

August 19, 2021

To the Townships of Woolwich and Centre Wellington Councils:

We request that you re-consider your January 2020 decision to remove without replacement the Middlebrook Truss Bridge and strongly urge you to repair and refurbish the bridge for pedestrian and bicycling use.

We write to you as Chairs of the Guelph Trail-User Groups Coalition (comprised of nine cycling, hiking and running clubs with over 2,000 members) and the G2G – Guelph Trail Way. We personally know dozens of people who crossed the Middlebrook Bridge on at least a weekly basis, primarily by bicycle. It is by far the safest, and definitely the most scenic and historic, way to cross the Grand for a very long ways, both directions.

We are confident that many other citizens are informing you of the cultural, mental and physical well-being, safety and historic benefits of maintaining the Bridge. But our impression from reading Council minutes is that your decisions to remove the Truss Bridge was based primarily on economic considerations. We believe that you failed to thoroughly examine the broader financial picture, and would like to address two key areas. First, keeping the bridge open yields economic returns that far outweigh the costs. Second, significant funding is available to help cover the costs of repairing/refurbishing the Bridge, especially through recent pandemic funding sources.

Economic Returns

The Environmental Assessment that identified removing the bridge without replacement as the preferred solution completely, and incorrectly, left Active Transportation out of the study. Because Active Transportation was ignored, it was erroneously stated at the Public Consultation Centre that “analysis of data showed that the Middlebrook Place Bridges likely only serve the immediate local area residents”. A study that included pedestrians and cyclists would have shown very significant use of the Bridges by both local and non-local recreationists and commuters.

The passage over the Middlebrook Bridge was an integral part of many local cycling routes. Most frequently, riders would come off of the Kissing Bridge trail and ride up Weisenberg Road, cross the Grand River, then either further enjoy scenic gravel roads up to and around Alma; ride a loop up to Floradale and down to Elmira; or head NE to Elora and Fergus.

The G2G Experience estimates that pedestrian and bicycle traffic on the G2G has tripled during the pandemic. People have discovered it and word is spreading further. Many bicyclists enjoy forays off the trail to explore local roads and towns in the vicinity. Preserving the Middlebrook Bridge offers you a golden opportunity to showcase the townships and reap the benefits of tourist dollars.

Even prior to the pandemic, bicycle tourism was one of the fastest growing leisure sectors in North America. During the pandemic, it has taken off even more. Almost all available bicycles have been sold, with people currently waiting up to a year to buy a new model. A significant portion of bicycle tourists are retirees with fixed pensions, making this form of tourism recession-proof. Many studies have shown that the return on investment for cycling infrastructure is very high. We are providing below just a few examples. We hope this is enough information for you to re-consider your decision, using a longer time-frame that places more emphasis on the economic benefit of retaining the bridge.

Examples of published studies on economic benefits of bicycle tourism

QC

A 2014 study by UQAM's Transat Chair in Tourism in Quebec Province shows cycle tourists spend an average \$214 per day.

A 2006 study of La Route Verte, a 5,300 km network of bicycle designated roads, lanes and multiuse trails, revealed cyclists spent a total of \$134 million, which corresponds to over \$38 million in government revenues and helps support 2,861 jobs. Note that these numbers are much higher than that now, after 15 years of explosive growth in bicycle tourism.

Arkansas

A 2018 study commissioned by the Walton Family Foundation showed that bicycling in Northwest Arkansas provides \$137 million in benefits to the economy annually and that bike tourism is a significant economic driver with tourists spending \$27 million at local businesses each year.

The impact of bicycling on the economy for an extensive trail system centered around the 36-mile Razorback Regional Greenway is estimated at \$137 million annually through local spending, visitor spending and health benefits. Of that amount, \$27 million is attributed to visitor spending through tourism.

Colorado

A study published in October 2016, *Economic and Health Benefits of Bicycling and Walking in Colorado*, revealed that the overall health and economic benefits from bicycling contribute \$1.6 billion to the state. Of that \$1.6 billion, the study attributed \$448 million to non-resident tourism spending, and \$74 million to resident tourism spending, with an overall estimated bicycle tourism economic impact of \$522 million.

The Economic Impact of Cycling in the Pikes Peak Region in a 2015 study commissioned by the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments and shows that 1) bicycling contributes \$28 million per year and 2) bicycle tourism contributes \$23 million per year in direct economic impact to the Pikes Peak region. Each dollar invested in cycling in the Pikes Peak region yields \$1.80 to \$2.70 in direct economic benefits to the community.

U.S.

The Outdoor Industry Association released a study in 2017, *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*, which found that bicycling participants spend \$83 billion on 'trip-related' sales (bicycle tourism), and generate \$97 billion in retail spending. Bicycle recreation spending also contributes to the creation of 848,000 jobs.

Funding sources

Given that bicycling and hiking have been identified as safe recreational outlets that are contributing significantly to emotional and physical well-being during the pandemic, restoration of the Middlebrook Bridge is a prime candidate to receive significant funding from several recently announced funding sources. The fact that the local community is rallying around its preservation, and is willing to fund-raise and help with labour, etc, makes it all the more attractive to funders.

Here is a wonderful local example. We raised \$100,000 in less than four months to build a bridge over a storm-water outflow, along with some other improvements, on the James St. Trail in Guelph. We obtained \$35,000 in grant funding from two sources, \$15,000 from a foundation and the remaining \$50,000 from individual donors. We sense that same community energy around the Middlebrook Bridge.

Below are some examples of funding sources that are worth investigating. No doubt, you are already familiar with these, but we urge you to review them, particularly the newly launched National Active Transportation Strategy and Fund, with respect to rehabilitating the Bridge.

[National Active Transportation Strategy and Fund](#), also [here](#)

[Infrastructure Canada – Investing in Canada Infrastructure](#)

[Community Building Fund – Capital Stream](#)

Please re-consider. The EA on which you based your original decision failed to investigate the significant long-term economic benefits of retaining the bridge, nor was any effort put into identifying funding sources (some of which were not available at the time) that could alleviate the impact of short-term costs.

Thank you for your time and dedication,

Meg Thorburn
Chair, Guelph Trail-User Groups Coalition

Lorenz Calcagno,
Chair, G2G – Guelph Trail Way