



**2009 AASHTO NTPAW Skills Awards  
Entry Form**  
(Entry form may not exceed two pages.)

**ENTRY INFORMATION**

Division No.	5
Category No.	a
Title of Entry	Bridging History at Blennerhassett Island

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Entrant/Organization Name	West Virginia Department of Transportation
Contact Name	David Marcum
Title	Multimedia Specialist
Street Address	1900 Kanawha Boulevard, E., Bldg. 5, Room 137
City	Charleston
State	West Virginia
ZIP/Postal Code	25305
Phone	304-558-0103
E-mail	<a href="mailto:David.S.Marcum@wv.gov">David.S.Marcum@wv.gov</a>

**ENTRY PROFILE**

**1) Situation, goals and objectives of public relations activity**

The West Virginia Department of Transportation (WVDOT) was completing the upgrade of US Route 50 from Clarksburg to Parkersburg from two lanes to four lanes, which required the construction of a bridge to connect to the four-lane highway in Ohio, where it would continue to Cincinnati. The hindrance to this process was not just the wide Ohio River, but Blennerhassett Island, which has an esteemed history.

The island was the home of Harmon and Margaret Blennerhassett, English nobility who had built their estate there at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It was on this island that Vice President Aaron Burr would visit the Blennerhassetts to discuss his plans to create a new nation in the unsettled Southwest territories, an event that would set off a national firestorm about treason. Hence, the island bears National Landmark status.

Historians and local residents were very uncomfortable with the idea of the bridge going over the historical island, although it would cross the unsettled, non-historical end of the three mile tract of land. WVDOT had to work with historians and community leaders to create a unique bridge that would not upset the balance of the island's historical significance, while also meeting U. S. Coast Guard requirements for navigation, and staying within budget.

The reasons for this film were:

- Revisit the history of Blennerhassett Island
- Celebrate the local history of the communities in both West Virginia and Ohio
- Explain the types of bridges considered for this project
- Explain how the design selected executed all of the needs for the project
- Tell how the bridge won international acclaim before it was even open

The overall goal was to use virtually no budget (beyond employee salaries and travel expenses) and make use of existing resources to create a film showing the agency's respect for the communities and the process, while bringing the region's rich history to light without further expanding further usage of taxpayer dollars. This was largely achieved by working with museums and historians in the area, who would receive the mutual benefit of using the film themselves. As reflected in the title, WVDOT went to great lengths in its process of literally *Bridging History at Blennerhassett Island*.

## 2) Target audience

The primary audience for this film was the residents of the communities of the Parkersburg/Marietta metropolitan region and the historical communities who had a stake in preserving the integrity of historical resources, as well as to promote economic development. The secondary audience was the taxpayers of West Virginia, whose taxes (along with Federal subsidy) were being used to build the bridge. The residents of Ohio were considered a tertiary audience as the bridge would bring them additional access, though the main structure would not require Ohio funding, which is the reason the primary focus of the film is on West Virginia's assets.

Though WVDOT holds copyrights on the completed film, being a state agency we cannot (and do not) create profit mechanizations with the product. However, as with all such media that we create, we donate the resource to charitable organizations in arts and letters to benefit them. Therefore, the film was distributed on DVD to three museums in the metro region, which had helped us with research and archival material: The Blennerhassett Island State Park and Museum and The Oil & Gas Museum in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and the Campus Martius Museum in Marietta, Ohio. Also, the video is being distributed to all West Virginia History teachers around the state.

## 3) Measurable results

*Bridging History at Blennerhassett Island* was intended to inform people living in the Parkersburg/Marietta area about the project upon its completion, but it was so highly regarded that word of mouth created an interest in it.

The film has been received with wide acclaim from members of the community and historical groups. In addition, the film has become a part of the viewing at the three museums mentioned above. We have gotten letters of approval from residents who enjoyed revisiting history and learning how WVDOT respected it with the bridge design.

We receive constant requests for copies of the DVD and West Virginia PBS has expressed interest in broadcasting it statewide. The film will also be put onto WVDOT's website for viewing everywhere.