorized subcontractor and the inaccurate payrolls were a cause for concern. As a result of these allegations, Gibb Gilchrist ordered the THD Division Engineer in Austin to make a complete investigation and report. In his memo dated July 17, 1937, Gilchrist underscored the seriousness of the situation: "It is particularly important that this matter be handled at the earliest possible date since it has come to the attention of the District Office of the Bureau of Public Roads. It not only involves the eligibility of this contractor [Vincennes Steel Corporation] but also the eligibility of Federal funds for payment of future estimates."

In a document dated July 30, 1937, Herbert Eldridge, Acting Bridge Engineer, stated: there remains insufficient evidence to prove the existence of a subcontract for the foundation work. It is my understanding that there is on file a Lease Agreement by the Vincennes [Steel Corporation], General Contractors, with Clarence Jones Construction Company for the leasing of equipment necessary for a sum of \$1.00 and other valuable considerations. There have been three men killed on this project and it is my understanding that no insurance settlements have been made. It is understood that the Insurance Companies claim their policy is with Clarence Jones Construction Company and yet the premium payments have been made by the Vincennes [Steel Corporation].

He went on to state that an affidavit would be furnished declaring that the Clarence Jones Construction Company was not a subcontractor on the project.

A later memorandum regarding the investigation, dated September 2, 1937, states:

It is evident that all labor on these projects have (sic) been paid at least the minimum wage rate specified in the contract and that no sub-contract exists between Vincennes Steel Corporation and Clarence Jones

Construction Company. . . . The only irregularities remaining, which can not be adjusted, are the excessive hours worked by approximately five individuals, employed during the first four months that this job was active. The State has made a rather extensive investigation of these excessive hours and we feel that the men were allowed to work without the knowledge or consent of the Vincennes Steel Corporation and that the company was not guilty of intentional violation of labor provisions.

The bridge was completed on February 11, 1938, at a cost of nearly \$232,000; the federal contribution through the emergency relief program for the construction of the bridge came to just over \$113,000. The THD resident engineer in Austin supervised the construction which was periodically inspected by engineers from THD and BPR. The dedication ceremony was held the day after completion. The March 1938 issue of Texas Parade provided the following description of the event:

Simple, but impressive, ceremonies marked the opening February 12 of the Montopolis Bridge over the Colorado River, a few miles east of Austin. The bridge affords a new high water connection into Austin over the heavily traveled Highway 71, and later will serve also as the Colorado River crossing for Highway 29, the Austin-Lockhart connection that now enters Austin over the Post Road. . . . Louise Davis and Juanita Fae Bailey, representing the two Travis County precincts connected by the bridge, cut orange and white ribbons to formally open the bridge.

Regarding the old bridge, the article stated:

The old Montopolis bridge was erected by Travis County. Immediately after the dedication ceremony, County Judge George Matthews burned the \$14,000 in bonds that represented the final indebtedness on the old structure. The bonds had been retired by the state a few days previously.

In 1962 and 1963, THD responded to increasing traffic volumes on US 183 by constructing a new bridge made up of steel girders and prestressed concrete beams adjacent to the Montopolis Bridge to serve northbound traffic. In 1995, new structures were completed to serve southbound lanes. The truss bridge was retained in place on what became the southbound frontage road, providing access to the Montopolis Road exit. This configuration lightened the traffic burden on the truss bridge, allowing for its preservation in place. Although the construction of the new structures has altered the setting of the truss bridge, as transportation facilities they are compatible with the use of the original bridge and therefore do not significantly compromise its integrity.

#### Bibliography:

Barkley, Mary Starr. History of Travis County and Austin 1839-1899. 2d ed. Austin: Steck Co., 1967.

Texas Highway Department. Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement. Control-Section-Job No. 0265-01-007, located at TxDOT headquarters in Austin.

Texas Highway Department. Project Correspondence Files. Control-Section-Job No. 0265-01-007, located at TxDOT headquarters in Austin.

"On Texas Highways." Texas Parade, March 1938

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Montopolis Bridge

OTHER NAMES/SITE NUMBER: US 183 Bridge at the Colorado River (southbound frontage road);  
TV0265-01-034

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: US 183, 8.1 miles south of junction with I-35

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

CITY OR TOWN: Austin

VICINITY:

STATE: Texas

CODE: TX

COUNTY: Travis

CODE: 453

ZIP CODE: 78767

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

Director of Environmental Affairs, Texas Department of Transportation

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain):

**5. CLASSIFICATION**

**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** public-State

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** structure

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	0	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	1	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** Historic Bridges of Texas, 1866-1945

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** TRANSPORTATION/road-related (vehicular)

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** TRANSPORTATION/road-related (vehicular)

**7. DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Other: Parker through truss bridge

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION substructure: concrete piers and bents  
WALLS N/A  
ROOF N/A  
OTHER superstructure: steel truss

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-1 through 7-4)

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

**CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Engineering

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1937-1938

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1937-1938

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** Bridge Designer: Texas Highway Department  
Truss Fabricator: Vincennes Steel Corporation of Vincennes, Indiana  
Bridge Builder: Vincennes Steel Corporation of Vincennes, Indiana

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-5 through 8-8)

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-9)

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency (*Texas Department of Transportation*)
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	625940	3346500	3	—	—
2	—	—	—	4	—	—

(— see continuation sheet)

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheet 10-9)

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION (see continuation sheet 10-9)

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME/TITLE: text by Regina A. Lauderdale  
graphics by Pat St. George

ORGANIZATION: Texas Historical Commission/  
Texas Department of Transportation

STREET & NUMBER: Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276

CITY OR TOWN: Austin STATE: TX

DATE: April 1995

TELEPHONE: 512/463-6094

ZIP CODE: 78711

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

**PROPERTY OWNER**

NAME Texas Department of Transportation

STREET & NUMBER 125 East 11th Street TELEPHONE 512/416-2606

CITY OR TOWN Austin STATE TX ZIP CODE 78701

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic Bridges of Texas  
Montopolis Bridge  
Travis County, Texas

Section number 7 Page 1

## Description:

The Montopolis Bridge consists of five 200-foot Parker through truss spans and four 52-foot steel I-beam approach spans (see Figure 3). The bridge carries the southbound frontage road of US 183 over the Colorado River in southeast Austin (see Figure 1). In addition to serving traffic heading to Lockhart and points southeast on US 183, this crossing also links the Austin area with Bastrop, Smithville and La Grange, as well as Bergstrom Air Force Base, via State Highway (SH) 71 which intersects US 183 south of the river. Although the air force base closed in 1993, the site will serve as the new Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, currently in the planning stages. In Central Texas on the eastern edge of the Texas Hill Country, Austin is the state capital and the Travis County seat. The area's economy is based primarily on education, state government, tourism, research and industry.

Texas Highway Department (THD) engineers developed a special design for the bridge's five riveted Parker through truss spans. These spans rest on reinforced concrete piers consisting of battered cylindrical columns in a dumbbell configuration (see Photograph 2). The steel I-beam approach spans are supported on a series of arched concrete bents. The bridge's west side features a 5-foot wide pedestrian walkway with decorative steel railing. Six-inch steel H-beams are used for truss railing. A water level gaging station operated by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) is attached to the bridge's south side.

In 1937 and 1938, the Vincennes Steel Corporation built the Montopolis Bridge under contract to THD. From 1962 to 1963, THD undertook a project to turn the Montopolis Bridge into part of a one-way pair by constructing a companion bridge to serve northbound lanes. In 1995, THD constructed a new bridge to serve southbound lanes, employing the original truss bridge on the southbound frontage road (see Photograph 1). No other major alterations have been performed on the bridge. As such, it retains integrity of design, materials and workmanship. Because the bridge remains in place serving vehicular traffic on a state highway, it also retains integrity of location and association. Although construction of the new bridges has compromised integrity of setting and feeling, the truss bridge retains substantial integrity overall. Although no projects are currently planned for this bridge, its BRINSAP sufficiency rating as of May 1994 is 52.2, making the bridge eligible for rehabilitation, but not replacement.

### GENERAL SPECS

TRUSS TYPE:	Parker through
THD STD. DESIGN:	n/a
NO. TRUSS SPANS:	5
TRUSS SPAN LENGTH:	200'
ROADWAY WIDTH:	24'
DECK WIDTH:	25'
APPROACH SPANS:	4 - 52'0" steel I-beam spans
OVERALL LENGTH:	1221'

### SPECIAL FEATURES

BUILDER/DATE PLATE:	no
APPROACH RAILING:	steel
OTHER:	pedestrian walkway with decorative steel railing

### SUPERSTRUCTURE

TRUSS DEPTH:	38'0"
TRUSS PANELS:	8 - 25'0" panels
TOP CHORD & END POSTS:	2 channels w/ cover plate and lacing
BOTTOM CHORD:	2 channels w/ batten plates
VERTICAL POSTS:	2 channels w/ lacing or I-beam
DIAGONAL MEMBERS:	2 angles w/ batten plates or I-beam
DECK TYPE:	concrete

### SUBSTRUCTURE

PIERS/INTERIOR BENTS:	concrete piers and bents
THD STD. DESIGN:	n/a
ABUTMENTS/END BENTS:	concrete end bents
THD STD. DESIGN:	n/a

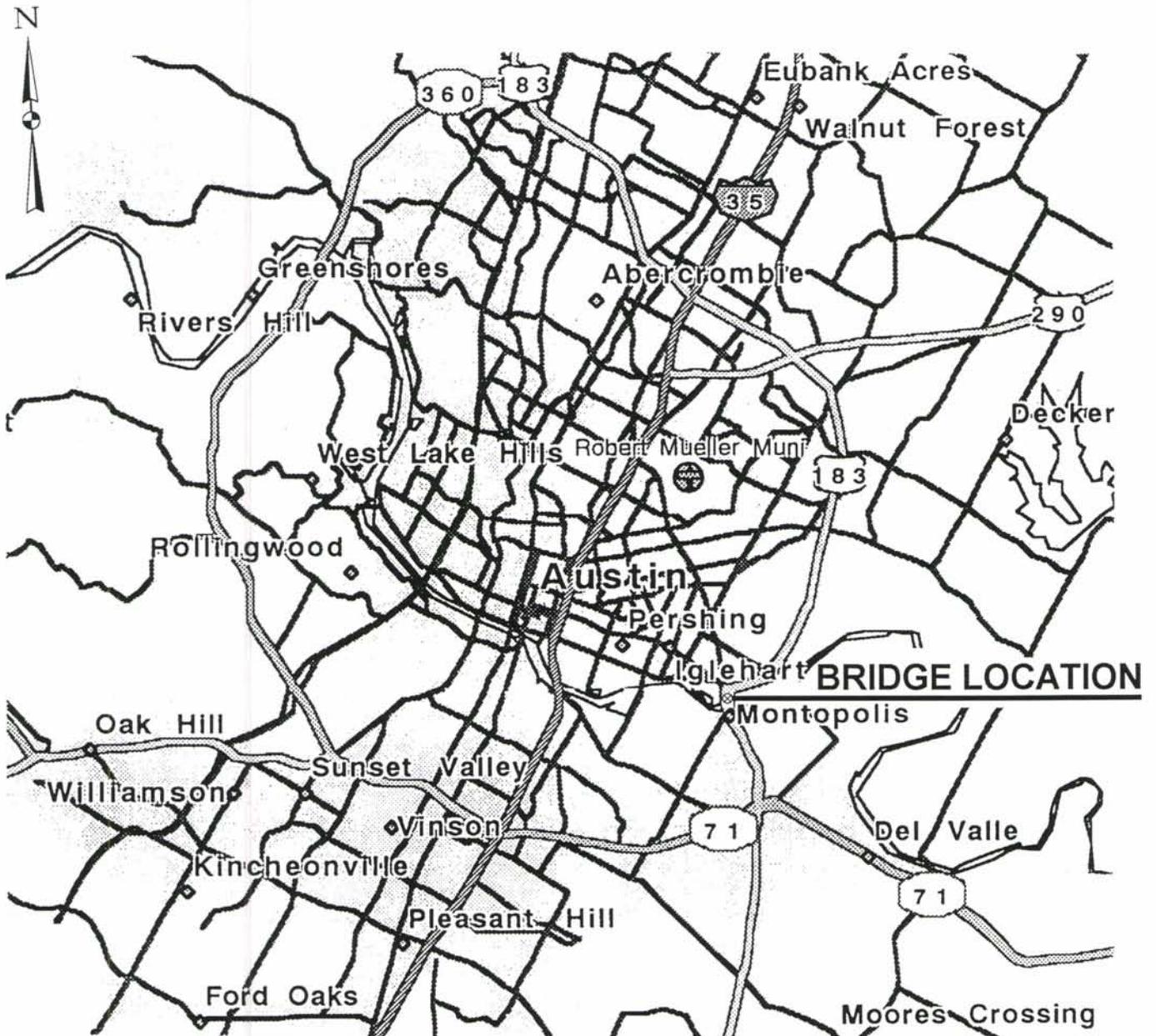
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic Bridges of Texas  
Montopolis Bridge  
Travis County, Texas

Section number 7 Page 2

Figure 1. Current map of the Austin area showing the location of the Montopolis Bridge.



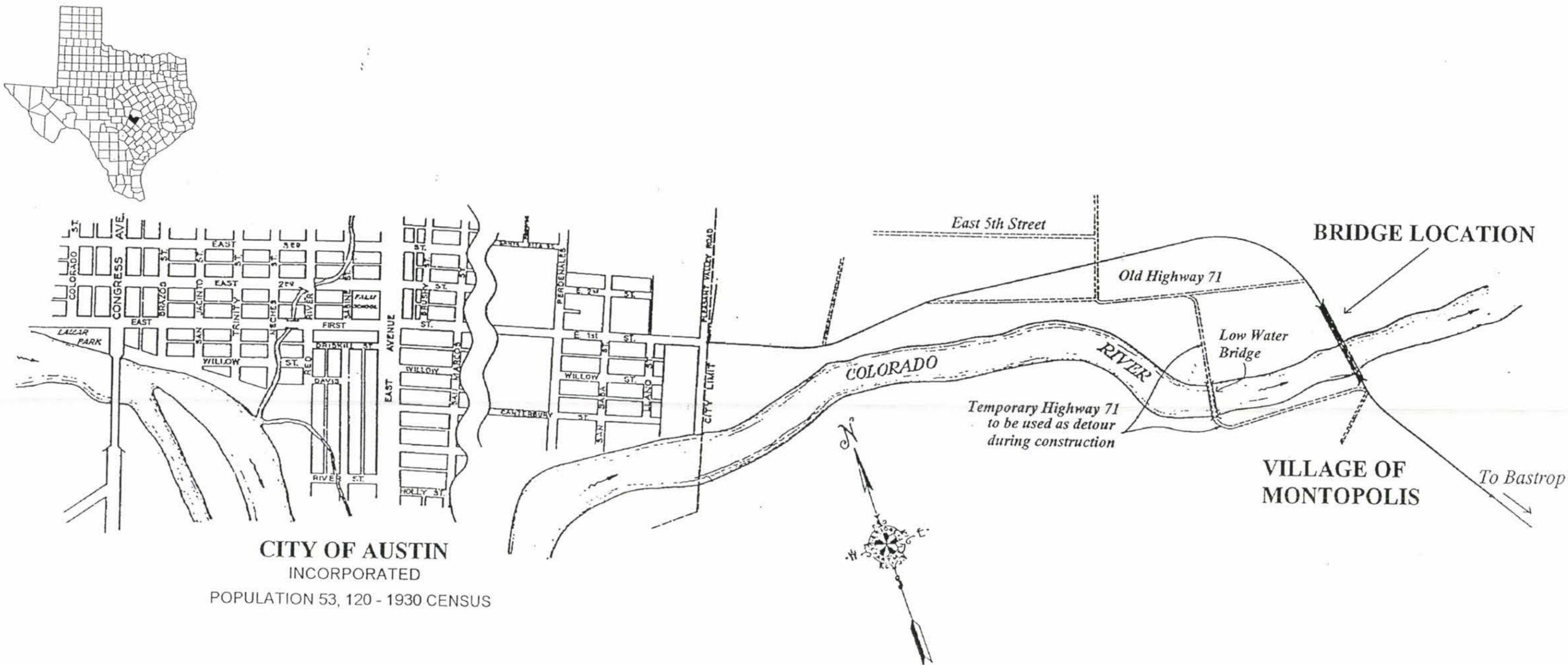
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Historic Bridges of Texas  
Montopolis Bridge  
Travis County, Texas

Figure 2. 1936 Map of Austin and Montopolis showing the location of the Montopolis Bridge.



Source: Texas Highway Department, CSJ 0265-01-007, 1936.

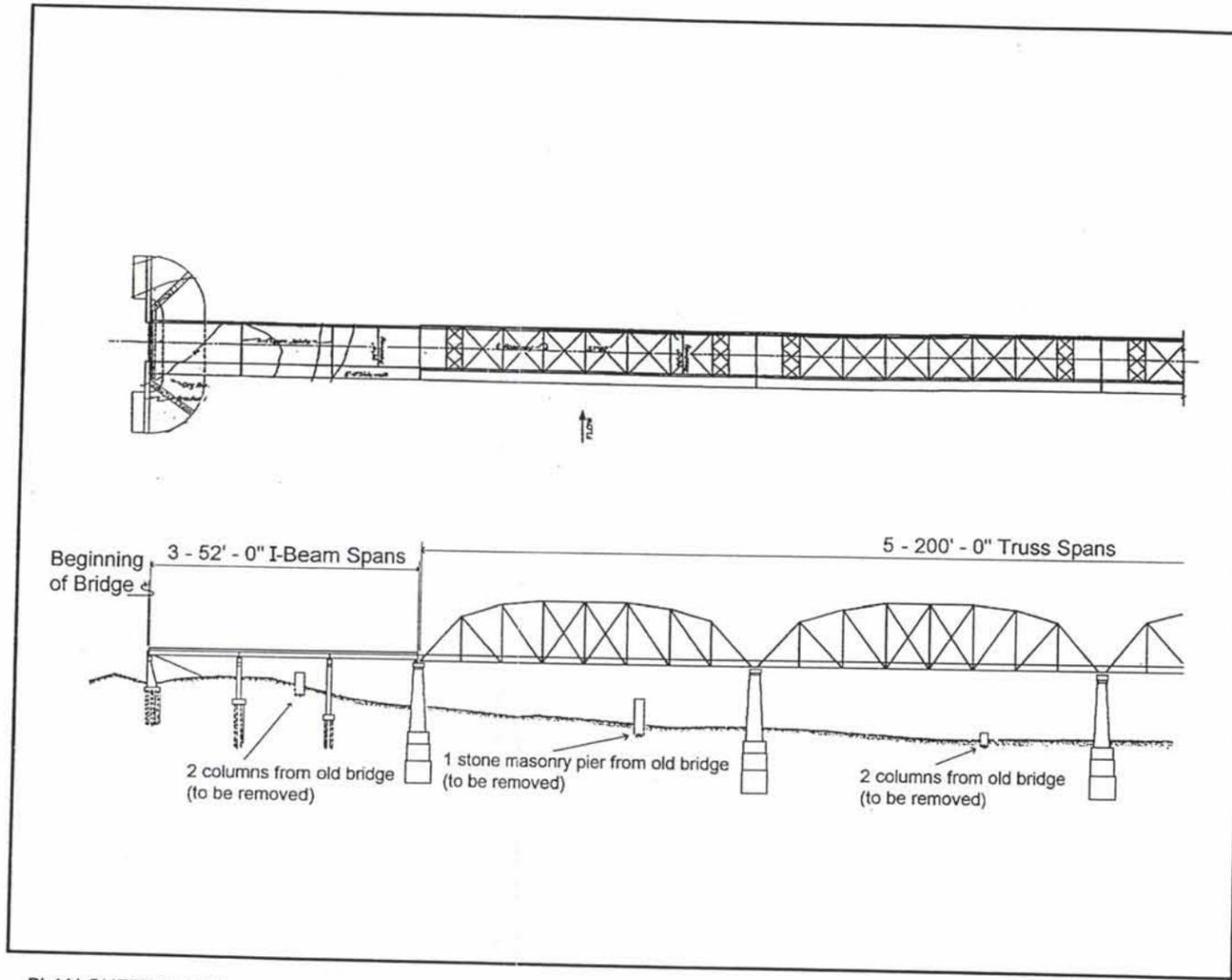
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

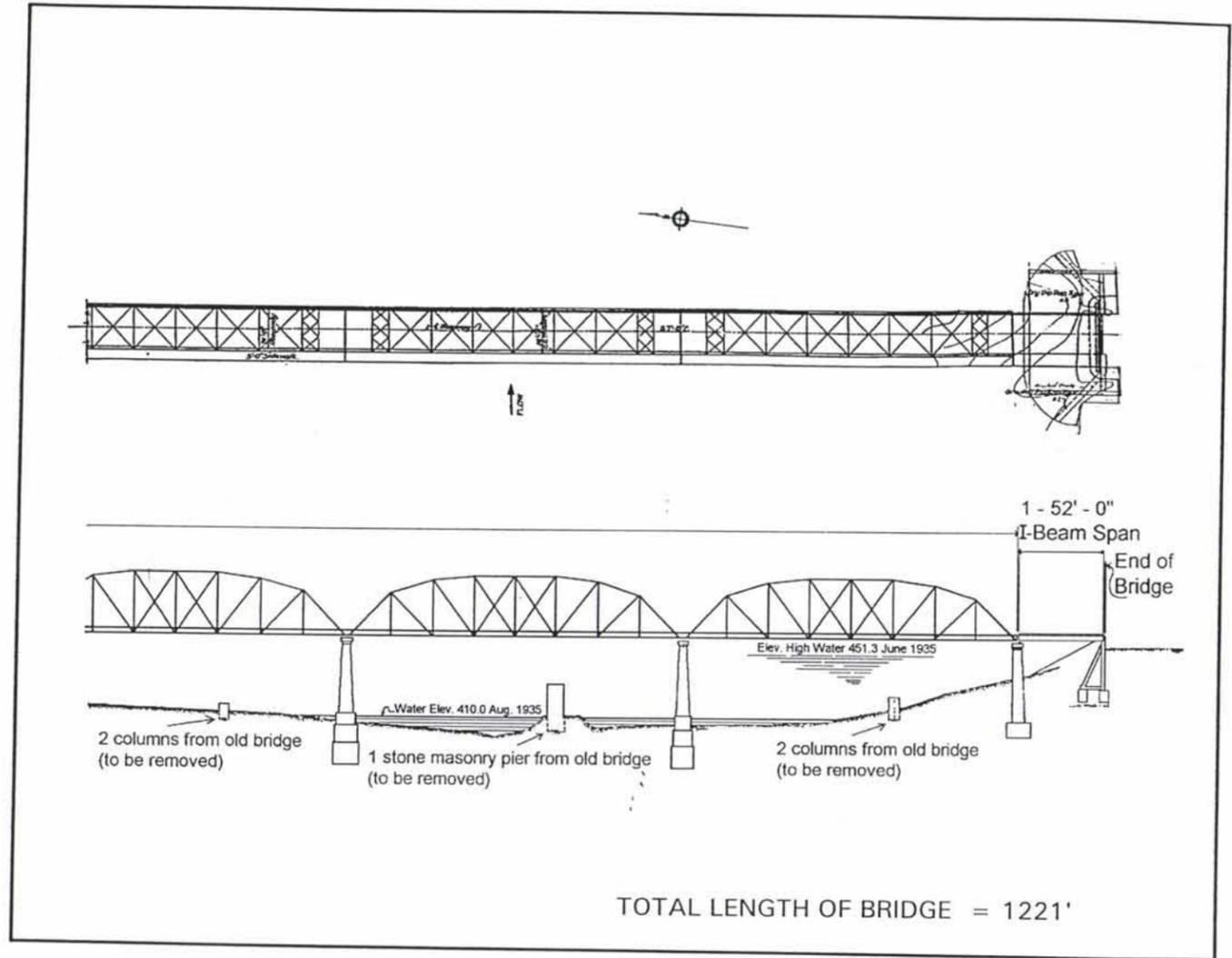
Section number 7 Page 4

Historic Bridges of Texas  
Montopolis Bridge  
Travis County, Texas

Figure 3. Elevation of the Montopolis Bridge as shown in the 1936 plans.



PLAN SHEET 1 OF 2



PLAN SHEET 2 OF 2

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic Bridges of Texas  
Montopolis Bridge  
Travis County, Texas

Section number 8 Page 5

### Statement of Significance:

The Montopolis Bridge was built from 1937 to 1938. This custom-designed Parker through truss bridge with five spans and special decorative features is significant under Criterion C for embodying the defining characteristics of a THD truss bridge. As such, it meets National Register Criterion C in the area of Engineering at a state level of significance.

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic Bridges of Texas  
Montopolis Bridge  
Travis County, Texas

Section number 8 Page 6

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The third project was a state project covering the construction of a link between SH 71 and East 5th street. In a memo dated October 14, 1936, THD engineers informed Gibb Gilchrist, then State Highway Engineer: "The Division Engineer has recommended the construction of a short connection to be undertaken in conjunction with the adjacent 1937 Regular Federal Aid Project on Highway 71 near Montopolis, since considerable farm traffic will utilize 5th Street to reach the Community Market on 6th Street and thus relieve the congestion of traffic on East 1st Street."

Rather than use a standard design, THD bridge engineers developed a special design for the 200-foot riveted Parker through truss spans of the replacement bridge. Nine other Parker truss bridges specially designed by THD survive today. One of these, in Bell County, uses a similar design for its single truss span (refer to nomination of State Highway 53 Bridge at the Leon River, BL0015-05-060, NRHP 1995). The Montopolis Bridge is one of only two bridges with five truss spans surviving on a Texas state highway. The bridge's six concrete piers, supporting the truss spans, were designed to rest on the uniform shale strata 15 feet below grade.

As part of an effort to improve the aesthetics of bridge design, particularly for structures in or near urban areas, THD bridge engineers incorporated several decorative elements into the design of the Montopolis Bridge. The bridge substructure exhibits arched concrete bents and concrete piers with beveled copings. In addition, decorative steel railing flanks a 5-foot wide pedestrian walkway. The posts are made up of H-beams placed vertically, then cut, bent and welded to form the curved top end of the post. The top handrail consists of 3-inch piping. Below, two rows of channels are placed between the posts, facing down. Small square steel pickets of varying lengths hang from the pipe handrail to fill out the railing. These pickets run through holes in the three rows of steel channels and are welded in place. The result is an elaborate and labor-intensive decorative steel railing. This is the most decorative type of steel railing used on THD bridges. The Montopolis Bridge is one of only three surviving THD truss bridges exhibiting

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a pedestrian walkway with this type of decorative steel picket railing.

Although the Montopolis Bridge projects were funded from three different sources, the projects were advertised as a group and incorporated into in a single construction contract. They were advertised in Austin, Houston and Dallas newspapers. The Texas Highway Commission held bidding for the three Montopolis Bridge projects in December 1936. After reviewing the 10 bids received, the commission awarded the projects to the low bidder, the Vincennes Steel Corporation of Vincennes, Indiana. Although all 10 bids came in below the THD's preliminary estimate of \$315,000, Vincennes Steel Corporation's bid of just under \$254,000 came to nearly ten percent below that figure.

Work on the bridge began on February 15, 1937. By summer, the project was under investigation for labor violations. The affair began when William Lee, who was employed as a night watchman on the bridge project, complained that he had been promised a salary of \$2.40 per day but only paid \$12 per week. In his July 8 letter to the BPR's District Engineer in Fort Worth, he further stated that the Vincennes Steel Corporation subcontracted the foundation work to the Clarence Jones Construction Company and that the payrolls the subcontractor submitted to the Vincennes Steel Corporation had been falsified.

THD officials dismissed the complaint regarding wages since Lee was paid the minimum rate THD required. However, the allegations about the unauthorized subcontractor and the inaccurate payrolls were a cause for concern. As a result of these allegations, Gibb Gilchrist ordered the THD Division Engineer in Austin to make a complete investigation and report. In his memo dated July 17, 1937, Gilchrist underscored the seriousness of the situation: "It is particularly important that this matter be handled at the earliest possible date since it has come to the attention of the District Office of the Bureau of Public Roads. It not only involves the eligibility of this contractor [Vincennes Steel Corporation] but also the eligibility of Federal funds for payment of future estimates."

In a document dated July 30, 1937, Herbert Eldridge, Acting Bridge Engineer, stated:

there remains insufficient evidence to prove the existence of a subcontract for the foundation work. It is my understanding that there is on file a Lease Agreement by the Vincennes [Steel Corporation], General Contractors, with Clarence Jones Construction Company for the leasing of equipment necessary for a sum of \$1.00 and other valuable considerations. There have been three men killed on this project and it is my understanding that no insurance settlements have been made. It is understood that the Insurance Companies claim their policy is with Clarence Jones Construction Company and yet the premium payments have been made by the Vincennes [Steel Corporation].

He went on to state that an affidavit would be furnished declaring that the Clarence Jones Construction Company was not a subcontractor on the project.

A later memorandum regarding the investigation, dated September 2, 1937, states:

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It is evident that all labor on these projects have (sic) been paid at least the minimum wage rate specified in the contract and that no sub-contract exists between Vincennes Steel Corporation and Clarence Jones Construction Company. . . . The only irregularities remaining, which can not be adjusted, are the excessive hours worked by approximately five individuals, employed during the first four months that this job was active. The State has made a rather extensive investigation of these excessive hours and we feel that the men were allowed to work without the knowledge or consent of the Vincennes Steel Corporation and that the company was not guilty of intentional violation of labor provisions.

The bridge was completed on February 11, 1938, at a cost of nearly \$232,000; the federal contribution through the emergency relief program for the construction of the bridge came to just over \$113,000. The THD resident engineer in Austin supervised the construction which was periodically inspected by engineers from THD and BPR. The dedication ceremony was held the day after completion. The March 1938 issue of *Texas Parade* provided the following description of the event:

Simple, but impressive, ceremonies marked the opening February 12 of the Montopolis Bridge over the Colorado River, a few miles east of Austin. The bridge affords a new high water connection into Austin over the heavily traveled Highway 71, and later will serve also as the Colorado River crossing for Highway 29, the Austin-Lockhart connection that now enters Austin over the Post Road. . . . Louise Davis and Juanita Fae Bailey, representing the two Travis County precincts connected by the bridge, cut orange and white ribbons to formally open the bridge.

Regarding the old bridge, the article stated:

The old Montopolis bridge was erected by Travis County. Immediately after the dedication ceremony, County Judge George Matthews burned the \$14,000 in bonds that represented the final indebtedness on the old structure. The bonds had been retired by the state a few days previously.

In 1962 and 1963, THD responded to increasing traffic volumes on US 183 by constructing a new bridge made up of steel girders and prestressed concrete beams adjacent to the Montopolis Bridge to serve northbound traffic. In 1995, new structures were completed to serve southbound lanes. The truss bridge was retained in place on what became the southbound frontage road, providing access to the Montopolis Road exit. This configuration lightened the traffic burden on the truss bridge, allowing for its preservation in place. Although the construction of the new structures has altered the setting of the truss bridge, as transportation facilities they are compatible with the use of the original bridge and therefore do not significantly compromise its integrity.

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Texas Highway Department. Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement. Control-Section-Job No. 0265-01-007, located at TxDOT headquarters in Austin.

Texas Highway Department. Project Correspondence Files. Control-Section-Job No. 0265-01-007, located at TxDOT headquarters in Austin.

"On Texas Highways." *Texas Parade*, March 1938.

## Verbal Boundary Description:

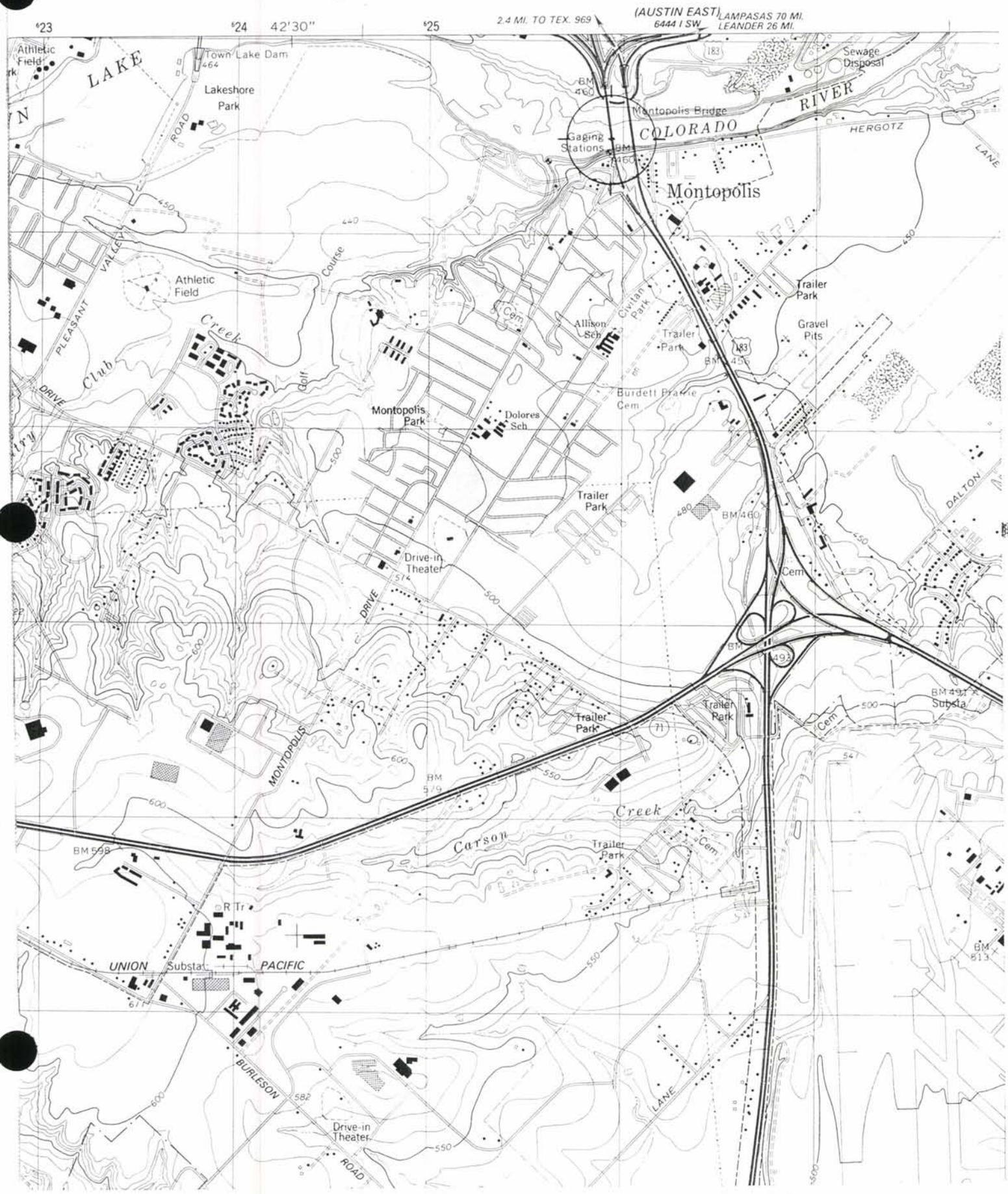
The nomination encompasses the complete structure, Montopolis Bridge, from the extreme limits of the north end bent to the extreme limits of the south end bent.

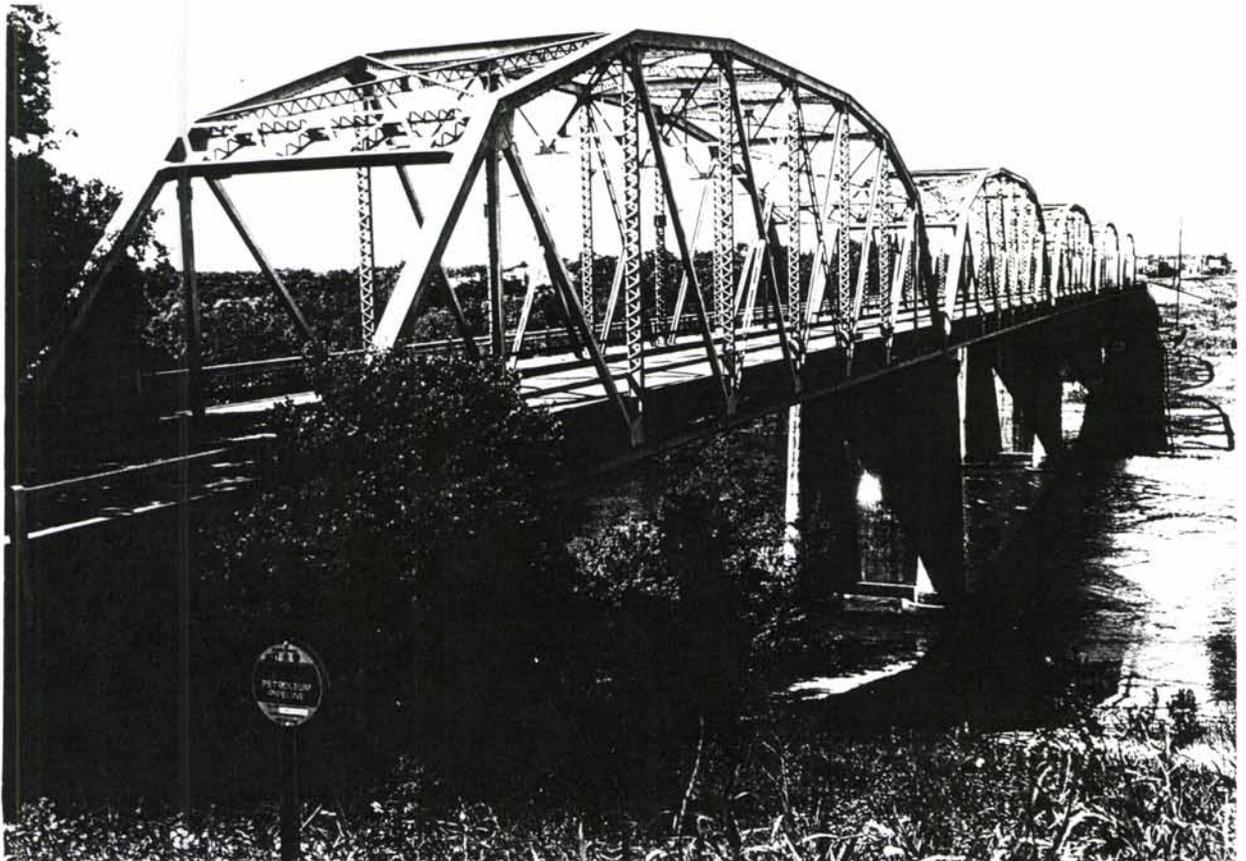
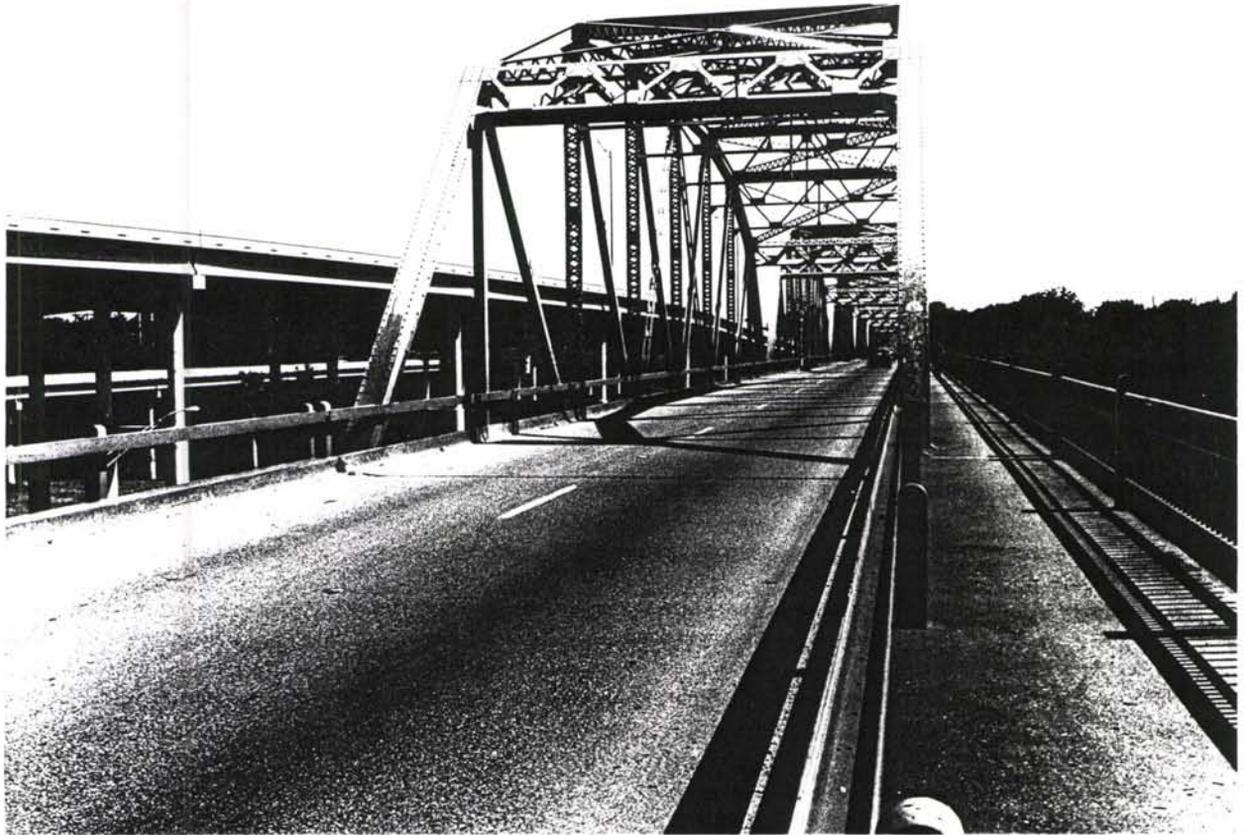
## Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes all components of the bridge substructure and superstructure, including the approach spans and pedestrian walkway with decorative steel railing, historically associated with the property.

HISTORIC BRIDGES OF TEXAS  
MONTOPOLIS BRIDGE  
MONTOPOLIS, TRAVIS CO., TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE: 14/625940/3346500

SITE NO: TV0265-01-034





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MONTOPOLIS BRIDGE  
HISTORIC BRIDGES OF TEXAS  
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PHOTOGRAPH 1 OF 2

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MONTOPOLIS BRIDGE  
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PHOTOGRAPH 2 OF 2











