

Schell Bridge Northfield, MA

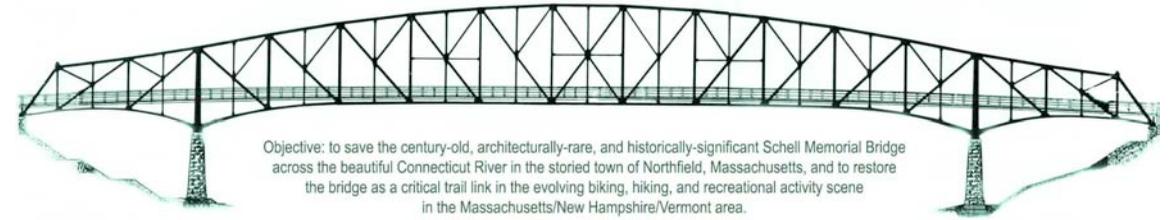


Heritage - Renewal



A newsletter from
 Friends of Schell Bridge, Inc.
 a non-profit corporation.
 Contributions are tax-deductible.

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The previous Friends of Schell Bridge newsletter summarized the results of the Smith College Engineering Program study of the steel structure of the bridge and the inspection of the piers by University of Massachusetts diver Ed Klekowski. Briefly, the truss steel can be brought up to modern structural code for about one million dollars, and the piers are sound and need no rehabilitation.

The bearings need replacement, on top of both piers and at both abutments, and this is likely to cost another million dollars. The current paint and rust needs to be sandblasted, and disposed of in an environmentally sound way; new paint must be applied. Estimates obtained put this in the vicinity of yet another million dollars.

Any rehabilitation must be designed by licensed bridge engineers, and this and other miscellaneous needs will likely bring the total cost of rehabilitation into the neighborhood of four million dollars.

As also mentioned in previous newsletters, Friends of Schell Bridge is committed to raising the necessary funds for rehabilitation from private, federal, and state sources. This would include funds sufficient to endow future maintenance. *No local Northfield funds would be required, for either rehabilitation or maintenance.*

Rehabilitating Schell Bridge makes positive contributions to at least half (e.g., 1, 2, 4, 7, 10) of the ten *sustainable development principles* recently adopted as part of Northfield's new (2006) community development strategy.

In addition, Friends of Schell Bridge believes there are four specific ways that rehabilitation of Schell Bridge for non-motorized and emergency-vehicle use would benefit Northfield significantly. These are

- Community connectedness
- Area attraction
- Trail network link
- Life in the 21st century

Community Connectedness

Northfield is the only town in Massachusetts divided by the Connecticut River. Since the closing of the Schell the two sides of Northfield have become more isolated from each other. Restoring the bridge for non-motorized use would restore at least a symbolic connectedness.



A majority of West Northfield residents live in the northern part of the town, near the Vermont border, within easy access of the bridge. The north end of East Northfield - with its library, bank, post office, and shops - would become more accessible to West Northfield residents, on foot or bicycle, and could benefit the northern village center in East Northfield.

With more emphasis on identifying accessible open spaces, walking and bicycling will become increasingly popular in Northfield. Schell Bridge would make West Northfield, rich in open spaces and country roads, available to East Northfield walkers and cyclists.

These are some of the ways Schell Bridge could knit the two parts of Northfield into a closer community.

Area Attraction



One needs only to reflect on how Shelburne Falls has benefited from the restoration of the "Bridge of Flowers" to realize the economic benefit a restored Schell Bridge could be to Northfield. As stated in a recent letter-to-the-editor in the Greenfield Recorder, a restored Schell Bridge would be "a reason for the well-heeled visitor to leave the interstate and spend some time and money in Northfield".

People like restored historic structures, and respect and appreciate communities that preserve their history. They will take the time to visit such places, stay at their B&Bs, eat at their cafes, patronize their gift shops and galleries, and fill up at their gas stations.

Moreover, such places become known far and wide as forward-looking places, to be included in guide books and in travelers' trip planning and vacations as enjoyable destinations. As masses of baby boomers hit retirement, many will reward interesting places in the course of their leisure travel.

Schell Bridge could, in these respects, put Northfield back on the map.

Trail Network Link

Northfield has great potential as a hiking/biking mecca.

The famous M&M trail, a hiking-only trail traversing Massachusetts from Connecticut to New Hampshire, passes through Northfield; it passes over Crag Mountain, one of the most popular sections of the entire trail.

Currently there is a new Franklin County bikeway on the east side of the river, from Turners Falls up route 63, though Northfield, to about a mile south of the New Hampshire border.



The Ashuelot rail-trail in New Hampshire comes within about a mile of the Massachusetts state line. A two-mile linkup would make it possible to hike/bike from south of Greenfield, MA to Keene, NH.

On the west side of the river, Vermont has plans to provide a bikeway from Brattleboro to Massachusetts, along route 142 and Pond Road. In Massachusetts there are good bikeway route options from VT through Gill to Turners Falls - see the accompanying map.

The Schell Bridge would link these various tri-state trails in an elegant way, making Northfield a premier trail center in the northeast.

Life in the 21st Century

People using the trails will tend to respect the environment and have money to spend in the village's shops. Some will headquarter briefly in Northfield, generating income for local establishments.

A recent column in the New York Times entitled "A Nation of Villages" described how people increasingly want to live in villages where there is a strong sense of community, congenial small shops, and walking trails.

Northfield can capitalize on this trend with a revitalized main street, now in the works, and a rehabilitated Schell Bridge, nicely lit, with small parks on each end.

One can envision Northfield maintaining its attractiveness to young families due to its wholesome environment and low costs, while attracting some of the retiring baby boomers due to its open-space orientation, trails, and forward-looking character. The latter make few demands on infrastructure and are a rich source of involvement.

Thus a rehabilitated Schell Bridge can help Northfield successfully meet the challenges of small-town living in the 21st century.

