

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE BRIDGE CRISIS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

JIM FLAHERTY

CHAIRMAN

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Frank Lloyd Wright once said, "the best thing that could be done for Pittsburgh would be to destroy the entire downtown, sparing only the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail". Gentlemen, if the Bills before you this morning do not pass, you will have started Pittsburgh down that same road to destruction and made a prophet out of that great architect.

If an enemy wanted to cripple the defenses of the United States, all he would have to do is to destroy Pittsburgh, the steel capital of this country, where over 20 million tons of steel are produced each year. To destroy Pittsburgh, the enemy would not have to burn down all its buildings, however. All he would have to do is destroy the bridges that link the triangular center of the city with the land to the north, west and south. By cutting off these transportation links, he would virtually isolate the heart of the city. Three interstate highways would be obstructed. And highway access from the east would soon be cut off. Without its bridges, Pittsburgh would be paralyzed, an island of corporate headquarters lacking communication with their industrial plants. Military strategists have always designated bridges as the primary targets of bombing, ranking them even ahead of the steel mills -- for if armor plate cannot be shipped to the factories when it is made into ships and tanks, it is virtually useless.

At this time, I am not aware of any eminent enemy attacks on Pittsburgh. But, ironically, all we have to do -- is to do nothing -- and we will have accomplished what an enemy would attempt to do. Our 1700 bridges in Allegheny County are now so urgently in need of repair -- at an estimated cost, by 1976 figures, of \$260 million. Let me point out to you just a few of these deficient bridges: the crucial bridges which link downtown Pittsburgh to the north, the west, and the south.

Before you are two images of Allegheny County. The first is an artist's rendering of downtown Pittsburgh which was designed to promote our new convention center, financed by the State of Pennsylvania. The second is a realistic photograph that shows where some 130,000 people work, shop, or do business -- downtown -- and where some 1,600,000 people live -- Allegheny County. In both images, the bridges stand out. They, along with the wide rivers and high, wooded hills, are among our most beautiful assets. But, because of their deterioration, these bridges are our major problem, creating a crisis which threatens the safety, the economy and the mobility of our citizens.

We have been forced to fix load limitations of 3 to 5 tons on many of the bridges you see before you. These limitations cannot be tolerated for long, however, in Allegheny County where 417,000 tons of materials and goods must cross a major river bridge every day. At times, a four-lane bridge is limited to single lane traffic, while repairs are being made. As one bridge is limited to 3 or 5 ton-traffic, all the loaded trucks must be diverted to another bridge further down the river. The

extra burdens diverted to this second bridge hasten the deterioration, in turn, of the residential streets which were not designed to support a large volume of heavy loads. If nothing is done to alleviate this situation, there will soon be no bridges or roads to carry loaded trucks in and out of the Golden Triangle.

Our bridge crisis affects all parts of Allegheny County. We have about 1700 bridges. There is practically one bridge per mile of highway and 2.3 bridges per square mile. This morning, I would like to emphasize the situation of just one square mile of Allegheny County: the Golden Triangle, or central business district of Pittsburgh. Here nine (9) critical bridges span the Allegheny and the Monongahela Rivers, connecting the Golden Triangle with the north, the west, and the south. Today 7 out of these 9 bridges are deficient. One has just recently been rehabilitated at a cost of nearly half a million dollars. It is estimated that the repair or replacement of the remaining 7 bridges will cost over \$56 million. This is just about 1/5 of the total 260 million needed for all our bridges.

Now let us look at the situation of downtown Pittsburgh more closely. In the photograph, the four bridges most clearly visible all span the Monongahela River, connecting with the entire western and southern parts of the County, where most of the County residents live. All of these four bridges are deficient. From the left:

The Fort Pitt Bridge (1) carries Interstate Route 279, leading to

the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, Southwestern Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. 41,000 tons of goods cross this bridge every day. The bridge is only 18 years old -- but an in-depth inspection this year has revealed major deterioration in the bridge deck and concrete piers. Rehabilitation will cost over \$17 million.

The next bridge in the photograph is the Smithfield Street Bridge (2). This bridge, nearly 100 years old, carries all the trolleys from the southern part of the County and most of the vehicles from the Southside of the City, into the Golden Triangle. Right now emergency repairs are underway, and a 15-ton limit is fixed on the bridge. This means that only one trolley can go over this bridge at a time. No heavy trucks can cross this link with the Southside where J&L Steel is considering investing \$200 million to modernize its plant. The estimated cost of replacing this bridge is over \$34 million.

The third bridge is a railroad only bridge, called the "Panhandle Bridge (3), which seems to have been spared the chemical warfare waged by the destructive onslaught of sodium chloride necessary in our severe winters to salt the road surfaces of our bridges, since steel wheel vehicles use sand for traction.

The fourth bridge is the Liberty Bridge (4). This 50 year old bridge connects downtown Pittsburgh and the South Hills, by way of the Liberty tunnels. Because of the major deterioration in the floor system, the bridge decks, the truss members and the piers, it will take more than

\$13-1/2 million to rehabilitate this bridge. But to give you some idea of the time element involved, it is going to take ten years to do the engineering and the construction necessary to rehabilitate the bridge to last 20 more years.

I could go on with more facts and figures like these. Let me mention that among the bridges that cross the Allegheny River -- which you see in the artist's rendering of downtown Pittsburgh -- three more County owned bridges (Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Streets) remain unsafe for heavy traffic, and will cost an estimated \$2.5 million to rehabilitate them. But the in-depth inspections on these bridges are five years old! Before any rehabilitation can begin, an updated in-depth inspection must be carried out for all three bridges. This will take time, many engineers and inspectors, and an additional \$400,000.

In this short time, I have only scratched the surface of our bridge crisis by mentioning nine (9) of the more than 100 bridges already identified as deficient. The estimated need of \$260 million is deceiving, however, because that figure will soon become obsolete. As more of the costly and time-consuming in-depth inspections of all our bridges are completed, we will expect our needs to become even greater. Will \$300 million take care of the rehabilitation and replacement of all deficient bridges in Allegheny County? If we wait five or ten more years, will \$500 million be enough?

Gentlemen, I think the main problem should be clear to you: Allegheny County, the 9th largest county in the United States and the largest

producer of steel in this country, cannot survive without its bridges. Even now, as more bridge closings and load limitations are ordered, the economy of our industries -- is suffering. Ultimately, this is not a crisis that is limited to Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, or the tri-state area of Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. This crisis will ultimately affect the entire nation. But Allegheny County, the pioneer bridge builder of this country, with the oldest and, now, the most structurally deficient bridges, is in need of immediate help.

We cannot wait until a national policy on bridge salvation is addressed. We cannot stop salting the roadways of our few good bridges until a national solution is found, so they will deteriorate while local funds are used like fingers in the leaking dike to meet crisis after crisis.

Again, let me remind you that our own worst enemy is not attacking from the outside. Our own worst enemy is -- inaction. If nothing is done to meet this crisis of deteriorating bridges --- we will all be held responsible for the disaster which no enemy has been able to accomplish.