



COUNTY OF MERCER

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Amy Cradic
Assistant Commissioner
NJ DEP
501 Station Plaza
Building 5, 4th Floor
Trenton, NJ 08625

May 7, 2010

Dear Assistant Commissioner Cradic:

Thank you for meeting with me and members of my administration yesterday to discuss plans to construct a new bridge over Jacobs Creek and the realignment of County Route 579 in Hopewell Township.

As we discussed, Mercer County's goals have been from the beginning and continue to be the provision of a safe roadway and bridge that can accommodate emergency vehicles and school buses, and the traffic growth that has occurred in this area of our county, while doing so at a responsible cost to the taxpayers.

The problem at the bridge is one that has been 40 years in the making. The need for a new structure was first acted on as far back as 1966 when the County obtained the right of way for a new alignment. Since then, the structure and its approaches have grown increasingly unable to safely support modern vehicles and a growing community. For the past six years, we have partnered with a broad spectrum of community residents, engineering consultants, historic preservation experts and other stakeholders to reach a consensus. It was decided that the best course was to construct a new Jacobs Creek Bridge adjacent to the site of the existing bridge, and then relocate the existing bridge to a park after rehabilitation. The process was transparent and balanced public safety, engineering necessity, community input, historical concerns and long-range planning, as chronicled in our meeting by County Engineer Gregory Sandusky. Mercer County has gone far beyond what has been required of it in order to meet the concerns of the township, the nearby residents and our taxpayers. Yet, after all those years of due diligence, it has only been in the past few months that new criteria has been outlined, and NJHPO has been asked to consider naming the area a historic district. From our meeting, NJHPO is not certain what the parameters of that district might be, and whether local businesses, schools and property owners would be affected.

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As stated in our meeting, the Jacobs Creek Bridge process included many public meetings and a report from an independent consultant that provided more than 15 options in its Historic Bridge Alternatives Analysis. All participating parties reached agreement to realign Route 579 and relocate a rehabilitated Jacobs Creek Bridge to nearby Alliger Park, where it could be enjoyed by all as a pedestrian bridge. A letter dated May 15, 2009 from NJHPO to Mercer County states: "the HPO concurs with the submitted Alternatives Analysis report and that the selection of Alternative 5A/5B-Modified 3 (New Single Span/relocate truss) will minimize adverse effects to identified historic properties."

But recently, as discussed in our meeting, Hopewell Township Committee passed a resolution in support of a different bridge design than agreed to earlier (3B), which calls for a new one-span bridge (stringers and deck) would replace the structural element of the crossing. The rehabilitated truss would then be remounted as refurbished, non-functioning trusses as a façade to the bridge replacement and leaving it on the same alignment. Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission, however, is not in agreement with the township committee, and endorses design 3A, which would be widened, rehabilitated and strengthened for continue vehicular use. The extent of deterioration and addition of numerous repairs would require extensive and intricate strengthening and select component replacement of main and secondary components. The historic integrity would significantly affect the original design and the required work on the trusses does not comply with the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

It would seem that bureaucratic red tape, disagreement and issues that had not been raised over the many years this project has been in discussion is now holding up a process that Mercer County believes has already reached a uniformly agreed upon conclusion. At present, only the County, which did not have a pre-determined plan, is ready and prepared to move forward on the project.

We believe that it is imperative that we move forward with a plan for Jacobs Creek Bridge. Given the new set of criteria presented to us by your office, if NJHPO chooses to disregard the extensive analyses, studies and tax dollars put toward this project thus far, Mercer County presents the following final options, as discussed in our meeting:

- Rehabilitate the existing truss bridge for pedestrian use and at retain at the current location. The floor beams would be replaced and the deck replaced with new stringers with a new deck. The existing stone masonry abutments would be rehabilitated. This area and the existing truss bridge would be closed to vehicular traffic and could be considered an overlook for pedestrians and bicyclists. A new, single-span bridge of conventional construction would be built on the new alignment to carry two-way traffic with 12-foot-wide lanes and shoulders.
- The existing truss bridge would be relocated and rehabilitated for pedestrian use at Alliger Park in Hopewell Township. The floor beams would be replaced and the deck would be replaced with new stringers and a new deck. New abutments and wing walls would be constructed using the stone from the existing abutments at the new location for the relocated existing truss. A new single-span bridge of

conventional construction would be constructed on the new alignment to carry two-way traffic with 12-foot-wide lanes and shoulders.

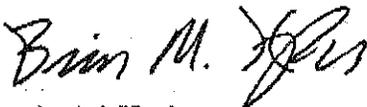
- The existing truss would be removed and rehabilitated. A new single-span bridge would replace the structural element of the crossing on the new alignment to carry two-way traffic with 12-foot-wide lanes and shoulders. The rehabilitated truss would then be "sliced" to accommodate the new width and height. The non-functioning trusses would be refurbished and replaced as a facade to the replacement bridge on the new alignment.
- Leave Jacobs Creek Bridge closed.

As I stated, as the condition of the Jacob's Creek Bridge deteriorated, the weight limit was reduced to the current 3-ton gross weight. That deterioration was not due to neglect. In fact, this bridge was inspected annually instead of the typical biennial inspection, and Mercer County DOT has an impeccable record of repairing the bridge and keeping it in service. Mercer County will not continue to throw good money after bad by repairing a bridge that does not meet current standards, and the County taxpayers cannot afford to shoulder the costs of this project if the state dollars earmarked for the project are deemed ineligible if the project does not meet current design standards.

Since 2004, numerous crashes have been reported involving motorists losing control on that on the roadway approaching the bridge, and many crashes have occurred where the bridge intersects Bear Tavern Road. Countless other scrapes and fender-benders are anecdotally measured by the evident damage seen on the retaining structures near the bridge, and in fact, the wood surface of Jacobs Creek Bridge was cited explicitly as a contributing factor in many of the crash reports.

NJHPO is now in receipt of the Phase 1B report of the Archeological Survey performed by John Milner Associates and delivered to NJHPO on May 3, 2010, and we anticipate your response to that report within 30 days. I look forward to your direction on the four alternatives presented above.

Sincerely,



Brian M. Hughes
County Executive