

Call-to-Action: Support Echo Bridge Railing Reconstruction Today

By Lee Fisher, Chairman of the Echo Bridge Railing Committee

Background

Echo Bridge's handsome granite and brick design contributes to the rugged beauty of surrounding Hemlock Gorge, one of the first of five parks acquired by the Metropolitan Park Commission in 1893. The bridge is on the National and State Registers of Historic Places and it is the second longest masonry arch on the continent. Once a major tourist destination, it continues to serve as a popular spot for hikers, artists and nature lovers



Echo Bridge

and as a transportation corridor. It received its name because of the striking echoes one hears when shouting under the main arch of the bridge.

The Echo Bridge Promenade is one of the best kept secrets in Metropolitan Boston. This multi-use pathway, linking Newton and Needham since 1876, offers dramatic views of the Charles River as it drops over the nearby falls and winds its way through Hemlock Gorge.

In April 2006, Bill Hagar wrote a great story for the Newton Conservators entitled "Preserving Echo Bridge" (<http://newtonconservators.org/preservingechobridge.htm>). He made the case for completion of repairs to the 140-year-old railings on this distinctive granite and brick National Registry landmark nestled in Hemlock Gorge.

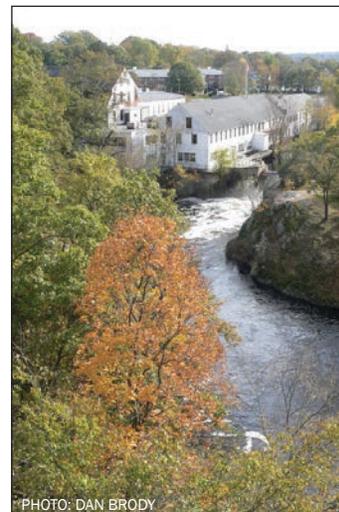
In 2007, the bridge owner, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), contracted with the preservation-planning firm McGinley Kalsow & Associates for a comprehensive study of the cast iron railings. Also in 2007,

State Representative Ruth Balser secured \$250,000 in state funds for the project. In 2008, temporary chain link fencing was installed to keep the Echo Bridge Promenade open and safe. But then nothing happened... and the historic cast iron railings have continued to deteriorate.

Today, you can make a difference by registering your support for a new initiative to reconstruct the railings and by helping spread the word in Newton.

Current Situation

Echo Bridge was built to carry water to the growing City of Boston and now serves as a back-up water route, last used in 2010. Both Echo Bridge and the Sudbury Aqueduct, which is housed inside the Bridge, are structurally sound, and the water supply for metropolitan Boston is safe and secure. Therefore, with total cost of replacing the railings estimated at \$1.44 million, MWRA



Mills Falls View from the Bridge

could not justify dedicating ratepayer dollars to fully fund a reconstruction of the historic railings, which are not linked to the safety of the public water supply.

Without MWRA funding, another source of funding is needed for the project. Last fall, Newton and Needham residents formed the *Echo Bridge Railing Committee* to focus public and private resources to work with the MWRA to seek Community Preservation

Act (CPA) funding for an in-kind reconstruction of the 140-year old cast iron railings.

The Committee concluded that there were two ways to generate support for sharing the cost for reconstructing the railings with the MWRA:

1. MWRA would apply to both Needham and Newton for CPA funding, and
2. The Railing Committee would launch a private capital fundraising campaign, to which \$126,700 has already been pledged.



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Close up of Railing

Plans to advance the historic railing reconstruction took a big step forward with two approvals—one from the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission on November 11, 2016, and one by the Needham Historical Commission two weeks later. MWRA and Committee members developed a Railing Reconstruction Plan based on the 2007 study.

On December 8 the Newton Community Preservation Committee (CPC) voted

to invite a full proposal on the Echo Bridge Historic Railing Reconstruction Project for its consideration. Also in December the Needham CPC voted that the project is eligible for CPA funding, which is the first step in the process of deliberations for Needham’s 2017 planning cycle.

Public Reaction

“Echo Bridge is not only beautiful; it’s an important pathway for pedestrians and cyclists,” said Andreae Downs, chair of Newton’s Transportation Advisory Group and a member of the Railing Committee. “Clear February days



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Close up of Granite and Brick

are perfect for walking across Echo Bridge to take in the view and also to see how badly the railings need repair,” she added.

“As the Echo Bridge Railing Committee

launches our public awareness and pledge drive, we aim to secure hundreds of pledges by the end of February from Newton and Needham residents who are fond of Echo Bridge and value its preservation,” said Lee Fisher, chairman of the Committee. “We need pledges both large and small in order to show the two Community Preservation Committees that this project has both widespread support



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Echo Bridge Railing

within the City/Town and a significant commitment of private funds to leverage potential CPA funding,” he emphasized.

“The need to reconstruct the historic railings has been known for a decade. Now is the time for our municipalities to come together, as they did in reconstructing Cook’s Bridge, to commit to a public/private partnership to do the job right for the next 100 years,” said Brian

Yates, Newton City Councilor, President of the Friends of Hemlock Gorge, and Railing Committee member.

Call-to-Action

1. Learn more and pledge your support at www.EchoBridgeRailings.com.
2. Take a walk with friends and family across the bridge and through Hemlock Gorge to reacquaint yourselves with this jewel in our midst and to see firsthand the condition of the railings.
3. Visit our Facebook page @EchoBridgeRailings and post or “like” it to share with your contacts.
4. Email our website URL to your friends who may share a fondness for Echo Bridge and encourage their support. ■

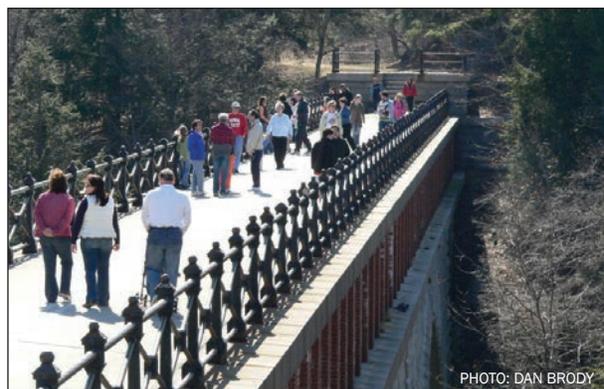


PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Photo from 2006 Bill Hagar Boston Globe Article