

Prior to the construction of the bridge, Trail’s only means of crossing the Columbia was by cable ferry, situated roughly one hundred yards west of the bridge site. Alternatively, if one proved brave enough, canoes or row boats were utilized. The ferry was a large scow, or flat-bottom barge used typically for transporting freight, attached to a cable. The front end faced upstream at a 45 degree angle, using the current to assist the crossing.

Usage of the ferry was sporadic and it was often abandoned, as the cost to hire a permanent operator proved uneconomical. Residents frequently took it upon themselves to man the ferry, often with tragic results. After two deaths, citizens rallied to remove the ferry altogether.

With the Pend d’Oreille and Fruitvale now attracting more and more settlers, demand to increase accessibility for marketing purposes was high. In summer of 1909, officials identified the Rock Island area as an appropriate location for a river crossing. In addition, the Province was interested in linking the coast with Alberta, and this route, with many roads already in existence, would benefit greatly from a permanent bridge.

Trail’s Member of Parliament at the time, James H. Schofield, lobbied long and hard on behalf of the citizens of Trail. In June 1909, Premier Richard McBride, accompanied by Thomas Taylor, Minister of Public Works, visited Trail to assess the plans and listen to local concerns. A well-attended contingent of local dignitaries, members of the Board of Trade, City Council and the local Conservative Association were keen to address the Province’s powers-that-be in order to influence their decision. Their presence did not go unnoticed.

Premier McBride remarked: “People expected much from governments, and on the other hand the people had also a duty to perform, and should the requirements of this district merit attention, the people would find in the McBride administration a sympathetic friend and a strong right arm.” Hon. Thomas Taylor stated: “One of my first duties when I return to Victoria will be to secure an engineer’s report on the Rock Island Bridge proposition, and if the plan is feasible and conditions warrant it, I can only corroborate what the premier has already said.”

By early 1911, MPP Schofield had secured at least \$100,000 for the construction of the bridge.

Although a seemingly suitable location, given the existence of a firm rock bed for piers, Rock Island was deemed too far from the City and ultimately inappropriate for a crossing. Provincial Engineer J.E. Griffith surveyed land between Trail and Rock Island in March 1910 and selected a site roughly 100 yards downstream from the ferry site, due to the ideal height of the river banks on either side and the relative shallowness of the water there. In addition, the current would only strike the south side of the piers, with little or no current affecting the north side, due to the bend in the river. Levels and soundings were taken in order to find the greatest depth at the new site, which, in March 1910, measured a mere 23 feet.

The following summer, plans and specifications were completed. By August 1911, newspapers province-wide were publishing calls for tenders pertaining to the substructure and the superstructure. In September 1911, Vancouver contractors Armstrong & Morrison were hired

to handle the substructure, quoting \$93,905. The Cleveland Bridge & Engineering Company of Darlington, England, was awarded the contract for metal materials, at a cost of \$22,797.

Work officially began in October 1911, with mainly local labour.

All light material was local, with heavy timbers transported here from the coast. G.L. Merry was hired to supply the piles, which came from the Blueberry Creek area and were barged down river by raft.

The first order of business was to prepare the abutments on each side of the river. The south abutment was excavated first. A coffer dam was then built and the caissons for the first two piers riveted together. Completion of the first pier occurred in February 1912. The first coffer dam was then drained. The north abutment required an additional 11 feet, which was lower than expected.

The second pier was set in position in March 1912 fifty feet below the surface and was then filled with concrete. Concrete testing was continuous throughout the entire construction process. Roughly 22lbs of pressure was applied to the caisson until the concrete reached water level.

By the end of March that year, all caissons were sunk, the substructure was completed and 115 men were employed on the project.

The project was slowed only by the delay in steel needed to complete each span of the superstructure. By late April, the steel still had not arrived. Fortunately, it appeared in time to complete by the scheduled opening of May 24th.

A massive celebration took place in the area now known as Butler Park in East Trail on May 24th, 1912. Over 2000 people congregated to witness the official opening and partake in the festivities. A program of children's and adult team sports, a Boy Scouts exhibition, rifle competition, fireworks, a dance and an "electrical illumination" of the bridge filled the day with hectic activity and excitement. The firemen were engaged to handle the "nuisance of dust" that would inevitably occur as a result of so many people. It was noted that nearly half of festival goers arrived from Rossland, Waneta, the Pend d'Oreille and Fruitvale.

Assistant Government Engineer J.P Forde of Revelstoke completed the final inspection and noted that the bridge was "one of the most handsome & well built in the province."

The construction of Trail's first bridge came at an extremely prosperous and progressive time for the young City of Trail.

In 1910, City Council began work on filling Trail Creek with slag from the smelter. The creek was culverted and slag transported down a launder from the smelter. The filling of downtown eliminated the need for the Bay Avenue and Bowery Bridges, which were distinct landmarks in

Trail in the early days.

In 1911, construction began on Trail’s Fruit Fair Building situated at the end of Bay Avenue. It opened officially in 1912. It also became the City’s first indoor ice facility and remained in operation until the Cominco Arena was built in 1949. In addition, Trail’s first school was constructed. Central School was officially opened on April 1, 1912.

With significant changes to the landscape and the addition of a multi-span bridge, Trail began to truly take shape in the early part of the 1910s.

DIMENSIONS & MATERIAL

- Total Length of Bridge: **691 Feet, 9 In.**
- Deepest Pier Below Water: **44 Feet**
- Penetration of Deepest Pier: **85 Feet**
- Height of Piers Overall: **86 Feet**
- Height from Floor to Top Chord: **20 Feet, 6 In.**
- Height from Low Water to Top Chord: **67 Feet**
- Weight of Steel in Piers: **300,000lbs**
- Weight of Steel in Superstructure: **480,000lbs**
- Number of Rivets in Piers: **50,000**
- Timber used in Superstructure: **125,000 (board measure)**
- Timber used in False Work: **130,000 (board measure)**
- Piles used in False Work: **14,000 lineal feet**
- Earthwork in Approaches: **1500 cubic yards**
- Cement Used in Construction of Piers and Abutment: **7500 stacks**
- Approximate Cost: **\$170,000**
- Funded by the British Columbia Provincial Government