



# City of Havre de Grace

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## Susquehanna River Rail Bridge Project Advisory Board Of the Mayor and City Council

### Advisory Bulletin #15 Bridge Historical Preservation and Display March 18, 2015

#### Background

The Advisory Board met on several occasions in November 2014, and in January, February and March of 2015, to discuss the need for historical preservation of specific components of the existing Amtrak rail bridge. It also recognized the need to consecrate the history of both rail bridges that occupied the broader site and were an integral part of the history of Havre de Grace and Perryville. The Board believes that this can best be accomplished by creating a permanent outdoor historical display on public property that is accessible at all times. The display should be presented in such a way that people of all ages can understand and appreciate the historical significance and engineering accomplishments associated with these two bridges.

#### Historical Artifacts

In previous advisories the Board recommended that the existing Amtrak rail bridge be removed entirely, and that all of its piers and abutments, as well as the piers of the original rail bridge, also be removed entirely. The purpose of that recommendation is to open up the river viewscape, make room for the new bridges, and provide for safer river navigation. The Board recommends that only the abutments of the earlier bridge continue to be preserved, perhaps restoring them more to their original appearance and function.

The Advisory Board believes there are several key features of the existing Amtrak rail bridge that are well worth preservation and permanent display. As a practical matter, each artifact should be kept to a size that would not overwhelm the display area or become too difficult or costly to maintain in the future. Each preserved artifact should be suitable for close public scrutiny, should have no unsafely exposed components, and should be dramatically imposing with a very special story to relate. The overall objective should be to convey the advancement of this type of bridge engineering by the beginning of the twentieth century, and to explain how certain rail bridge components functioned in that era.

A fascinating artifact with educational value would be one side of one lower connection of a deck truss, literally cut out of a span, with its moving parts secured by hidden welds. It would then be carefully cleaned and repainted, and displayed about two feet above a ground-level concrete slab using nearly-concealed support legs. The purpose of this display would be to show the bottom chord rods, tension and compression beams and connecting kingpin up close, with a description of how each part functioned and the critical importance of the entire connection. Attachment A is a photograph of the recommended artifact with cut points shown.

Another artifact that is of keen interest to the Advisory Board is the swing span pier top with its ring and pinion gear assembly, turning casters and adjacent structure. Although the entire swing span is far too massive to preserve and display, the Board thinks that its central mechanism between the rail deck and pier top would suffice to show how a rail swing span operates and how massive its working parts were required to be. If the entire core assembly should prove too large in scale for the display area, then perhaps a half or quarter segment of it could convey the same understanding and interpretation. The entire top layer of granite from the circular pier should be saved and installed at ground level, whether or not the entire circular mechanism could be fitted onto it. See the Attachment B photograph for the current location of this artifact.

A third major artifact of interest is the motor and drive assembly from the control house atop the swing span. The entire house and its contents could be relocated and preserved on land, provided with a means of visitor entry and viewing. Alternatively, the motor and drive mechanism could put on outdoor display within a clear weatherproof container. An interpretive display should describe the span swinging procedure. This artifact is shown in Attachment C.

The Board has also identified two historical plaques that should be saved and put on display. A large dedication plaque mounted into the face of the current westerly abutment should be relocated, along with a large panel of granite blocks to which it is attached, to a nearby ground-level display area. The second, a much older dedication plaque embedded in an original bridge pier near the Perryville shoreline, should likewise be removed along with its adjacent panel of granite blocks and put on ground-level display at a designated site in Perryville.

### Display Area Location

The Advisory Board has concluded that David Craig Park, with its proposed expansion, be dedicated to the history of these two bridges and to the display of artifacts, historical photographs, and interpretive signage. The site should be augmented with as much railroad property as can be reserved for this purpose without interfering with future bridge access for maintenance. The beautiful park landscaping that was recently completed through efforts of City staff and workforces should be restored and expanded after completion of the new bridges. The very attractive current theme of this park should be integrated with its proposed use to every extent possible.

This location is most appropriate because it is on relatively high ground and safe from flooding. The expanded park, with some use of adjacent railroad property, should be sufficient to contain the overall display area and provide additional parking spaces. Displays would not be overshadowed by the new bridges at any time of day. This park is within close proximity to downtown pedestrian activity, and is not currently encumbered with other structures, themes or specific uses except fishing. Most importantly, this park is the perfect vantage point from which to visualize the two past bridges spanning the river as one stands at the interpretive displays and sees the historical photographs, many of which were taken from the very same spot.

### Display Components

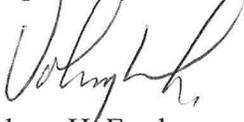
The artifacts recommended above should be placed and oriented on high ground within the park in such a way that they more directly relate to the historical bridge locations and to photographs on display taken from the same angles and perspectives. Display sites must be planned carefully and integrated with a series of current documentary photographs before the existing bridge is removed. The larger displays should also be positioned to draw attention from beyond the immediate park without cluttering the nearby streetscape or its view of the river.

The interpretive displays should be filled with written, photographic, diagrammatic, and artistic components that not only depict the historical bridges as accurately as possible, but tell their complete stories, teach their engineering fundamentals to adults and youngsters alike, and describe how they contributed to rail transportation along the entire east coast of America. This effort should be taken to such a level that the overall park display becomes a tourist destination in its own right, requiring at least two hours to fully explore.

### Recommended Action

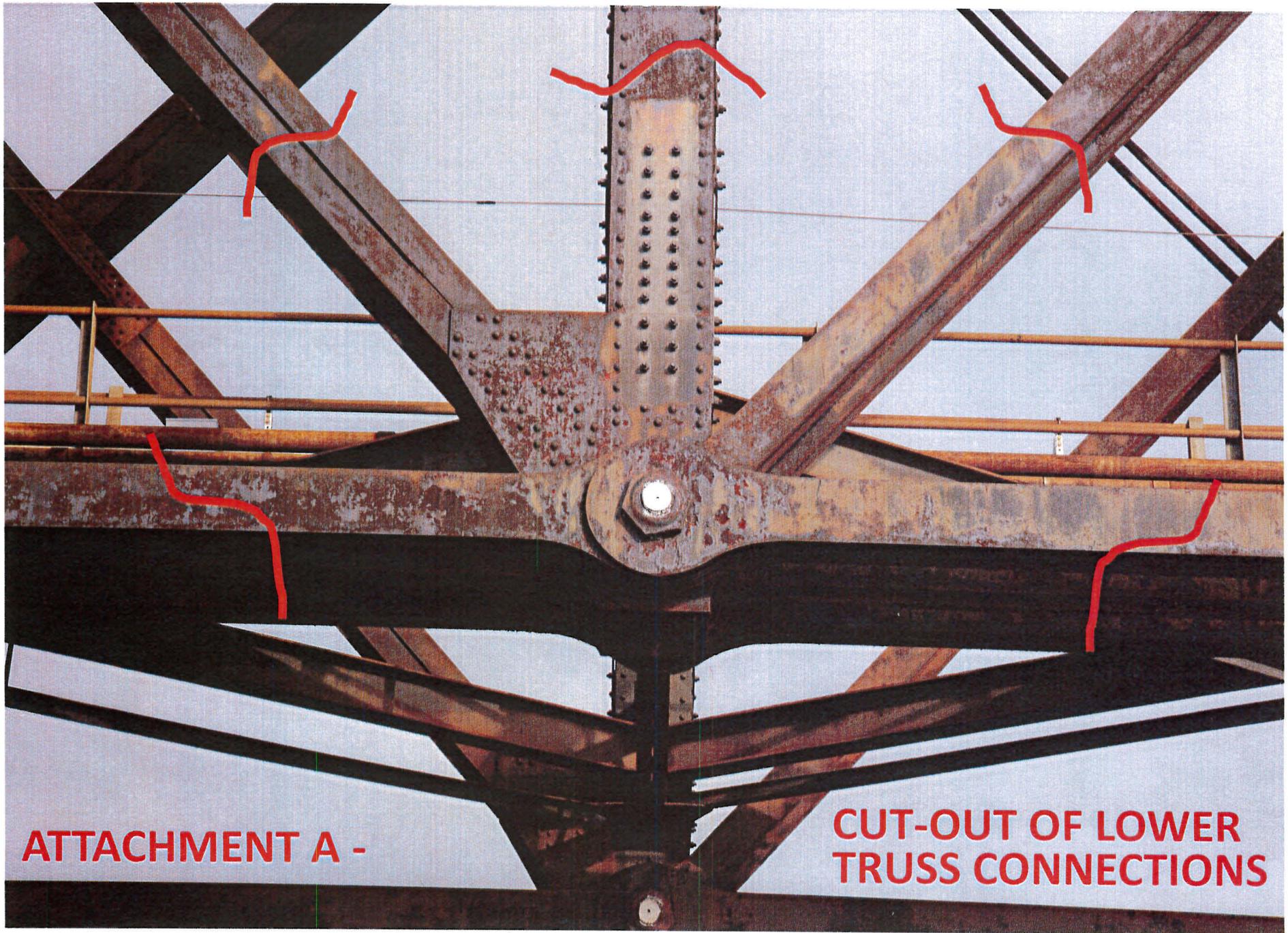
The Advisory Board requests that the Mayor and City Council take necessary steps to consolidate these recommendations into a formal communication to the SRRBP project team, and to all agencies and local organizations having interest in historical preservation related to these bridges, as soon as possible. The Board also recommends that the upper level of David Craig Park be held in reserve for this future purpose and use.

Respectfully submitted,



Volney H. Ford  
Chairman

Attachments A, B, & C: Artifact location photographs



**ATTACHMENT A -**

**CUT-OUT OF LOWER TRUSS CONNECTIONS**



**ATTACHMENT B— SWING ASSEMBLY**



**ATTACHMENT C — CONTROL HOUSE**