

State of Vermont House of Representatives



Montpelier, Vermont

Joint House Resolution

J.R.H. 6

Joint resolution relating to the closure and rehabilitation of the Vilas Bridge

Offered by: Representatives Obuchowski of Rockingham, Partridge of Windham, Deen of Westminster, and Mrowicki of Putney

Whereas, the Connecticut River divides the communities of Walpole, New Hampshire and Bellows Falls, Vermont, and

Whereas, the Vilas Bridge, with the state of New Hampshire owning 93 percent and the state of Vermont seven percent, is a 635-foot span that joins these municipalities into a single social and economic community within the Connecticut River Valley, and

Whereas, constructed in 1930, the Vilas Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 and is the only remaining three-span open spandrel reinforced concrete arch bridge in New Hampshire, and

Whereas, a May 1994 memorandum of agreement to which the Federal Highway Administration, the New Hampshire department of transportation, and the New Hampshire state historic preservation office were each a party commits the state of New Hampshire to restore the bridge in accordance with that state's ten-year highway program, and

Whereas, according to the New Hampshire department of transportation, an average of 4,600 vehicles cross the bridge each day, and

Whereas, over 20 years ago, the New Hampshire department of transportation placed the Vilas Bridge on the state's red or danger list, finding the bridge to be structurally insufficient, and assigned it a sufficiency rating of 3.1 percent out of a possible 100 percent, and

Whereas, the New Hampshire department of transportation's Ten Year Plan had previously proposed a rehabilitation of the Vilas Building in 2010, and a more recent version of the plan delayed that date until 2015, and

Whereas, on March 31, 2006, the Vermont General Assembly adopted a resolution urging the state of New Hampshire to expedite the rehabilitation of the Vilas Bridge, a vital roadway for the residents of Bellows Falls and Walpole, New Hampshire, and

Whereas, the danger of driving or walking across the Vilas Bridge became so acute that the New Hampshire department of transportation closed the span to all vehicular and pedestrian traffic on March 19, 2009, following a semiannual inspection that found, to no one's surprise, that the bridge was absolutely unsafe for either mode of transportation, and

Whereas, the closure of the Vilas Bridge blocks direct access from Walpole, New Hampshire into downtown Bellows Falls, forcing traffic to flow instead across the new arch bridge located approximately one mile to the north, and

Whereas, the diverting of traffic to the new arch bridge causes excessive pressure on this span and connecting roads and deprives Bellows Falls of severely needed consumer dollars, and

Whereas, the Vilas Bridge project remains on the waiting list which is indefensible given the traffic congestion and economic hardship its closure has precipitated and that for two decades, the New Hampshire department of transportation has listed this span on its danger list, and

Whereas, in Vermont, the Richmond Bridge, which is also a severely deteriorated bridge that serves as a community's economic lifeline, was raised on the state's priority replacement list after Congressman Welch secured federal stimulus funding for its rehabilitation, and the rehabilitation work on this span has already commenced, and

Whereas, a comparable effort on the part of the New Hampshire Congressional Delegation might produce a similar result, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly implores the New Hampshire Congressional Delegation, New Hampshire Governor John Lynch, the New Hampshire Executive Council, and the New Hampshire General Court to make every possible effort to seek federal economic stimulus money to finance the rehabilitation of the Vilas Bridge as expeditiously as possible, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly strongly urges the state of New Hampshire in the alternative to reprioritize upward the replacement ranking of the Vilas Bridge and to finance this project from either other federal transportation funds designated for the state of New Hampshire or state gasoline tax revenue, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the New Hampshire Congressional Delegation, New Hampshire Governor John Lynch, the New Hampshire Executive Council, New Hampshire Commissioner of Transportation George Campbell Jr., the chairs of the House and Senate transportation committees of the New Hampshire General Court, Vermont Secretary of Transportation Brian Searles, and the Vermont Congressional Delegation.

Attested to:

Shapleigh Smith, Jr.
Speaker of the House

Phil Scott
President of the Senate

Donald G. Milne
Clerk, House of Representatives