

TOWN OF DUDLEY
MASSACHUSETTS
Public Information Office



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Dudley Awards Contract to Demolish Brandon Road Mill Race Bridge

One bridge that spans the French River on the Dudley and Webster town line has been inaccessible since June 2021 because an adjoining dry bridge on the Dudley side, known as the Mill Race Bridge, was deemed unsafe.

MassDOT ordered the bridge closed to vehicular traffic in May 2021 when an inspection revealed an interior beam at the midspan was fatigued. The bridge section of road was closed in June 2021.

The combined bridges were a popular bypass for motorists seeking to avoid Main Street traffic when traveling to points in both Dudley and Webster. The Dudley approach on Brandon Road was closed at the intersection of Chase Ave. and barricades were placed on the Hill Street approach in Webster.

Although the site shows no evidence of progress since its closure, the Town of Dudley has been working with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), state legislators and engineering firm Tighe & Bond to launch the more than \$6 million project to permanently reopen the road.

While town officials' sights are set on the permanent fix, they are also seeking to fund a temporary bridge but first, the old bridge must go.

"In addition to working weekly to secure funding, and lobbying for the reconstruction, we have been pursuing a parallel action to demolish the bridge utilizing state Chapter 90 funding rather than local taxes to pay for the removal," Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda said.

Dudley Highway Superintendent Jeffrey Murray recently informed selectmen 11 bids were opened on February 1, with quotes ranging from \$148,500 to \$370,000 to remove the Mill Race Bridge. The town is presently preparing a contract with low bidder Pasquazzi Bros., Inc. of Cranston, RI. Demolition work is expected to start in April and complete in roughly three months.

MassDOT has an inventory of temporary Acrow modular bridges available for loan, but Dudley must come up with \$600,000 to \$800,000 for its engineering and installation.

Murray said many efforts have been made to source the funding to no avail. All possibilities, including grants and appeals to local state reps for special funding have been exhausted, he said, yet the pursuit of funding continues.

"Tighe & Bond did a 60% design on the temporary bridge, which gives the town the tools to ask for funding," he added.

If the funding for a temporary bridge is not found, it could be five or more years before the road reopens.

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“According to historical records with similar bridge situations, the amount of time it takes to get the plan in place, secure funding, and get the project underway, could be a 5-10-year process before the final solution is in place,” Murray said.

The proposed permanent solution would eliminate the Mill Race Bridge by re-grading the area to replace its primary purpose, which was flood control capacity.

“The bright spot on the horizon is the \$6 million as the ultimate solution would be done with federal and state funds. MassDOT would bid, contract and give oversight to the installation without the use of general funds from the town Dudley,” Murray said.

In a January 31 letter, MassDOT deemed the bridge work eligible for funding and approved the estimated cost of \$6,235,000. The town is responsible for the costly and time-consuming process of right-of-way acquisitions. MassDOT will handle the design and environmental permitting, the letter said.

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