

Route 47 Bridge History

In 1926 citizens of Washington approached the State Highway Commission about constructing a bridge across the Missouri River in that community. Although the State chose not to participate in construction at that time, local planning for a toll bridge progressed. In 1928 the Washington Missouri River Bridge Company was authorized by the US Congress to construct a bridge across the Missouri River to “promote interstate commerce, improve the postal service, and provide for military and other purposes.”¹ Congress granted an extension in 1930, they were to have construction underway by 1931 and construction completed by 1933.

In June 1933 authority to build the bridge was transferred to the City of Washington. Sverdrup & Parcel Consulting Engineers designed the bridge for the City. In 1934 funding was provided by the State Highway Commission, \$200,000, a Public Works Administration Grant, \$174,783.84, and a bond issue of \$295,000.

Bidding for work on the bridge was competitive, with eleven bidders participating. The Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron Company was awarded the contract for the substructure with a bid of \$212,187.50; the Stupp Brothers Bridge & Iron Company won the superstructure with a bid of \$345,493. The Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron had 240 calendar days to complete the substructure, beginning from September 25, 1934. The Stupp Brothers had 200 calendar days to complete the erection of the superstructure after piers 3-8 were complete.

The bridge was dedicated and opened to the public on May 28, 1936 amid a gala celebration. Over 10,000 people attended the ceremony, which included a banquet, a parade through town, cutting the ribbon of the bridge at 3:00 and officially opening it to traffic, and concerts and a dance in the evening.



Figure 1. The Washington Bridge in 1936.

¹Government Printing Office. *The Statutes at Large of the United States of America from December, 1927 to March, 1929*. Vol. XLV, Part 1. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929, p. 151.

Tolls became effective on the bridge at 8 a.m. on May 29. The tolls were 45 cents for a car and driver, 75 cents for a bus and driver, 80 cents for a two-ton truck and driver, each additional passenger was 5 cents; for a pedestrian or a bicycle to cross the bridge was 15 cents. There was a discount for round trips.

Following bridge construction, representatives from the City of Washington frequently petitioned the State Highway Commission for assistance in freeing the bridge from tolls. One argument presented was that the adjacent Missouri River bridges at Weldon Spring and Hermann were free bridges. The Hermann Bridge had been freed from tolls in 1932 and the Weldon Spring Bridge was constructed as a free bridge and opened in 1937.

On August 14, 1951 the City of Washington entered into an agreement with the State Highway Commission to transfer the bridge to the State. The City estimated that there would be sufficient revenue to pay off the bonds at the end of September that year and a transfer date of September 29 was agreed upon. The city was able to transfer \$5,000 from the bridge maintenance fund to the state for continuing maintenance. The Washington Bridge became toll free at noon on September 29 amid a large celebration.