

No, we don't need more than a 10-ton limit

Traffic sources and needs near the Skinners Falls Bridge

Until June 1, 2021, PennDOT is conducting what it is terming a “traffic survey” of the general public with regard to their habits and needs relative to use of the Milanville (aka Skinners Falls) Bridge (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7V7ZFWW>). This will presumably furnish them with information that will help them determine whether we need a bridge there at all, and if so, of what kind.

It will be interesting to hear what the results of the survey are. However, a good look at a map of the area; combined with a knowledge of the small network of area roads near the bridge, the sources of the traffic that runs on them and the nearby population centers to which they connect, leads to a commonsense conclusion that anything more than a 10-ton limit on the Skinners Falls Bridge would be superfluous.

Let's designate the area in question, the target area, as that falling between the two adjacent bridges, both of which can support traffic over 10 tons: upstream the Damascus-Cochecton Bridge, and downstream the Narrowsburg bridge.

With regard to this area, the material questions in deciding what weight limit is needed are:

1. What percentage of the traffic in the target area will be seeking to cross the river and find itself closer to the Milanville Bridge than to either of the two others?
2. Of this fraction, what percentage is likely to weigh more than 10 tons?
3. For this still smaller fraction, how much further would it have to travel to get to an alternate bridge rather than the Milanville Bridge?

The below detailed analysis shows the answers to these questions to be:

1. Small in NY; larger in PA
2. Tiny approaching 0 on both sides
3. Nominal on the New York side. Significant on the PA side by the time the vehicle in question gets close to Milanville. However, vehicles greater than 10 tons are overwhelmingly unlikely to originate in this area, with the closest likely sources of such traffic being State Route 652 or one of the major routes intersecting in Honesdale; from those originating areas, it's actually shorter in both distance and time to go to the Narrowsburg Bridge.

NEW YORK SIDE

There are only three roads (not including the short bridge feeder roads coming up from the river) that debouch onto Route 97 between the Cochection and Narrowsburg bridges at locations that are closer to Milanville than to the other bridges.

- A. County Rd. 116. This is the only road that intersects Route 97 between the Milanville and Damascus-Cochection bridges. It heads east to Lake Huntington, where it intersects with State Route 52.
 1. As a county road that intersects with a state route, this is a better road probably carrying more traffic than either of the two others.
 2. Most of the traffic on this road is likely to come from the lightly populated local rural/residential area it and most of the roads leading into it serve, meaning largely passenger vehicles, pickups and light commercial. However, because of the intersection with State Route 52, there's a reasonable likelihood that at least some of Route 116 traffic weighs over 10 tons.
 3. Fortunately, according to Google maps, any such vehicles arriving at Route 97 via 116 would have to travel only 0.9 miles further to get to the Damascus-Cochection bridge rather than the Milanville Bridge.
- B. Cushetunk Drive. This one debouches onto Route 97 almost exactly at the head of Skinners Falls Rd., one of the two small, short feeder roads leading west to the bridge.
 1. This is a winding road through a sparsely settled rural/residential area, connecting to Skipperene and 116 (see above and below) at either end, but not directly connected to any larger routes.
 2. The chance of 10-ton-plus traffic originating on this road is close to 0, and because it does not directly connect to a major route, the chance of its being used by such vehicles as a through route also approaches 0.
 3. If such traffic did somehow find its way to the mouth of Cushetunk Road, it would have to travel 3 miles to get to the Damascus-Cochection Bridge.
- C. Skipperene Road. Like Route 116 this road intersects with State Route 52, although this time at Cochection Center.
 1. As another narrow, winding rural/residential road, Skipperene does not carry a great deal of traffic, and what it carries is mostly local, residential and light commercial.
 2. Since it intersects directly with State Route 52, Skipperene is another candidate for carrying heavier traffic. It is unlikely, however, that any traffic originating on Route 52 would choose to use Skipperene to get to Route 97 to cross the river: Because Skipperene is narrower and more winding than the alternatives, it takes longer to get from Cochection Center to the Milanville Bridge than to Narrowsburg. Specifically, according to Google maps, the Narrowsburg Bridge is 6.3 miles 8 minutes from Cochection Center; whereas the Milanville Bridge via Skipperene is 5.5 miles but 12 minutes away.
 3. Should heavy traffic for some reason choose to approach the river via Skipperene, it would have to travel about 2 miles further to get to the Narrowsburg Bridge than to the Milanville Bridge.

CONCLUSIONS FOR NEW YORK SIDE:

- Only one county route and two smaller back-country roads arrive at Route 97 closer to the Milanville Bridge than the closest alternatives up and down stream.

- The vast majority of traffic on these roads is likely to originate locally, and as such to consist of passenger and small commercial vehicles well under 10 tons.
- Ten-ton-plus traffic originating elsewhere and arriving in the target area is likely to be funneled either from Route 97 north and south, or from Route 52 via the small local/county roads. Such heavyweight traffic that arrives from north or south will hit the Narrowsburg or Damascus-Cochecton bridges before Skinners Falls. If any such traffic should arrive in the target area via the local/county roads, it still would not have to travel a prohibitive distance to find an alternative bridge.

PENNSYLVANIA SIDE:

There are only three roads on the Pennsylvania side that feed into the Milanville Bridge: River Road, Calkins Road, and Milanville Road.

- A. River Road is a scenic but very narrow, winding road, frequently clinging to the side of steep hills, that is currently only rated for 10 tons. Indeed, at some points it is too narrow for even two passenger cars to pass without one pulling over to the side. There is thus no reason to raise the Milanville Bridge weight limit over 10 tons to accommodate traffic from this road.
- B. Milanville Road approaches Milanville from Beach Lake, located on State Route 652, a major road that can carry some 10-ton-plus traffic.
 1. After leaving 652, this road winds through rural/residential areas similar to those on the other side of the river. Traffic originating between Beach Lake and the river on this road is similarly overwhelmingly likely to consist of personal use and light commercial vehicles under 10 or even 5 tons.
 2. Because of the 652 connection, it might be surmised that heavyweight through traffic might travel this road and seek to cross the river at Milanville. However, any vehicle at Beach Lake on Route 652 is closer in both space and time to the Narrowsburg Bridge: according to Google Maps, only 5.4 miles and 8 minutes, vs. 7 miles and 11 minutes to get to the Milanville Bridge.
 3. Should a heavyweight vehicle nevertheless choose to make its way to Milanville, due to the 10-ton limit on River Road and the limited network of roads available near the river on the PA side, it would have really no other alternative than to go all the way back to Beach Lake and then head to Narrowsburg, which as we have noted was closer to begin with.
- C. Calkins Road approaches Milanville from Honesdale, a comparatively major population center where a bevy of state routes intersect, as well as Interstate 6. The connection with Honesdale is made by a network of smaller roads including Cliff Road, Bunnell Pond Road, Carley Road, and Kellows Road.
 1. Similar to Milanville Road, Calkins is one that winds through lightly populated rural/residential areas in which originating traffic is overwhelmingly likely to be personal and light commercial.
 2. However, because of the connection to Honesdale and the major routes that pass through it, the possibility of through traffic originating from these routes—including 10-ton-plus vehicles--and seeking to get over the river should be considered.
 3. The distance from Honesdale to Milanville from the beginning of the Cliff Road route to Calkins Road, off Route 6, is 14.9 miles and 22 minutes. The distance to the Narrowsburg Bridge from there is 13.6 miles and 21 minutes. Even the Damascus-Cochecton Bridge alternative isn't too unreasonable here, at 17.5 miles and 28 minutes, and over roads much more suited to heavyweight vehicles.

Calkins is also connected to another possible source of heavyweight traffic, State Route 371, by a number of small roads, so it might be surmised that such traffic might feed onto it from that route. But State Route 371 is a high-quality, comparatively straight road that heads directly over the Damascus-Cochecton Bridge, and the turnoffs that take you to Calkins are all closer to that bridge than to Milanville. It would be senseless for heavyweight traffic seeking a river crossing to turn off 371 to get to Milanville.

CONCLUSION FOR PA SIDE:

- Only three roads, all of winding back-country character, feed into the PA side of the Milanville Bridge. Much of the traffic on these roads in the vicinity of the river will be closer to the Milanville Bridge than to the alternatives, emphasizing the need for a bridge of some kind there, especially on the PA side. However, as far as the needed weight limit:
- The vast majority of traffic on all these roads is likely to be local, which is to say rural, residential and small commercial; and indeed, one of these roads has a 10-ton limit and less than two full lanes in some places.
- The two other roads connect to more likely potential sources of 10-ton-plus traffic. However, for those sources, either the Narrowsburg or Damascus-Cochecton bridge provides a faster and more reasonable alternative, regardless of what the weight limit is on the Milanville Bridge.

BOTTOM LINE FOR THE RIVER:

Given the nature of the roads and population centers near the Skinners Falls Bridge, a weight limit over 10 tons would be superfluous, as traffic of that weight would keep right on heading over the Damascus-Cochecton and Narrowsburg bridges, both of which provide more reasonable and time-efficient approaches and connections for heavyweight vehicles.