Devil's Elbow Bridge

The bridge over the Big Piney River at Devil's Elbow has been with us since 1923. The red lead based paint is flaking off into the river (see inset) and the bridge needs some structural rehabilitation. The landmark can stretch well into the next century with some help.

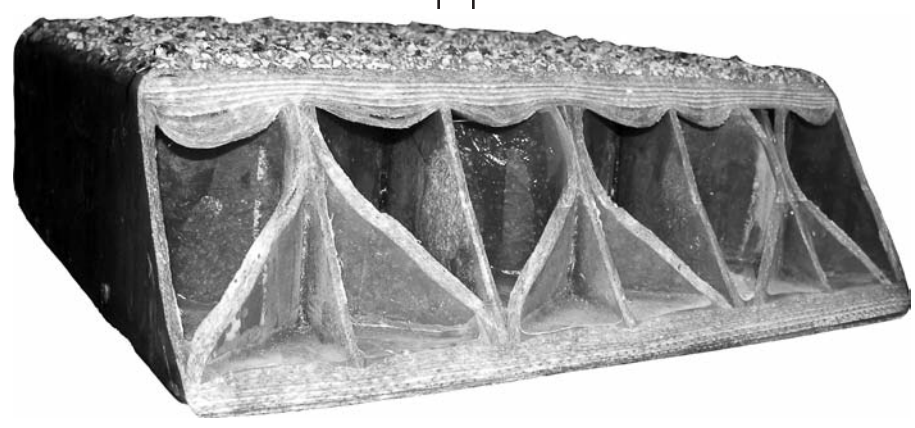
Show your support to area, state, and national legislators and agencies by filling in the enclosed sheet. It is ONLY a show of support. No money will be solicited from you personally. Please take a moment to fill out the few lines, slap on a stamp, and mail to the address shown. It's in all of our interest to rehabilitate the bridge.

An Historic Bridge for the Future

Route 66 has become not only a local and national treasure but an international icon. Authorized in 1926, Ozarkers fled to California during the Great Depression along, its path, countless Americans took their vacations on the the road, and soldiers hitchhiked home. A culture of diners, gas stations, and cultural attractions grew up along its shoulders. However, it is deteriorating. The National Trust for Historic Preservation included its motels on a list of "America's Most endangered Historic Places" in 2007 and The World Monuments Fund named Route 66 to its Watch List of endangered sites in 2008.

The Mother Road stretched 2,400 miles from Chicago to Santa Monica, California. We have 33 miles of Route 66 in Pulaski County and it has some of the best pavement and most scenic stretches anywhere along the road. The bridge at Devil's Elbow, built in 1923, is the most famous Route 66 bridge in Missouri. Tourists come from not only the United States to drive the road but come from Europe and Asia, as well. Their tourist dollars are welcome in the county.

In a Special Resource Study on Route 66, the National Park Service described bridges along the road in this manner:
Many Route 66 bridges are on old alignments that are no longer heavily used or that are closed to automobile traffic. They are major contributors to the allure of Route 66. Like many other structures along the road, they bear testimony to the highway's evolution. Unlike modern bridges, which are nearly indistinguishable from the rest of the roadway, early bridges were distinct structures that were aesthetically appealing and provided a sense of crossing between places.
This certainly applies to the Devil's Elbow Bridge — aesthetically appealing and provides a sense of crossing.



A cross-sectional look at the proposed polymer bridge surface material. At least 40% will be recycled material and will weigh 85 percent less than the current concrete deck.

However, the road and the bridge may not always be there. When the road was decertified in 1979, much of the local pavement on the old road and the Devil's Elbow Bridge became the responsibility of Pulaski County. Simply put, the county does not have the funds to rehabilitate the bridge, which was originally estimated to cost $1.6 million.

Dixon business owner Jerry Plunkett has advanced a novel plan for the rehabilitation of this historic bridge. Dr. Plunkett is a materials specialist and has given much thought to saving the historic structure. Addressing the County Commission, he outlined his imaginative plan and commitment to the bridge's rehabilitation. "This is a bridge of great historic and cultural significance. This is a marvelous opportunity. It's an historic bridge and should be a benefit to society." This new plan would be more costly ($3.2 million) but has added benefit and appeal for funding. The plan is endorsed by the Pulaski County Commission.

The Plan

• Removal of the lead-based paint and repainting. The red lead flakes pose a serious environmental problems.

• Structural improvements to the double-span steel truss bridge.

• Resurfacing the deck of the bridge with a polymer-based surface material This is a key feature. Each square foot of the present concrete bridge surface weighs 150 pounds. The polymer material weighs only 20 pounds per square foot. This greatly reduces the dead weight of the road deck. Additionally, the material would be made with at least 40 percent recycled materials which is an attractive funding point.

• Installation of defroster strips in the roadbed to melt ice and snow. Electric resistance elements can easily be installed in this composite deck. This will reduce the number of weather related accidents due to the curved approach to the bridge.

• Electricity for the defroster will be generated in two ways. A wind turbine will be installed on a hill above the bridge. Secondly, photovoltaic cells will be mounted on the bridge. The resulting electricity generated will be "banked" with the local utility during good weather and withdrawn when adverse weather conditions call for it. This "green" approach design and safety is also advantageous from a funding perspective.

Funding of the plan will probably require a variety of sources. Success will require support from Pulaski County residents. Implementation will give Pulaski County and Route 66 travelers an historic 20th century bridge with 21st century technology and lifespan.

For more information, contact:

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