

Grand Opening of Sullivan's Bridge

On the sunny and pleasant late summer morning of Friday 19 August 2016, a large and enthusiastic crowd, with many on bicycles, gathered in the Betzwood Picnic Area for the long-awaited grand opening of the new Sullivan's Bridge across the Schuylkill River in Valley Forge National Historical Park (VFNHP). The following descriptive press release was provided by the Pennsylvania Dept. of Transportation (PennDOT) later that same day:

PennDOT Secretary Leslie S. Richards joined the National Park Service and federal, state and local officials to open Sullivan's Bridge – the new, four-span, bicycle and pedestrian trail bridge spanning the Schuylkill River in Valley Forge National Historical Park (VFNHP).

"Sullivan's Bridge is a wonderful addition to Valley Forge National Historical Park and to the region's Circuit Trails network," Richards said. "This new trail bridge greatly enhances recreational mobility in the park and it creates a new multi-use trail connection between the park and the Schuylkill River Trail."

"We're delighted that this day has come," said VFNHP Superintendent Kate Hammond. "This month, the National Park Service is observing its 100th anniversary, and what better way than to open this wonderful bridge that will be a linchpin in connecting the park with all the people who use hundreds of miles of regional trails."

With its opening, Sullivan's Bridge becomes a critical link in the Circuit Trails, a vast regional trail network that is composed of hundreds of miles of interconnected trails in the region. The bridge's location in VFNHP further connects the Circuit Trails between Montgomery County and Chester County.

Named for Major General John Sullivan, the officer who was charged by General George Washington with building a bridge across the Schuylkill River during the 1777-78 Valley Forge winter encampment of the Continental Army, the concrete, bicycle-and-pedestrian-trail bridge is 14 feet wide and 604 feet long. The bridge features an observation area where trail users can stop midway to view the Schuylkill River and VFNHP. Construction began in March 2014.

Prior to the opening of Sullivan's Bridge, pedestrians and bicyclists crossed the Schuylkill River in this area by walking on a narrow boardwalk path on the west side of U.S. 422. This path, which was 4 feet, 6 inches wide, opened in 1994 following the closure of the Old Betzwood Bridge over the Schuylkill River in VFNHP. The Old Betzwood Bridge closed in 1993 and was removed in 1995.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Opening ceremony held in the Betzwood Picnic Area with many enthusiastic bicyclists in attendance. The new bridge is just visible in the background; VFNHP Superintendent Kate Hammond at the podium, with park ranger holding the 2016 NPS Centennial sign and other event speakers behind them; PennDOT Secretary Leslie S. Richards. *Photos courtesy of John O. Senior © 2016*

In addition to building Sullivan's Bridge on the alignment of the former Old Betzwood Bridge, PennDOT's contractor replaced the nearby South Trooper Road bridge over the Schuylkill River Trail with a 60-foot long reinforced concrete arch structure; rehabilitated the 73-foot long bridge over Norfolk Southern railroad tracks; replaced the South Trooper Road pavement with a 14-foot wide asphalt trail between Station Lane (on the south side of the river) and the Riverview entrance (on the north side of the river); and rehabilitated South Trooper Road to accommodate two 14-foot wide travel lanes between the Riverview entrance and Susan Lane.

J.D. Eckman, Inc. of Atglen, Chester County, was the general contractor on the \$9,271,458 construction project, which was financed with 100 percent federal funds.

PennDOT will transfer ownership of the right-of-way and bridges built under this project to Upper Merion Township and West Norriton Township. Under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), the National Park Service will own and maintain Sullivan's Bridge and the adjacent bridge over Norfolk Southern railroad tracks. West Norriton Township will own South Trooper Road where it's open to vehicular traffic north of the Schuylkill River and the South Trooper Road bridge over the Schuylkill River Trail.

Engineering design of the Sullivan's Bridge project was managed under a local agreement between PennDOT and the Upper Merion Transportation Authority, in close coordination with Upper Merion Township, West Norriton Township and the National Park Service.

Sullivan's Bridge is part of the Schuylkill River Crossing Complex of transportation improvement projects that are designed to enhance multi-modal travel on U.S. 422 between the Route 363 (Trooper Road) and Route 23 (Valley Forge Road) interchanges. In addition to Sullivan's Bridge, the improvements include the \$97 million project currently under construction to rebuild U.S. 422 between the two interchanges and build new, wider bridges over the Schuylkill River, Schuylkill River Trail, South Trooper Road and Norfolk Southern railroad tracks; the recent opening of two additional ramps built to complete the U.S. 422/Route 363 (Trooper Road) Interchange; and the relocation of North Gulph Road at Route 23 (Valley Forge Road) in VFNHP, which is expected to move to construction in 2019.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The ceremonial ribbon cutting to officially open the bridge, with General Sullivan (as portrayed by Park Ranger Bill Troppman) using his sword instead of shears; The first public crossing of the bridge by many happy bicyclists and pedestrians; Valley Forge Park Alliance President Don Naimoli at the podium; Standing with 2016 NPS Centennial sign, (L-R) Bob Donnelly, Acting Supervisory Park Ranger, General Sullivan, Kate Hammond, Park Superintendent, and Deirdre Gibson, Chief of Planning and Resource Management; General Sullivan on his bridge. *Photos courtesy of John O. Senior © 2016*

Speakers at the ceremony included PennDOT Secretary Leslie Richards, VFNHP Superintendent Kate Hammond, Valley Forge Park Alliance (formerly Friends of Valley Forge Park) President Don Naimoli, U.S. Representative Brendan Boyle, State Senator John Rafferty, State Representative Mike Vereb, State Representative Warren Kampf, Montgomery County Commissioners' Vice Chairwoman Val Arkoosh, Montgomery County Commissioner Joe Gale, Upper Merion Supervisor Greg Waks, Lower Providence Supervisors' Chairman Jason Sorgini, and others.

The National Park Service (NPS) and the Friends of Valley Forge National Park sponsored a contest in 2013 to name the new pedestrian/bicycle trail bridge. In September 2105, it was announced that the new trail bridge would be called "Sullivan's Bridge" after Major General John Sullivan, who was responsible for building a wooden bridge across the river during the 1777-78 encampment. Superintendent Kate Hammond said that park officials were proud to open Sullivan's Bridge during the NPS Centennial, once again connecting both sections of the park, much as General Sullivan's original wooden bridge united both sides of the Valley Forge encampment. She and other speakers also praised the bipartisan federal and state partnership that has worked effectively on completing the bridge project as well as on other issues in the park.

— JOS

Views of the bridge. The old fenced boardwalk will probably not be missed by many. *Photographs courtesy of John O. Senior © 2016*

