
CONNECTING THE NORTH RECREATIONAL TRAIL OVERPASS

Purpose

Secure funding to replace the bridge at Highway 17/Bissett Creek, which currently blocks the multi-purpose Algonquin Trail, which is part of the larger Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail (OVRT), and halts tourism growth. Replacing the bridge will restore vital trail access, attract more than 150 users per day, and reconnect the region to Northern Ontario's trail network – boosting local economies and enabling year-round tourism opportunities.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Province of Ontario for its ongoing support on numerous projects, including the provision of granular material for the development of the Algonquin Trail. We look forward to strengthening this collaborative relationship moving forward.

Proposal

The importance of the Algonquin Trail/Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail in promoting an active lifestyle, connecting communities, boosting economic development, and providing viable transportation alternatives in parallel to Highway 417/17 cannot be overstated. However, an aged former CP Rail bridge/overpass risks the linking of this recreational artery northward to Mattawa.

We are asking for your support to replace the Algonquin Trail overpass over Highway 17 in Bissett Creek, which has reached the end of its service life, ensuring the connection of the Algonquin Trail continues to Mattawa.

Why Now

The Algonquin Trail, when completed, will stretch from our border with Lanark County at the Town of Arnprior to our border with Papineau-Cameron Township near Deux Riviere, a distance of approximately 216 kilometres. The Algonquin Trail, part of the Ottawa Valley Recreation Trail (OVRT), developed and owned in partnership between Renfrew County, Lanark County, and Papineau-Cameron Township, connects Smith Falls to Mattawa, a distance of approximately 296 kilometres. On the national scale, the Algonquin Trail is also part of the Trans Canada Trail network. Renfrew County has been developing Algonquin Trail since a Land Acquisition Agreement was reached with Canada Pacific Rail Company for their former rail corridor in 2016. By the end of 2025, the Algonquin Trail will be completed and open from Arnprior to Bissett Creek, a distance of approximately 176 kilometres.

County Structure AT032 is a former train bridge/overpass in Bissett Creek which would carry the trail over Highway 17 and Bissett Creek. The existing three span, steel girder bridge is in poor condition with severe corrosion on much of the steel structural members and very severe spalling on the concrete piers. In its current condition, the bridge cannot support additional weight for installation of barriers, construction equipment, or the snowmobile trail groomer. As such, the County has been exploring several alternatives for the bridge:

1. Removal of the bridge and construction of an on-grade crossing over Highway 17 using an existing concrete box culvert to cross Bissett Creek nearby

This alternative is considered unsafe due to the poor sight lines along Highway 17 in the area and high speed of traffic. Moving the crossing would incur a large cost making this alternative not viable in other locations as well.

2. Rehabilitation of the bridge to similar geometry

This alternative is not considered to be a cost effective long-term solution for the bridge/overpass. The poor condition of the bridge would incur a great cost to rehabilitate and would result in a low added design life for the bridge. Additionally, one of the existing piers is immediately adjacent to Highway 17, which presents several challenges should MTO consider even minor expansion of the Highway in this area.

3. Removal of the bridge and construction of a tunnel carrying the trail under Highway 17, using an existing box culvert to cross Bissett Creek nearby

This alternative will be further explored with the assistance of an Engineering Consultant and in consultation with the Ministry of Transportation. It would be a significant cost; however, it would be a viable long-term solution.

4. Removal of two piers and replacement of superstructure with a modular bridge on the existing abutments

This alternative is going to be further explored with the assistance of an Engineering Consultant and in consultation with the Ministry of Transportation. It would be a significant cost (approximately \$2.4 million); however, it would be a viable long-term solution.

The County has been in discussions with the Ministry of Transportation regarding all of the above alternatives and will continue to be as the viable alternatives are further evaluated. We have solicited the services of Dillon Consulting Limited to complete a more detailed replacement study report on the two viable alternatives above.

Regardless of the alternative to proceed, completing this important connection for the Algonquin Trail will incur significant cost and burden the overall budget for the County of Renfrew. Any supports which may be available would be of tremendous assistance in ensuring a viable transportation connection from Smith Falls to Mattawa.