



Ridley Park Borough Council
Special Council Meeting Minutes
Sellers Avenue Bridge Closure
Wednesday July 27, 2022, 6PM

Welcome

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Councilor Michelle Stock Mattus- Late
Councilor Michelle Endriss Dalessio- Present
Councilor Kim Collins- Present
Councilor Michael McGinley- Present
Councilor Len Pinto- Present
Council Vice President Richard Guerra- Present
Mayor Hank Eberle- Present
Council President Dane Collins- Present

Opening Remarks: Council President Dane Collins and Mayor Hank Eberle

Council President Dane Collins: Thanked the Council, the public, and guests for attending this meeting to discuss the Sellers Avenue Bridge closure. Expressed his concern that over the years this project has hit many roadblocks and the bridge is still not at the point of construction. Council President Collins shared an extensive history of the proposals on fixing the Sellers Avenue Bridge dating back to 2005. He shared a timeline of the project up until the 2022 closure, attached to the minutes.

Mayor Eberle: Thanked all those in attendance. Expressed disappointment that Amtrak was not in attendance since they are the agency holding the project up from starting. Spoke on a meeting from 2012, and the expectation that the bridge project would start in 2014. Shared information regarding meetings that first occurred in 2014 to discuss the façade of the bridge and

compatibility with other historic aspects of the area. In 2018, he went to the Borough Engineer to ask what the next steps should be, who suggested we write a letter to the elected officials and Amtrak to advocate to move the project forward. Sen. Kearney's Chief of Staff Sara McCullough helped bring everyone to the table in order to facilitate the conversation on how to get the bridge started.

Robert Frazer Chief of Police: Shared concerns that the Bridge closure will cause increased response times. By way of example, he explained prior to the closure, it took one minute and thirty seconds to respond from one side of the rail to the other; the closure of the Bridge has tripled the response time. The closure cuts the town in half and with nearly 2,200 students walking to schools in and around town it is concerning with the increased foot traffic on Swarthmore Avenue. This is the major roadway and will see increased vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Chief Mike Eckenrode: Letter sent to Council is attached.

Noted that there had been some knowledge of the eventual closure of the bridge, but Borough was not given sufficient notice of when resulting in 3,000 vehicles being diverted and causing an additional lag for response times from volunteers and to the scene. Requested PennDOT conduct a traffic study of Swarthmore Avenue to evaluate the impact. There is still a need for preemption devices for the first responders to use to respond to emergency in a safe and efficient matter, which had been promised by PennDot 10-15 years prior. Stated that even if the project started today, it would take years before the emergency services could use the bridge.

Invited Offices Comment Period

Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon's Office:

Heather Boyd and Faith King were invited but unable to attend due to unexpected circumstances.

State Senator Tim Kearny's Office:

Sam Arnold was in attendance. Asserted that the Sellers Avenue Bridge has been a number one priority for the Senator, even before he took office in 2019. Stated that this office has helped move the project to this point and is disappointed it is not complete. Gave assurances that Senator Kearney will continue to push for the project's completion.

Representative Dave Dellosa's Office:

Robert Yannuzzi, District Director was in attendance.

Amtrak

Representatives were invited but did not attend, representing insufficient notice of the meeting.

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation:

Charles Davies, Senior Assistant District Executive for Design

Paul Shultes, Consultant Project Manager

Kristin M. Caparra, Consultant Project Manager
Paul Lutz, Traffic Signals Manager
Gene Blaum, Assistant to the District Executive

SEPTA:

Representatives were invited but did not respond.

Gene Blaum (of Septa): Apologized to Council and the general public for how the closure of the bridge was handled. Advised that on July 20th at around 9 a.m., he was informed that the bridge was inspected and required closure. Mr. Blaum shared that there were several steps that needed to be done by PennDOT before closure could occur, but miscommunication ensued and not intended.

Charles Davies: Provided information on the state of bridge and the need for the closure. Shared that the two major girders that are holding the bridge up are in a failing condition which resulted in the sidewalk closure several years ago. Council raised several inquiries on why the bridge was closed entirely to all forms of traffic on such short notice. Mr. Davies advised the determination regarding shutting down structures is not subject to a precise mathematical calculation, but is a judgment call particular to the assessors. Council inquired into how the bridge is too dangerous for traffic or pedestrians but safe enough for trains to pass underneath daily. Mr. Davies responded that, PennDOT's responsibility is the safety and integrity of the bridge, and it has no authority over what happens on the rails. In response to several concerns from member of the public and Council, Mr. Davies contended the plan for the project is to be put out for bid and construction in the start of 2023.

Councilor Kim Collins: Asked where the project currently stands in the design phase? Concerned that over the years there has been very little communication to the Borough and would like to try and move this forward since the timeline continues to be held up year after year.

Gene Blaum: Advised the design phase of the he plan is complete. Amtrak has the plans and has had them since June. PennDOT is still awaiting Amtrak provide its comments to the proposals. Along with that, there are two agreements that still need to be executed between Amtrak and PennDOT before construction can start. This project is very important to PennDOT and noted that it is a priority, and there is still 7 Million dollars set aside for this project.

- 1) Reimbursement agreement still needs finalization in order to fund Amtrak's portion of the project;
- 2) Right of Way Access agreement still needs to be executed before work can happen on the rail ways.

Charles Catania, Borough Engineer: Inquired into what else is holding this project up and what needs to be done for PennDOT to move forward.

Christy Kemper: Project Manager starting in 2016, at which point the project was 2 years behind. The Signal and Traffic Plans were signed in 2015 and 2016 respectively. They have been working to get the project let. There was still discussion on language of contracts as of July 25th. With respect with standards governing historic preservation, those issues were discussed and resolved over ten years ago. Progress remains contingent on Amtrak timely executing agreements, with a projected construction phase of March 2023.

Councilors Michelle Endriss Dalessio and Richard Guerra: raised questions about the pedestrian bridge which the Borough had been advised would accompany the bridge closure to permit pedestrians to continue to cross the tracks. They inquired into how and if the pedestrian bridge could be expedited. Councilor Dalessio asked if a bridge could be built over the bridge as it currently stands, as sit would not need Amtrak approval.

PennDOT representatives advised that undertaking that project would take longer than the actual repair of the brudge. Councilor Guerra asked if the pedestrian bridge would be the first thing constructed on the project? PennDOT affirmed that this is one of the first priorities during .

Councilor Michelle Stock Mattus suggested the Borough Manager work with PennDOT to have a monthly phone call with stakeholders to help push this project forward in order to provide updates to Council on where the project stands.

Public Comment (Limit five minutes per resident)

Susan Brochet: Stated that she feels that the project is getting closer. Asked if there were any legal options that the Borough could take to get Amtrak here and force them to move this project forward?

Katie Wolverton: Director of the Library: There is a cutoff of nearly half of the library patrons since the library is a walkable library. Swarthmore Avenue is a very busy road and is concernign that children and older patrons will be walking on this road way. Wolverton made the walk recently and took nearly twenty minutes to get to the Library. How long will Ward Avenue, in front of the library, be closed during the duration of the project?

Anthony Dale: The closure of the bridge has had the back up from Swarthmore and Dupont which is creating more congestions. Is it possible to open the bridge to pedestrians in order for people to access the other side of town?

Sara McGraw: Amtrak seems to be the major hold up that is not going to get done on time. Concerned about the current state of the Borough roads and with the increased traffic due to the closure will be increased on side roads and Swarthmore Ave. Is there going to be a traffic study to see what the impact on the roads and the future repairs?

Jim Headley: Can the pedestrian bridge be expedited?

Pat Dolan: This is a big deal to this town and everyone and stakeholders. There are 11k views on this project. Thanked everyone for making it a priority. Private industry works little faster than public sector. Where was the intuition to add stops signs on the bridge to create the 4 way stop. Fear of people about to cross the tracks to get to the business district. Why does it have to wait until 2023? This private sector would find a way to get it done.

Brian Forney: Shared his concern that Amtrak is not here since this is group that is holding the project up. Who does the community contact in order to reach out to Amtrak?

Michelle owner of Lux and Rose: The bridge closure has already impacted her business only after one week.

Jeff Moffo: Concerned that there is no barricades or safety measures on Swarthmore Avenue of people that may be struck by vehicles. Can safety measures be installed on Swarthmore Avenue for pedestrians?

Michelle Stock Mattus asked if we could increase the Crossing Guards?

Sean Conran Johnson Ave: Is there anyway to put metal beams to add support along with this to help allow traffic and pedestrian bridge? PennDOT: Putting something underneath will stop the trains from running.

Danielle Kerns: Can the project be expedited and put at the top of the list? Appreciate the agencies for being here. Council: please do a traffic study on Swarthmore avenue about the traffic on the road. Can there be better signage of the one-way issue on E Hinkley Ave? The signs do not provide information on what the bridge is closed.

Mike Gale 51 Collier Circle: Can you publish the timeline that was shared at the start of the meeting with the public? Can we do a traffic study on Swarthmore Ave? Asked PennDOT if they can share the most recent bridge inspection? The most critical thing to keep this on the existing schedule. How can the Borough get involved to expedient this project? Catenary lines need to get done before anything can get started.

Robert McLaughlin Ridley Park Resident: PennDOT needs to find a way to reinforce the bridge now for foot traffic. Told PennDOT they need to expedite the project immediately. There needs to be monthly and weekly for the project. There should be weekly reports on this project until the bridge is completed. This should be issued weekly. Stated that there is nothing stopping PennDOT from putting the bid out and changing it as the project moves forward.

PennDOT: Made it clear they can not put the project out the way it is since the design comments are not final from Amtrak.

Mr. McLaughlin stated again that they can put the project out now and nothing is holding them back,

Dane Collins on behalf of business owner: PennDOT purchased the property in front of their house? ROW was acquired. There is going to be some impact on the project. No encroachment on the buildings.

Michael McGinley: Plead with the community to support small business in the Borough. Shared a story of a small business owner that walks to work every day, and honors the Veterans' Memorial on the way. The bridge closure disrupts the route and routine.

Michele Endriss Dalessio: This bridge closure is going to impact the Fall Festival and the ability to help support these small businesses.

Paul Lutz: Please make sure the public knows that we are working to move the traffic thru the borough.

Closing Remarks: Council President Dane Collins

Thanked everyone for attending and will be sure to share to keep on the state, local, and federal agencies to keep this project moving.

Adjourn

Motion: Len Pinto

Second: Richard Guerra

7:50PM

Respectfully Submitted

Richard Tutak, Jr.

Borough Manager