

# State of Vermont

## House of Representatives



**Montpelier, Vermont**

### **Joint House Resolution**

**J.R.H. 5**

Joint resolution urging the prompt rehabilitation of the Vilas Bridge

Offered by: Representatives Partridge of Windham, Trieber of Rockingham, Deen of Westminster, and Mrowicki of Putney

Whereas, the 635-foot Vilas Bridge (the bridge) spans the Connecticut River, was built in 1930, and was financed with \$30,000.00 in grants from each of the connected towns of Rockingham, Vermont, and Walpole, New Hampshire, and Charles Vilas, for whom the bridge is named, provided significant financial support, and

Whereas, the bridge became a direct gateway into downtown Bellows Falls from neighboring New Hampshire, and

Whereas, despite the bridge's original funding formula, because it spans the Connecticut River, which in 1934, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case State of Vermont v State of New Hampshire, 290 U.S. 579, lies within the State of New Hampshire up to the Vermont low-water mark, 93 percent of the bridge is located in New Hampshire, and a similar percentage of the repair costs should be the Granite State's responsibility, and

Whereas, in May 1994, the Federal Highway Administration and the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Vilas Bridge, and

Whereas, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation signed the memorandum in concurrence, and New Hampshire's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation became a signatory in July 1994, and

Whereas, the MOU recognized the bridge's eligibility for placement on the National Register of Historic Places, provided that the bridge was "of sufficient quality, location and importance that only under exceptional circumstances...will the bridge be removed," and further guaranteed long-term maintenance in accordance with New Hampshire's 10-year Highway Program, and

Whereas, the Vermont General Assembly previously adopted 2006 Acts and Resolves J.R.H. 7, "Joint resolution urging the state of New Hampshire to expedite the restoration of the Vilas Bridge," and

Whereas, in 2009, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation closed the span to all vehicular and pedestrian traffic due to its poor condition, and

Whereas, the approximately 4,600 cars that crossed the bridge daily must now use alternative routes, and

Whereas, the bridge has now been removed from the 10-year Highway Plan although the New Hampshire Transportation Advisory Committee supposedly still discusses the bridge's future, and

Whereas, the town of Rockingham has requested the Vermont Attorney General to serve as an intermediary in the town's request to New Hampshire state officials to assist in repairing the bridge, and

Whereas, the State of New Hampshire's wanton neglect of the Vilas Bridge continues to cause significant economic and traffic problems in Bellows Falls, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly implores New Hampshire state officials and its Congressional Delegation to make every possible effort, on a timely basis, to seek state or federal funding for the rehabilitation of the Vilas Bridge, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu, the New Hampshire Executive Council, New Hampshire Commissioner of Transportation Victoria Sheehan, the chairs of the New Hampshire House and Senate transportation committees, the New Hampshire Congressional Delegation, Vermont Secretary of Transportation Joe Flynn, Vermont Attorney General T. J. Donovan, and the Vermont Congressional Delegation.