

Ross Fording Road Truss

Many historic truss bridges that become damaged or obsolete end up being removed and reused in new locations, a process that ultimately preserves the structure but not necessarily its setting. In some cases, PennDOT elects to rehabilitate rather than repurpose old bridges. The Ross Fording Road Bridge is a good example of that rehabilitation process. A Pratt pony truss, the Ross Fording Road Bridge was built in 1885 by the Phoenix Bridge Company. The bridge offers vehicular access over Octoraro Creek in West Fallowfield Township, Chester County.

Although it served well for over a hundred years, by 2011 it became clear that the bridge was in need of more extensive repairs. As PennDOT records note, it was rated as structurally deficient and “...therefore in need of repairs in order to maintain the safety and mobility of [the] crossing.” Necessary repairs included replacement of the timber deck, replacing sections of abutments, and repainting.



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In order to avoid adversely affecting the resource, repairs were made in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. As the Standards state, rehabilitation is “the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values.” In practice, this means that PennDOT will try to retain as much of the original bridge “fabric”, and to change as little of the structure as possible during rehabilitation. In the case of the Ross Fording Road Bridge, this included making sure

the new paint matched the old color, and replacing the timber deck and steel stringers in kind.

The result of this work was a beautifully restored and functional bridge that will provide a crossing for many years to come.