

# Interviews with design firms yield new insights into the utility and value of a pedestrian/biking bridge across the Lehigh

The Bethlehem Gadfly Pedestrian bridge, Walkability and Bikeability November 11, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts on the pedestrian bridge 

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Dear Gadfly:

A recent series of interviews between the City and four nationally prominent bridge design firms has yielded significant new insights into the potential economic and social impact of the pedestrian/biking bridge across the Lehigh River. New faces and new ideas have greatly boosted our understanding of the bridge as a community asset.

The interviews with their accompanying commentaries have brought wonderful new perspectives into the potential economic and cultural uses of the bridge. First and foremost on the engineering side, it is notable that not one of the design firms found traversing the railroad tracks an overwhelming issue. In fact, throughout the interviews, the idea of a technical or political impossibility of building the bridge was never a concern.

On economic issues the design firms were equally positive. New input brought fresh insights. By connecting Historic Bethlehem with the Greenway, for example, the bridge opens a physically active dimension to tourism in Bethlehem — a reason for longer visits to the city! A richly lit

“night bridge” along the Lehigh River promises a gorgeous fifteen minute evening walk between the downtown and the South Side Arts district and a major new addition to the city’s night life. As a daytime attraction, the bridge has the prospect of creating a vehicle-free pedestrian hub in the exact center of the city: a contemporary locus for commercial and cultural engagement.

Meanwhile, in a second revealing enterprise, our work with the Climate Action Plan proved an equally insightful opportunity for understanding the social and economic benefits of the bridge. As a link between the north and south corridors of the city, the bridge suddenly took on a greater utilitarian scope. That north-south connection immediately makes commuting to work by bike a reasonable alternative for hundreds of Bethlehemites. Most importantly, it makes the creation of an *intercity biking infrastructure* a practical concept. In short, the pedestrian bridge, as it supports the Climate Action Plan by taking vehicles off the roads, would give rise to a committed biking population in Bethlehem and provide the catalyst for what we might call a “biking city.”

And so, with the input of a full cadre of urban planners, the potential benefits of the pedestrian/biking bridge have become ever more profound. Embraced by the city’s Climate Action Plan and recognized by a series of national consulting firms as a potentially powerful means for advancing the city as a tourist destination, a pedestrian/biking bridge across the Lehigh River could not be a finer symbol of the city’s progressive future.

Doug

**The Bethlehem Gadfly**