

New Hampshire's Municipal Bridge Aid Program

State Assistance Available for Bridge Repair or Rehabilitation

Deteriorated municipal bridges are a significant problem for many towns throughout the United States. To help New Hampshire communities the State has established a Municipal Bridge Aid Program.

The program is administered by the Bureau of Municipal Highways, an organizational entity within the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) set up to assist New Hampshire communities with road related matters. That assistance is usually in the form of financial aid, including the Municipal Bridge Aid Program. Sooner or later, nearly every municipality with its own bridges will need to apply for this Program.

RSA 234 provides the DOT with statutory authority to provide municipalities with Bridge-Aid funds to assist them in defraying construction and rehabilitation costs of

1. Municipality-owned bridges on Class IV and V highways, and
2. Municipality-maintained bridges on Class II highways.

During the 1993 legislative session the General Court significantly altered several sections of the law. The most important change was that projects accepted into the Program are now funded at a ratio of 80% state or federal funds and 20% municipal funds. The funds available for Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 are \$10 million each year: \$4 million federal, \$4 million state, and \$2 million municipal.

To determine whether federal or state funds are used for a project depends on its type, magnitude, and complexity. Use of federal funds is more restrictive than state funds, and are generally applied to larger replacement projects. State funds are provided for rehabilitation, for relatively straightforward replacement projects, and for work on wood covered bridges.

The DOT accepts projects into the

Program in the order it receives applications. The scheduling for construction, however, depends on the scope of work and availability of DOT staff to design the rehabilitation or replacement. In general, design for rehabilitation can take from one to three years; design for a replacement bridge requires two to four because of the more complicated environmental, right-of-way, and design requirements.

To be considered for the Municipal Bridge Aid Program, a bridge must have a clear span of at least ten (10) feet. Bridges constructed or rehabilitated with Bridge Aid funds must, when completed, have a capacity of at least fifteen (15) tons. The DOT staff expects the Legislature to modify this requirement during this session. The probable changes would require that new construction meet legal load capacities, but rehabilitation capacities would remain at fifteen tons.

Rehabilitation of wooden bridges is specifically provided for in the Bridge Aid Program. One limitation, important for some wooden bridges, is that when work is completed they must carry at least six (6) tons.

To initiate estimates and construction under the Bridge Aid Program, a municipality's governing body (selectpersons, Town/City Council, or mayor) must complete and submit specific forms. These forms are available from the DOT's District Offices or the Administrator, Administrator, Bureau of Municipal Highways (name, telephone number and address at end).

Town officials should submit requests for estimates in the summer or early fall. This will allow field review and estimate preparation in time for consideration at the municipality's town meeting. Immediately after the town appropriates its share of the estimated project cost, town officials should request construction bridge aid.

A municipality is restricted to having one bridge per year accepted into the

Program. This limitation can be waived if availability of funding or emergency circumstances warrant it.

One alternative within the Bridge Aid Program is that a town can perform the design and let the construction contract. This usually means engaging and supervising a private engineering firm. For specifics about this alternative, town officials should contact the Administrator, Bureau of Municipal Highways.

The DOT can also serve municipalities by performing maintenance and repair work on any town or city road or bridge. Such work must comply with RSA 228:49 and is approved based on the magnitude and type of work required and staff availability. Under such circumstances work on a bridge might qualify for bridge aid assistance.

Robert T. Barry, the Administrator of the Bureau of Municipal Highways, participated in the Bridge Maintenance Workshops this spring. The considerable interest in his presentation prompted us to ask him for his notes for this article. We thank him for providing them.

Town officials wanting to apply for the Bridge Aid Program, or just to learn more about it, can contact Mr. Barry by telephone at 271-2107, or by letter to him at

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The UNH T²Center sincerely thanks the officials of **Pittsfield, Peterborough, Newmarket, and Plymouth** for their hosting RSMS and Bridge Maintenance workshops this spring.

We also want to express our appreciation to the instructors, caterers, and, above all, the participants, who contributed so much to these and other training activities.