

Scholzen, Jamie L CIV

From: McCaskey, Rob E
Sent: Monday, February 22, 2021 11:26 AM
To: iserr [REDACTED]
Cc: Robertson, Matthew S CIV; Dunn, Brian CIV; Sugarman, Shelly H CIV; Washburn, Eric CIV; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Bismarck Bridge / NP Bridge / BNSF Bridge
Signed By: rob.e.mccaskey [REDACTED]

Good Morning, Professor Isern,

My name is Rob McCaskey and I am the Project Officer for the bridge in question.
Thank you very much for the letter. We will be standing by for FORB's extension request and we will include your letter in our Administrative Record.

Very Respectfully
Rob McCaskey
Bridge Management Specialist
Western Rivers
8th District Bridge Branch

From: Tom Isern [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, February 21, 2021 8:47 PM
To: Dunn, Brian CIV [REDACTED]; Sugarman, Shelly H CIV [REDACTED]; Washburn, Eric CIV [REDACTED]; McCaskey, Rob E [REDACTED]
Cc: Chris Wilson [REDACTED]; John M. Fowler [REDACTED]; Elizabeth Merritt [REDACTED]; Jack Zaleski [REDACTED]; Amy Dalrymple [REDACTED]; Senator Mark F. Weber [REDACTED]
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Bismarck Bridge / NP Bridge / BNSF Bridge

21 February 2021

Email to:
Brian Dunn [REDACTED]
Shelly Sugarman [REDACTED]
Eric Washburn [REDACTED]
Rob E. McCaskey [REDACTED]

CC:
Chris Wilson [REDACTED]
John M. Fowler [REDACTED]
Elizabeth Merritt [REDACTED]

Jack Zaleski [REDACTED]
Amy Dalrymple [REDACTED]
Senator Mark F. Weber [REDACTED]
Governor Doug Bergum
Senator John Hoeven

This letter is in regard to what is known historically as the Bismarck Bridge--the Northern Pacific Railroad Bridge spanning the Missouri River at Bismarck, North Dakota, dating from 1882. The structure has been adjudged eligible for the National Register of Historic Places--which statement does not convey even a fraction of its significance.

The Bismarck Bridge is, to begin with, an internationally significant site in the history of engineering. It was constructed using the most advanced technologies of its time, including pneumatic caissons by which laborers descended, at grave peril, to and below the bottom of the Missouri River to emplace its massive footings. Its supervising engineer, George Shattuck Morison, was arguably the greatest bridge builder in American history.

Beyond this intrinsic significance as a structure, the historic associations of the Bismarck Bridge define it as essential, indeed existential, in the history of North Dakota, and consequential as to national historical developments manifest on the northern plains. Without this bridge, Euro-American settlement stopped at the Missouri River. Without this bridge, no North Dakota, and thus no capital at Bismarck, for development of the northern reaches of Dakota Territory would have been stunted. Without this bridge, no open-range cattle industry on the northern plains, for both the stockmen and their livestock reached the northern ranges, including the Little Missouri Badlands, by crossing it. Without this bridge, no Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands, indeed, no President Theodore Roosevelt, for by his own testimony, had it not been for his experience there, he never would have been President. The Bismarck Bridge was, for what was called at the time the Great Northwest, a passage equivalent to what Cumberland Gap was in the days of Daniel Boone.

Whether aware of this rich history or not, the citizens of Bismarck-Mandan and of the Great Plains regard the Bismarck Bridge as iconic, a physical fixture that anchors community and regional identity. Yet it holds potential to be much more.

For if placed into the hands of entities or agencies equipped to execute the sort of adaptive use proposed by such civic-minded parties as the Friends of the Rail Bridge, the bridge promises magnificent competitive advantage for heritage tourism in the region. It dovetails perfectly with current strategies, spearheaded by the Office of the Governor, for the elevation of heritage tourism by doubling down on the legacies of Theodore Roosevelt. Moreover, the bridge ticks every box in the list of attributes for appealing to those most desirable of tourists, the free independent travelers.

Recently I have written and read for broadcast a series of four radio features that now are running statewide to inform the public of the opportunities around its historic bridge.

- [Bully for Antiquities](#)
- [Northern Passage](#)
- [Caisson Disease](#)
- [Matching Wits with FITs](#)

These features are finding warm reception among regional citizens who until quite recently were completely unaware of the situation, or if aware, considered it a local matter. Only within the past few days have the wider significance and the economic opportunities implicit in the historic structure come to public notice.

On the other hand, whereas the Burlington Northern Santa Fe is on the ground with a full complement of well-paid lobbyists and aggressive influencers, the North Dakotans cognizant of the situation and trying to deal with it are just citizens with jobs to do and lives to live. They are working with systematically flawed state legislation and organization that inhibit public-spirited efforts for conservation and wise use of heritage resources. Thus for the public good, it is best if Coast Guard officials look favorably on reasonable requests from the Friends of the Rail Bridge for a bit more time to articulate the response that is welling.

Such request will come to you. I write in advance of it to press the importance of the matter, the need for deliberative response, and the opportunities to be realized.

Note that I sign below with my titles from our state's land-grant university, which I serve. This is not to imply that anything I say above reflects a policy or position of the university. My affiliations only indicate that in matters of regional history and heritage conservation, I know what I am talking about.

This, however, may be taken as an official statement, since I know you are looking for entities to come forward with commitments to represent the planning, articulation, and execution of alternatives for the Bismarck Bridge: as founding director of the Center for Heritage Renewal, authorized by the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education to conduct applied research and public service in matters of historic preservation and heritage tourism, I pledge the assistance of the Center toward research and development of the historic bridge for the public good.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

--

Thomas D. Isern
Professor of History & University Distinguished Professor
Director, Center for Heritage Renewal

