

IMPROVING RECREATIONAL ACCESS TO PENNSYLVANIA'S WATERWAYS ALONG BRIDGES AND ROADS

Pennsylvania has more than 85,000 miles of rivers and streams, 200,000 acres of lakes and 871 miles of shoreline along Lake Erie. Yet accessing these waterways is often very difficult for the growing number of people who wish to use them for fishing, canoeing, kayaking and other recreational activities.

One way to improve access -- that can be achieved relatively quickly and at little or no cost -- is along Pennsylvania's bridge crossings, road ends or roadways adjacent to waterways when they are being constructed or reconstructed. Many of these bridges and roads were planned and designed without any consideration of how access to the waterway for recreational use could be safely and reasonably accommodated or improved. They lack safe shoulders, pull-off areas or parking that could keep canoeists, kayakers and anglers safe from automobile and truck traffic. They sometimes have guardrails or other design components which unreasonably or unnecessarily (from a highway safety perspective) obstruct access to the water.

Modeled on similar efforts in North Carolina, Tennessee and Maryland, as well as the Commonwealth's pedestrian and bicycling safety accommodations, waterway access can be enhanced by requiring State and Local Transportation agencies to

- Consider any "reasonable and appropriate measures" to provide or improve water access for fishing, canoeing and kayaking when developing a bridge or road construction or improvement project that is adjacent to or crosses a waterway;
- Establish standards and guidelines, in consultation with Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and interested stakeholders, for identifying appropriate transportation facilities for water access as well as best practices and cost effective strategies to accommodate that access.

Provision of waterway access can be accomplished with little, if any, cost because:

- Access features would be incorporated into project planning and design at an early stage in process;
- No land acquisition would be required; potential access areas are already located in a public right-of-way;
- State and local transportation departments would not be required retrofit existing bridges or roads for access; improvements for access would only occur during the normal schedule for bridge repair, reconstruction or construction and economies may be achieved in the process. For example, staging areas are created for most bridge and highway construction or reconstruction projects. In many instances these staging areas -- expanded shoulders, parking, etc. -- are removed after the project is completed, at a cost to the project. Rather than remove them, states could leave them in place to provide parking for boaters and anglers.
- requested access improvements are only for bridge and road-side safety features and removal or mitigation of barriers to access -- not constructed paths to the water. Those further improvements, if desired by State and local governments or community partners, would be financed with other sources such as Transportation Alternatives funds.

These provisions would help promote outdoor recreational opportunities for families, greatly improve safety for recreational users and motorists alike, help stimulate the economies and livability of local communities, and enhance the health and quality of life of our citizens.

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