

# Plan on the table for Hill to Hill bridge renovation

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Hill to Hill bridge](#), [Southside](#) April 24, 2021

 *The latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

Gadfly wonders if a public meeting would be in order. Pretty complicated. See the virtual public meeting video embedded in Christina's article

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selections from [Christina Tatu](#), "[Bethlehem's Hill to Hill Bridge plan calls for \\$74.4 million in repairs and addition of a second span.](#)" *Morning Call, April 23, 2021.*

A \$74.4 million plan to fix Bethlehem's Hill to Hill Bridge would add a new, two-lane bridge parallel to the 100-year-old span over the Lehigh River.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, which is working with the Federal Highway Administration, is asking the public to weigh in on the proposed plan, which was the finalist among several **PennDOT has been studying.**

The public has until May 7 to comment on the plan, **[which is available on the PennDOT website.](#)**

It would rehabilitate the existing bridge and add a new parallel bridge on the southern side to provide additional width with two northbound travel lanes and a sidewalk. The new span would taper back and tie into the existing bridge just before the northern truss.

The proposal would also widen the left turn lane onto the 2nd Street ramp and add a right turn lane to westbound 3rd Street.

Other plans under consideration were to just rehabilitate the existing span, but that didn't address significant traffic congestion issues.

Engineers also considered installing a new parallel bridge that runs the full length of the Hill to Hill Bridge, but that would inflate the cost to \$100 million and require removal of the Fritch Fuel sign and its silos, which qualify for the National Register of Historic Places.

Mike Alkhal, Bethlehem's Director of Public Works, said city officials have been working closely with PennDOT to identify the main issues, which include the need for increased vehicular capacity and wider turning lanes. Other key issues include pedestrian access and increasing capacity on the 2nd Street ramp.

Morning and afternoon rush hours are always an issue in the area, and city and state officials have been trying to come up with solutions for years, Alkhal said, adding that he can remember traffic studies on the area from 10 or 15 years ago.

The project is complicated for many reasons.

Numerous utility lines, including fiber optic, telephone and cable lines, use the bridge to cross the Lehigh River, and four Norfolk Southern rail lines run underneath the bridge on the north and south sides of the Lehigh River.

The Delaware & Lehigh Canal Trail and planned Bethlehem Greenway are also near the bridge. The South Bethlehem Historic District must also be protected.

Officials also want to protect the Hill to Hill Bridge's unique architecture, which qualifies for the National Register of Historic Places with its Hudson Trusses and closed-span arches.

The Hill to Hill Bridge provides a critical link for residents, businesses and services, and is important for the city's many festivals, including Musikfest. PennDOT studies show that 300-350 pedestrians and 60-100 bicyclists use the bridge each day.

During Musikfest, up 150-250 pedestrians use the bridge per hour. The development of the Bethlehem Greenway trail is expected to increase pedestrian use.

Angela DelGrosso, senior vice president of the Bethlehem Chamber at the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, said the biggest request she hears from North Side and South Side business owners is the desire to provide a pedestrian-friendly connection between the two downtowns.

Reducing traffic congestion when trying to get between the two downtowns is also crucial, she said.

DelGrosso was happy to see a six-foot-wide sidewalk included in the plan for the new, parallel span, but she and others in the business community want to see a dedicated pedestrian bridge. A pedestrian bridge is something city officials have been exploring for several years, but it would be separate from the PennDOT project.