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11/16/05

E. Worcester bridge fate still in suspense

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Nothing was resolved at Monday's Worcester Town Board meeting about the fate of an East Worcester bridge that was closed to vehicular traffic last week, some of those who attended said.

About 30 people went to the meeting to discuss the plight of the Brooker Hollow Road bridge that was closed after a state inspection last month found several deficiencies, town officials said.

"Nobody will do repairs until the owner is determined," said Jon M. Coon, town highway superintendent.

He said the town says Delaware and Hudson CP Rail System owns the bridge, which crosses railroad tracks, while he said the rail officials contend it is owned by the town.

Those who attended the meeting wanted some answers that "we couldn't provide until ownership is determined," he said.

The matter, he said, has been sent to the town attorney, Marvin Parshall Sr., who said Tuesday he is still trying to see what can be resolved.

There has been a lack of communication on the part of the railroad, he said.

Nobody from the railroad responded to a message left there for comment Tuesday.

To keep the detour around the closed bridge through winter, the town will dedicate a maintenance truck to the approximately 5.5 mile route, Coon said.

Another concern among those in attendance was the lack of guardrails along the detour, which proceeds downhill for part of the way. That project was in the works before the bridge closing and hopefully will be done by the end of the month, he said.

Frank Reina, a resident who attended the meeting, said, "It's not right" that the bridge was closed. He lived so close to the hamlet, he could walk there, Reina, 73, said. Now he has to drive 22 miles to go to the post office.

Many of those affected are senior citizens, he said. If ambulances or fire trucks are needed, he added, the delay caused by the closing may cost lives.

State Department of Transportation spokeswoman Chris Klein said that an engineering analysis needs to be done on the problems the state inspection found. There have been no developments on the issue since last week, she said.

Otsego Emergency Services Coordinator Lyle "Butch" Jones said there have been no problems as a result of the closure but added that there have been few emergency service calls in the area since

the closing occurred.

Fire departments from outside East Worcester are helping to serve the area affected, he said.

Worcester Central Superintendent John Selover said the town highway department has been working closely with the school to help deal with the situation. Selover sent out a letter to parents of students affected last week, telling them to expect a period of adjustment while the new routes work themselves out, he said.

"I'm not optimistic it will open up anytime soon," he said Tuesday about the bridge.

"It will cost us extra mileage and wear and tear on the buses," he said, "but safety of our students is of primary importance."

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12/02/05

Meeting set at E. Worcester bridge

Officials to discuss temporary repairs

By Mark Boshnack

Staff Writer

A temporary fix could be in the offing for an East Worcester bridge closed after a state inspection.

A meeting for local and state officials involved with the issue is scheduled for 3 p.m. today at the site.

The Brooker Hollow Road bridge was closed in early November after a state Department of Transportation inspection indicated potential failure of a critical primary structure. This caused the town to design a detour of more than five miles, officials said.

The problem was made worse because the town of Worcester said the Delaware and Hudson CP Rail System owns the bridge, and the railway, whose tracks cross the bridge, contend it is owned by the town.

Worcester Supervisor Christopher Clark said that although the ownership needs to be determined, he will be recommending that the town share the cost with CP or pay for a temporary fix because "residents need to be helped." He said he did not know how much such a solution might cost.

The board will consider the issue during its Dec. 12 meeting, he said.

If approved, the work would take about a month to complete and could allow for "light traffic," which Clark said he hoped would allow for a limit of 18,000 pounds.

This would permit school buses and town trucks as well as passenger cars to cross, he said.

But a long-term fix is still needed, state and local officials said.

To that end, state Sen. James Seward, R-Milford, has scheduled today's meeting of state and local officials, as well as representatives of both sides of the dispute, at the state Route 7 side of the bridge.

Seward will be joined by Assemblyman Marc Butler, R-Newport, DOT officials, Clark, and officials from the railroad, Seward spokesman Duncan Davie said.

A solution needs to be found, because "It's an important link between two sections of the town and especially important for emergency and school vehicles," Seward said in a news release. "Getting the parties together to jointly evaluate options and review the ownership issue may help shed some light on where the town might go from here."

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A place is still being sought to meet, after Seward and others inspect the bridge, to review options and how to achieve a long-term solution, Davie said.

A call to the Delaware and Hudson CP Rail System seeking comment Thursday was not returned.

Resident Frank Reina, 73, said he is looking forward to a solution to the problem, which has caused him long detours through the mountainous roads.

"I won't stop calling (area officials) until I see something being done," he said.

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12/03/05

Taffic may resume on bridge in E. Worcester State, local officials talked on Friday about plans for repairs to structure

By Mark Boshnack

Staff Writer

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EAST WORCESTER — Temporary repairs to the East Worcester bridge, closed since early November, could allow traffic to roll before the end of the year, officials said Friday.

The bridge was closed after a state Department of Transportation inspection indicated potential failure of a critical primary structure on Brooker Hollow Road, officials said.

The problem was made worse because the town and Delaware and Hudson CP Rail System refused to claim ownership of the bridge.

Worcester town Supervisor Christopher Clark said that a tentative agreement was reached with a CP official on sharing the \$25,000 to \$35,000 cost.

This in no way acknowledges ownership by either party, he said during a meeting at the bridge and later at the Worcester Fire House, with both meetings coordinated by state Sen. James Seward, R-Milford, and attended by Assemblyman Marc Butler, R-Newport, and other officials.

The railroad still needs to send a letter to the town confirming the agreement, Clark said.

CP official Stephen Fisk, who was also at the meeting, indicated that would not be a problem.

The design by Clough Harbor Associates of Albany would allow for a maximum weight of 18,000 pounds, which would permit cars and town trucks to cross, but not school buses or emergency vehicles, officials said.

Officials agreed that Clough Harbor would be asked to design a fix that would allow for heavier vehicles, but if that would delay the project much past the end of December, it would not be pursued.

Seward said, "I'm glad the town and railroad are stepping up to the plate to allow us to sort out long-term issues and figure out how we will pay for it."

Along with Butler, he assured Otsego County Rep. Donald Lindberg of Worcester and other residents, that if the long-term repair is beyond local means, "the state will be there to help."

Referring to the more than 25 people who came to the bridge when officials were there to inspect it, "These folks will not be forgotten," Seward said.

One of those affected by the closure is local resident Bob Decker, 56, who said he was encouraged

to see elected officials working on the problem.

Lindberg said, "We will stick with the problem until we get a long-term solution."

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12/28/05

Official: Bridge near fix

By Mark Boshnack

Staff Writer

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Progress is being made on a temporary fix that could result in an East Worcester bridge being reopened in the first half of January, a town official said Tuesday.

The Brooker Hollow Road bridge was closed in early November after a state Department of Transportation inspection indicated potential failure of a critical primary structure.

A response was delayed as the town and the Delaware and Hudson CP Rail System argued about ownership.

At a meeting with state officials in early December, both sides agreed to split the cost of the work, estimated to be \$25,000 to \$35,000, without claiming ownership.

The blueprints for the project were received from Clough Harbor Associates of Albany on Friday, Worcester Town Supervisor Christopher Clark said Tuesday.

The town is finishing plans to hire a contractor for the repairs needed to reopen the bridge to traffic, including vehicles as heavy as a school bus, he said.

The board could take action on approving a contract this week, Clark said. After that, if the materials are available and weather permits, it could take about five days for the work, which includes two sets of vertical and horizontal beams and a steel deck, to be completed.

A spokesman for the railroad could not be reached Tuesday.

The situation is something for the town and railroad to address, said state Department of Transportation spokeswoman Chris Klein. The state agency will inspect the bridge before it can be reopened.

Robert Decker lives on the other side of the closed bridge. He said Tuesday that until repairs are made, he has no choice but to travel what town officials said was about a five-mile detour to get to the hamlet.