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Northern Valley Gazette

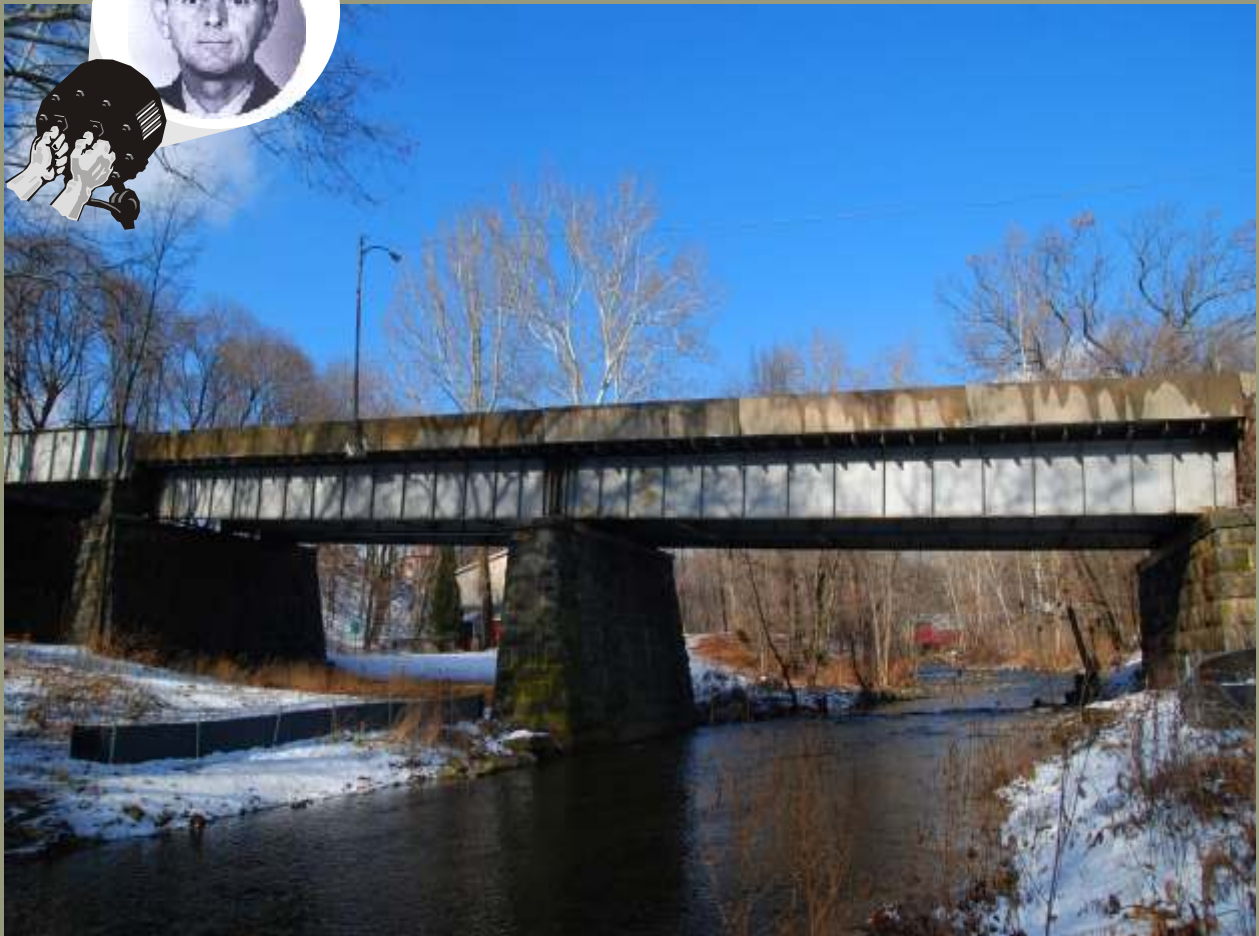


February 21, 2008

Volume I No. 6

Your neighborhood connection throughout northern Northampton & Lehigh Counties

Ask for us by name!



Deadline for the next issue is February 27th

Cover Photo by Rick Sweitzer

The Bridge Club

By Lori West Vernon

The Every Other Wednesday Morning Bridge Club, as it is fondly referred to by John Kasten, Slatington Borough Manager, missed the February 13 meeting. Bad weather caused the meeting to be cancelled. John Kasten and Fred Rentschler, however, took time out of their busy schedules to talk about this club, which has been the driving force behind the replacement of the General Morgan Bridge. "Since December of 2005, people representing the municipality have been regularly meeting and planning," Kasten said. "All of those people who come deserve the accolades."

There has been a core group that have remained involved with this project. Fred Rentschler and Gary Fedorcha have led the group, but Fred said it is the business owners, school district representative, concerned citizens, local organizations and area politicians that have been the motivating factor behind this group. Many of those attending these meetings will be directly affected by the bridge closing.

The details of this project have required a great deal of planning. "We owe a lot of thanks to Larry Turoscy of Lehigh Valley Engineering for providing the club with maps of the area." Kasten continued, "Designing the best way to handle traffic and parking was a group effort from Borough and emergency workers in the Borough." John Bolton, Borough Maintenance, and Keith Weaver, Fire Chief, looked at parking and possible one-way traffic patterns to best accommodate buses and emergency vehicles.

According to John Kasten, from the combined efforts of Rails to Trails, Northern Lehigh Future Focus, the Historical Society and the Bridge Club, the stones from the old General Morgan Bridge will be stored by Pete Papay until a project comes up where they can be used.

These people include State Representative Julie Harhart, PennDOT, Lehigh County executives, Jan Creeden, Larry Turoscy, Greg

Derr, Jimmy Haydt, Washington Township Supervisors, Slatington Fire Dept., Slatington Police Dept., Police Chief Dave Rockman, Ed Ziegler, Pete Papay, Karen Papay, Wendy Schlappish, Rory Orkin, Allen Boyer, Drew Maron from the Chamber of Commerce, Bob Keegan, Jack Bechtel, Gary Fadorcha and John Bolten. (Our apologies to anyone who may have been missed.)

"Local government works best when it includes more people and their ideas," Kasten said. "Fred (Rentschler) and I believe this is a perfect example of this."

This group is more than just a committee about a bridge, but has become a Bridge in, of and for the community. It is allowing communication and discussion leading to improvement and growth in the future.

NORTHERN VALLEY GAZETTE FEBRUARY 21, 2008 PAGE 3

Dear Lori,

Thank you for opening the dialogue about the reconstruction of the General Morgan Bridge.

As Chairperson of the Highway Committee, which oversees this project, I will be happy to address any question or concern residents may have. I also welcome everyone to attend Borough Council meetings (held the second Monday of the month at Borough Hall at 7 p.m.) and Highway Committee meetings (held the third Tuesday of the month in Borough Hall at 6:30 p.m.).

The General Morgan Bridge is 107 years old and has been rated structurally deficient by PennDOT. Although the closing of the bridge will create detours and a longer commute, and it will have a direct impact on local businesses, this short-term loss will result in the long-term gain of a new bridge.

I look forward to hearing from our residents and will continue to provide them with the best public service I can offer.

Best regards,
Kris Burek
Slatington Borough Council

Hometown History

According to Dave

DAVID D. ALTRICHTER
610-767-5519

Main Street Bridge

Nicholas Kern moved his family to the foot of Main Street in 1741. They established a sawmill and gristmill in this area. The old Warrior's Path was the only access from the east for twenty years. In 1861, the first public road was laid out to this area following some of the old Warrior's Path across the Lehigh River to the Slatington hill crossing Trout Creek, a hundred feet south of the bridge and extended in a south-westerly direction parallel to the Blue Mountain and around the hillside to the present course. A vast network of Indian trails, covering eastern Pennsylvania, were turned into roads and highways we travel everyday. In 1814, the court gave a favorable recommendation to build a Main Street bridge across Trout Creek., but for some reason, not recorded, the bridge was not built until 1826. The first Main Street Bridge was constructed of stone and served this growing community for forty-three years. The slate industry needed better transportation to get their product to the market place. This was accomplished in 1856 when the Lehigh Valley Railroad constructed their main line through town. In 1864, the Borough of Slatington incorporated and the stone Main Street Bridge replacement became one of the needed improvements. In 1869, the Borough installed the two Henszey Bowstrung iron bridges about 300 feet long with an elevation of about 30 feet over Trout Creek. This opened access to the west when the Lehigh Valley Railroad installed a spur route to



This 1869 photo shows the opening of the Main Street Bridge looking East. In the background you see the Victorian currently owned by Debbie Miller. To the right is the old Mill the building to the left is unidentified. Photo courtesy of David Altrichter

the slate field. At Emerald, this line connected with the Burks County Railroad. By 1900, it was determined that the violent puffing of the railroad engines caused some of the iron beams to show weakness and decay.

This bridge only served the Borough for 31 years before it was removed in 1901. It was sold to Lynn Township and conveyed by teams thirteen miles to Ontelaunee Creek near Berks County where it was used to improve the road between New Tripoli to Kempton. The bridge was closed to traffic in 1987. After 118 years, you would think this bridge story ends. No. In 2002 a 93-foot section of this old iron bridge was removed near the village of Wanamakers and shipped to Central Penn College in Summerdale, Pa., where it now serves as a pedestrian bridge. President Todd A. Milano said, "I am excited about the symbolism of the whole thing. The College serves as a bridge for our students on their journey to be professionals." The bridge designed by Joseph G. Henszey in 1969 is the only one of its kind in the nation. The College spent \$220,000 to move and refurbish this bridge that back in 1900 was thought to be weak and decaying.

The 1901 Main Street Bridge brought some new challenges to the Borough—the 1850 Kern gristmill and Victorian homes created a sharp turn at the bottom of the hill. The new bridge opened downtown trolley service in 1901, when the Lehigh Valley Traction Company extended their line to the railroad station. James G. Rauch also decided this was a good location for his business and built a four-story apartment building and print shop located on the north side of the bridge. This business was known as the Slatington News Publishing Company. This bridge has seen some



This 1900 photo looking up (West) Main Street on the left shows the Samuel B. Constenbeder Family home. In 1953 Stephen and John Papay bought the property. Today it is the parking lot for East Penn Bank. On the left you can see the work being completed on the First Baptist Church. Photo courtesy of David Altrichter



Looking Down Main Street in the 1920's a trolley coming up Main Street with the Slatting News Publishing Company building. Photo courtesy of David Altrichter

changes over the years. A steel grading was installed for several years, but it proved to be unsafe in bad weather. Another interesting note is the Truckers Mill state highway marker was located on the street side of the pavement until it got knocked down in the late 1970s. It was relocated to the inside bridge railing where it has been until 2008, when it was removed again until the bridge is replaced.

In the late 1970's, Borough Council had concerns about the deterioration of the Main Street Bridge. One afternoon, we meet under the bridge to get a first-hand look at how the bridge shook when heavy vehicles drove over it. The long process to replace the bridge began at that time. Many Borough officials became frustrated over the delays, postponements and unkept promises over the last quarter of a century. We have always had the support of our representatives in Harrisburg, but someone was always holding up the project. PennDOT pushed the date back because the Federal Highway Commission did not finish their paperwork, or finalizing an agreement with the Historical and Museum Commission. Since the bridge crosses Trout Creek, permits had to be approved by Department of Environmental Protection. The Lehigh Northampton Joint Planning Commission needed their stamp of approval. PennDOT bought the old Slattington News building and removed it in November 2003. They say it generally takes five to ten years to replace a bridge. Thank God, PennDOT nearly completed our paperwork before the other bridges in this area were given a lower rating. In the old days, it was a lot easier to build a bridge without all this paper shuffling.

Allen O. Delke Post #16 American Legion got the idea of naming the new bridge after the

highest-ranking military man from Slattington. Representative Paul W. Semmel and Senator David J. Brightbill helped the American Legion accomplish this goal. PennDOT at first resisted the idea because they only name bridges after someone deceased. Our elected officials were successful in their negotiations. On August 29, 1992, our Four Star General Thomas R. Morgan came to Slattington for the dedication of his bridge. We look forward to General Morgan's return for the dedication of our new bridge.

During the next year of detours and traffic jams, your patience may be pushed to the limits. I ask you to remember this is a minor inconvenience for a major improvement. Some day I hope we will all look around and say "thank you" to everyone who helped bring about the replacement of the old General Morgan Bridge. May the new bridge last as long.



General Morgan Bridge: Long Versus Short Term

By Pat Bechtel

A few years ago, Fred Rentschler, president of Rentschler Chrysler, 255 N. Walnut St., Slatington, and John Kasten, Slatington Borough's manager, started the Bridge Club, which is an informal group of local businessmen that are trying to make the best of the General Morgan Bridge Project.

"In 1987 they closed the Lehigh Gap Bridge, and we lived through that," Rentschler said. "We were concerned about the impact the General Morgan Bridge will have on local businesses."

Rentschler said that in the short term, Slatington's businesses will be affected greatly and that the business that will probably be affected the most by the project is Galio's because of all the traffic that will be passing by it. People will still be able to get through Slatington via alternate routes, but many people won't want to come through the town throughout the duration of the project.

It is expected that the General Morgan Bridge will be closed down in the beginning to the middle of March and that, depending on weather, the new bridge will be up by December. Rentschler said that this plan is better than the alternative.

"If we wait and it falls down, it could take longer than a year to get it back going and that would be devastating to the community," Rentschler said.

Kris Burek, of Slatington's highway committee, said that the contractor is currently ahead of schedule, even though the project is long overdue.

"I'm happy that it's finally happening," Burek said. "I apologize for any delays this may cause, but I really think this short-term loss will turn into a long-term gain."

Burek said that the bridge, which currently

takes over 12,000 vehicles per day, will be much safer once the project is finished. The new bridge will have a safer infrastructure, good sidewalks and Victorian lighting.

The bridge is being repaired at no cost to the community. About 3.9 million dollars of state and federal money will be used for the project. The stone from the General Morgan Bridge will be saved for the Historical Society. This year's Halloween Parade will take a different route. It will probably start at Northern Lehigh High School, travel down Diamond Street and head into Walnutport.

"I believe what the project has shown is that there's a core of local business people in the community who care about the Borough and the surrounding townships," Rentschler said. "Larry Turoscy [of Lehigh Engineering] owns his own engineering company, and he has helped with projects, maps and sign control. He's an example of someone who cares."

The Bridge Club expects to continue to meet during the period that the bridge is down to try to help better the situation.



The last days of the General Morgan Bridge

Photo by Pat Bechtel

Patience is the Key

By Lori West Vernon

The next few weeks we can expect a lot of delay and confusion as drivers get used to taking alternative routes getting around the Slatington area. Here are a few suggestions to make your travel around the area a little more helpful.

- Remember to allow extra time. You may know your way around, but on any given day someone may wander into the detour and become lost or confused and slow down traffic.

- Stop well back from the intersection for stops or turns. Many of these intersections are not made for large vehicles to turn. If a school bus, delivery truck or emergency vehicle needs to make a turn, they will need to swing wide. If you park on the street, make sure you stay well back from the corner to allow for tight turns. Many intersections will be re-marked with stop lines. Stopping at the white line will insure that turning vehicles will have room to make the corner.

- At an intersection take turns. Generally, the vehicle to your right goes first (This is where the term "Yield Right of Way" comes from). However, if it is bigger than you, let it go first.

- Many of the school bus routes are changing either directions or times. You may have buses stopping along your route at new times. Children getting on and off the busses may not have had to

worry about traffic before, but, because of changes in traffic patterns, they are now getting on and off in heavy traffic. Remember to stay well back from school busses when they are loading or unloading students.

- Emergency vehicles will be using side roads that they normally would not use to get to emergencies and if there is an emergency along the alternative route, be prepared for delays.

- For the local businesses along Main Street in Slatington, this will be a hard time. Please make an effort to continue to patronize them.

- Residents that normally park on the detour routes should start planning now to find alternative parking. If you are planning to have guests during the bridge construction make sure you have some place for them to park.

- For the locals, they will find their way around on the side streets. Some commuters will start taking the PennDOT detour right from the start. Many others will look for shortcuts and some may find that an enjoyable ride in the country on the way to work is very relaxing.

- A southbound traveler may experience some delays and find merging off route 329 back on to route 873 at Neffs with the left hand turn difficult. Be careful as there are three lanes of traffic that can head south at that intersection. An alternative is to use Mauch Chunk Road south at Bellietsville and avoid the delay on Route 309.

Lieutenant General Thomas R. Morgan

Family History

By David Altrichter

Thomas is the son of Harry and Olwen Morgan and lived at 618 W. Franklin Street in Slatington. Olwen was born December 14, 1898, in Cardiff, Wales, the daughter of Robert G. Pierce and Sarah Ann (Richards). Olwen was educated and received her teaching degree in Cardiff, Wales, before moving with the family to 566 Main Street. This home is currently owned by Craig and Doris Braday. Mr. Pierce opposed the location of the Fireman's Drinking Fountain with good reason, but the courts ruled against him for the public good. Olwen told me she had to help clean up the horse droppings before her father got home from work each day. She started teaching in the one-room schoolhouse in Washington Township located across the street from Good Shepherd UCC on the Mountain Road. Olwen met Harry while he was running power lines out the Mountain Road as an employee of PP&L. They had two boys—Robert P. and Thomas R.—and Olwen gave full attention to the boys through their formative years.

Robert G. Pierce and his wife's father, Joseph Richards, were prominent businessmen in Slatington. Mr. Pierce and Mr. Richards, along with Ellis Owens, owned the Carbon Slate Company, giving employment to 150 persons. They shipped slate through the United States and many foreign countries. They were also involved in many other business enterprises. Joseph Richards home was at 605 Main Street, the present location of the Slatington Post Office. Another interesting note is Joseph's son, Dr. Josiah Richards, was a U.S. Army Surgeon during the Spanish American War. Mr. Pierce's family were Baptists. In 1900, he and his business associates contributed one half of the cost of constructing the First Baptist Church at Main and Second streets in Slatington.

Robert P. graduated from Slatington High School in 1946 and Thomas in 1948. Olwen went back to teaching in the four-room schoolhouse in Walnutport known as the White House. I was one of her students in 1953 when her husband, Harry, passed away. She finished her twenty-five-year teaching career at the Roosevelt building. I remember Olwen's attending the Memorial Day Service until her passing in 1991.

Robert P. Morgan married Joan Seip from Emerald, and they had one son, David, who still lives in Slatington. Thomas R. Morgan married Barbara Croze from Kailua, Hawaii, and they had



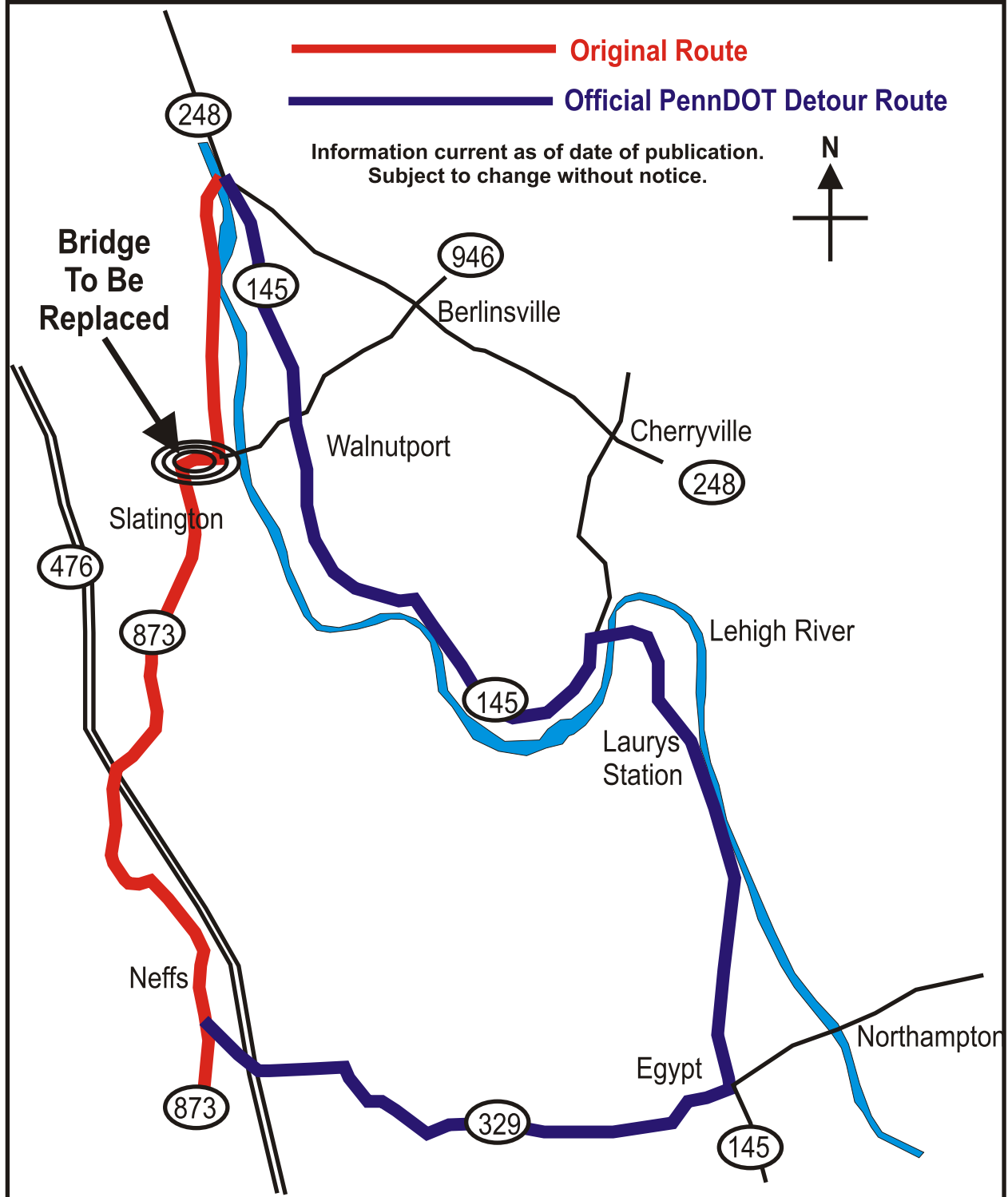
Lieutenant General Thomas R. Morgan.
Photo courtesy of David Altrichter

three children: Mrs. Lynn Rothenberg, who lives in Illinois, Mrs. Susan Herzog living in Virginia and Mrs. Beth Cuzzocrea living in California. Thomas and Barbara retired in Virginia.






SLATINGTON BRIDGE PROJECT

PENNDOT DETOUR MAP

From the Map supplied by PENNDOT

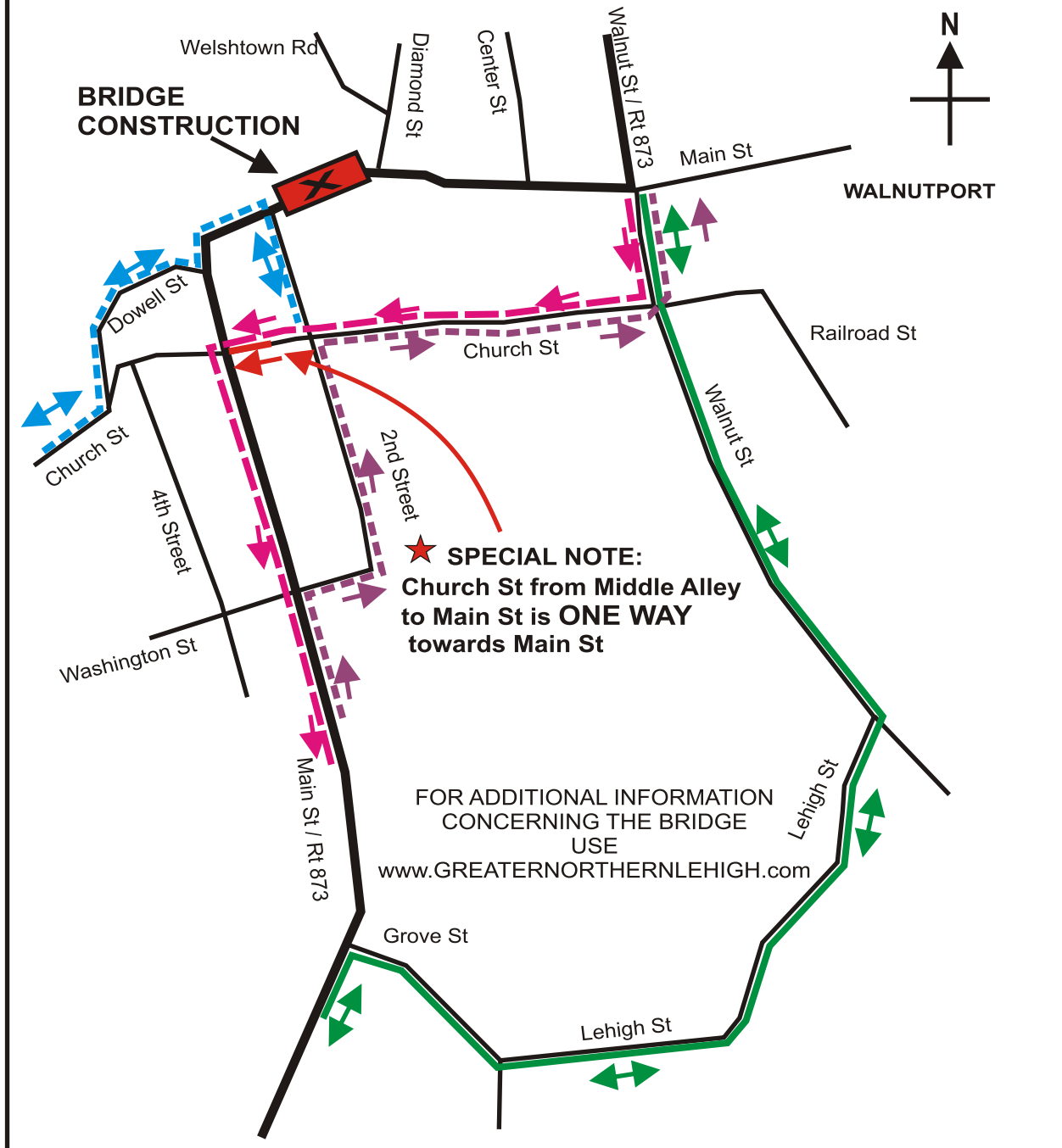


LOCAL AREA SUGGESTED BRIDGE DETOUR ROUTES

-  Rt 873 Original Route
-  Northbound Alt Rt 1
-  Southbound Alt Rt 1
-  North & Southbound Alt Rt 2
-  Eastbound Rt

Map Redrawn to fit Northern Valley Gazette
from original map provided by Lehigh Engineering

For Official Bridge Detour Contact
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
All information shown is current as of the latest
Bridge Committee Meeting prior to publication.
Subject to Change without Notice



Pedestrian Walkway

Sections of the pedestrian walk way are assembled ready to be shifted to the other side of Trout Creek. The three sections will be assembled and placed onto concrete box structure supports. Wood decking and fencing will complete the project. Once in place the bridge work can begin. The walk way will be at a 10% grade like to the current bridge Photo by Lori West Vernon



Bus News from Northern Lehigh School District

The General Morgan Bridge in Slatington is scheduled to close the first or second week in March. It is expected to remain closed through December of 2008. This presents a difficult challenge for the transportation department. We have many buses whose routes cross the bridge. Along with our regular AM and PM bus runs, the Northern Lehigh School District also provides transportation daily to four nonpublic schools, and makes four runs to LCTI daily. In the near future the district will be mailing out a letter to every parent in the district explaining the changes that will be necessary to ensure that the students arrive on time for the start of the school day. The district will receive a two week notice from PennDOT as to the closure date. We have already begun making some bus changes in preparation for the closing. There will soon be information available on the district web site about the closing, busing changes and the local detour map. The website address is www.nlsd.org.

Thank you,

Greg Derr. Director of Support Services

Bridge Up-Date

As of Feb. 20 the NLHS and MS changed several bus routes to accommodate the LCTI bus schedule allowing for traffic delay. Bus schedules and route change for Slatington Elementary and Peters Elementary are set. PennDOT must give two weeks notice of the bridge closing. When the school receives the notice from PennDOT, parents will be notified by mail of their child's bus times. Slatington Elementary's day will start 10 min. later at 8:35 am and get out at 2:55. Peters day will start at 9:25 am, and dismiss at 3:45 pm. Head Start will run from 9:50 am to 2:50 pm at Peters. Nonpublic students pickup and drop off times will change, but the start of the school day will stay the same.

LANTA has announced changes in the schedule due to the bridge closing. Public transport is required to follow the detour routes set by PennDOT. There will be no bus service into Walnutport. The final stop in Slatington will be at Dowell and Main (Horner's Laundry). All riders from lower Main Street and Walnutport will now have to use the walkway and pickup the bus at this location. If there are any questions please call LANTA at 610-776-7433.

Greater Lehigh Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Borough of Slatington is working on ideas to encourage patronage of local businesses. Some ideas in addition to the Art Fair and Walnutport Canal Days are: a Business Scavenger Hunt, Movie Night, Street Fairs, West End Playground Night, and Pool Parties. For updated information contact 610-769-5869 or www.greaternorthernlehigh.com.

The Northern Valley Gazette has printed additional copies of our issue featuring the General Morgan Bridge project and the detour information. If you are interested in getting a copy please contact our office 610-760-9469.

Bridge Up-Date

The bridge project is still on schedule but there is a little glitch. It seems the walk way did not meet specifications. In spite of the delay in the pedestrian walk way, the bridge closing is still planned for mid-April. Notice of the closing is expected the end of March.

How will this work if there is not a pedestrian walk way? This was the topic of discussion at the last bridge meeting where representatives of PennDOT, Road-Con, the construction firm, the school district, bridge club members and Borough officials were present.

The solution has been used before with other bridge replacement projects. It involves a bus shuttle from about 6:30-7:30 and again from 2:10 - 3:10 for the students that normally would walk across the bridge. A bus will pick them up from a designated spot up town and deliver them to the school in the morning, and deliver them back to the lot from school in the evening. It is estimates that approximately 200 students walk and will need transportation.

For the public, a 25 passenger shuttle will pick up at a designated site a up-town and drop them off at a point on lower Main Street. This shuttle will run seven days a week from 6:00 am til 9:00 pm. **East Church Street from Walnut to First (the Danny) will be CLOSED TO ALL PEDESTRIANS.** This will be a very high traffic roadway and there are no sidewalks or guardrail.

All these plans are tentative and must be approved by the Borough and PennDOT. According to Kris Burek, Borough Council woman, this should not delay the bridge project, but insure that it will start and be able to take advantage of good weather. The NL School District will send information home to high school and middle school students as soon as all the details are worked out. They will be sending notice out to parents of elementary students about starting time changes as soon as notification of the bridge closing is received.

The Borough and Washington Township have been working to put up signs and check the roads to get them ready for the change in traffic patterns, bus routes and parking. Washington Township has placed pipe under the road at Lehigh Street and North Gate to trap water from a spring under the road. This will help solve a long existing problem with an ice spot on the road in winter.

For updates on the project call 610-769-5869 or check out www.greaternorthernlehigh.com

Local Effects

By Lori West Vernon

Work began on the replacement of the General Morgan Bridge on January 17 with the removal of trees and laying of a rock base for the construction vehicles. Soon after, the pieces of the pedestrian walkway arrived. Slowly, the assembly process began.

The pedestrian walkway will consist of three spans totaling 330 feet at about a 10 percent grade. It will be metal with a wooden deck, and it will be fenced on both sides.

Construction is expected to take about 8 months at a cost of \$3.9 million. The new concrete box beam, two span bridge will be a total of 210 feet long and will have a side walk on both sides. A single middle support and the end supports will have the look of stone block. Aluminum rails on the bridge and Period streetlights will finish the project keeping it close in looks to what we have been use to.

One of the biggest impacts the construction will have is on school traffic. A number of the bus routes cross the bridge several times a day either full of students or on the return for their next runs. Dr. Nicholas Sham said” It is a short inconvenience for the long term solution for the community.” He



The pedestrian walkway is located to the south of the bridge construction. In photos the yellow line represents the placement of the walk.

Photo by Lori West Vernon



The pedestrian walkway will be at a 10% grade similar to the current sidewalk. In photos the yellow line represents the placement of the walk.

Photo by Lori West Vernon

hopes everyone remains flexible and understanding in a tough situation. “There is no guarantee that kids won’t be on the buses longer or that times may be off because of traffic. We cannot guess how the detours will affect traffic. The amount of traffic on the detours is unknown,” He adds.

Another unknown is how the closing of Main Street to thru traffic will affect area businesses. Locals will know how to take the side streets to get gas or pick up a pizza. It is the loss of the commuters stopping for coffee and to fill with gas that will hurt both gas stations. The curiosity shoppers that may have stopped at Stevens Antiques or Donna Schleichers Sweet Shop as they pass through town will be detoured onto routes 145 & 329.

The Emergency Services have been involved with planning the detour routes and the changes in parking. “If we have an emergency it may tie up traffic for a while” says Keith Weaver, Chief of Slatingtons Fire Dept. “Something like an EMS assist on Walnut Street that may take only twenty minuetts, could bring traffic to a stop.” He explains, “We have to be ready, and we have to expect there may be times of emergencies when drivers may have to wait. All we ask for is cooperation and patience.”