

THE QUICK STORY OF SCHELL BRIDGE

AND HOW IT IS SPAWNING COPY-CAT BIKE PATH BRIDGES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE



Schell Bridge over the CT River at Northfield Mass. www.schellbridge.org

This was built in 1903 by a wealthy benefactor named Francis Schell, who then donated it to the town. Since it was a privately financed project, it had a lot of interesting architectural features not found on standard DPW-built bridges. It was operated as an automobile bridge until it was taken out of service around 1985 because of deficiencies related to old age. Huge steel plates were then welded over the entrances to seal it off from would-be trespassers, and it was slated to be demolished, but through a strange set of occurrences, the demolition never happened. Instead, in 2003, a local history buff and a friend of mine—Tony Jewell—submitted it to Mass Historic as one of the state’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Resources. And, to his amazement, it was

chosen.

Friends of Schell Bridge (FOSB) was then founded in 2004 and the group spent the next 10+ years advocating for the restoration of the bridge. There is a burgeoning 120+ mile network of bikeways getting built on low-volume country roads and former RRs in Franklin County Mass, Southwest VT and Southeast NH. There are even three more former RR or automobile bridges over the CT River within 10 miles of Northfield that are also becoming bike-ped only bridges. This will become a world-class bike tourism mecca

One of the engineering firms brought to the effort regarding the Schell was a firm in Keene, NH that loved the Schell Bridge so much that when they were chosen to design a bike-ped bridge in Keene, NH, they designed a bridge that looked a lot like the Schell Bridge. [Go to this LINK](#) on the Face Book for Pathways for Keene and you’ll see a video or two about this topic—the North Bridge.

When a mention of this twin to Schell Bridge was featured in a FOSB newsletter, one of MassDOT’s key staffers in the region took a ride up to Keene to check it out, and he immediately saw the possibility of doing a similar project in Northfield. A project with a twist, that is.



NORTH BRIDGE CARRYING THE CHESHIRE RAIL TRAIL OVER ROUTE 12 AT KEENE, NH



He proposed a new bridge that would be built on the piers of the existing Schell Bridge and the new bridge would look much like the old one, but built with modern materials that would mean it would be much cheaper to do it this way—rather than renovate the old bridge. As an added bonus, two sections of the old bridge would be a part of a park on each side of the river, at the entrance to the new bridge. A Solomonic Solution, as they say. Importantly State Senate President Stan Rosenberg loved this idea. This is in Sen. Stan’s district.

The photo to the left shows another NHDOT project. This one, also in Keene, shows another

bike-ped bridge under construction, and of course, this is another bridge that resembles the Schell Bridge in Northfield. This will be open in late April or May of 2017. [See VIDEO](#) of this bridge. The new Schell Bridge project will likely take place in 2020 or 2021.