

Bridges

From A1

receive more abuse from work on Corridor X and from an increase in coal mining.

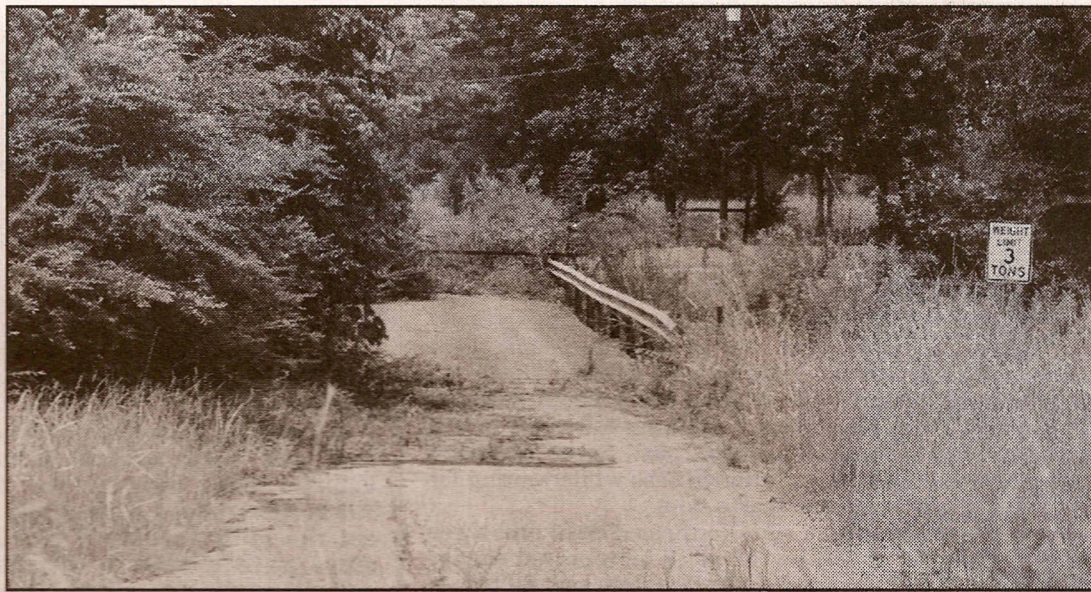
Much of the problems with bridges have come to light because of concern over the Ripley Cutoff Bridge. On Nov. 30, state inspectors closed that bridge, which prior to closing had a weight restriction of 3 tons.

Citizens have sent in a petition with 900 signatures, and the commission has petitioned members of Congress for \$780,000 funding to replace the structure. The full cost of completion has ranged from \$1 million to \$1.5 million in estimates.

The plans are in place. Edgil said the new bridge will have two lanes, replacing the old one-lane bridge. The plans call for a 250-foot bridge with concrete girders. It will be 28 feet wide with new approaches that will be more straight and more level than the current sloped approach.

The problem is money - moreover, the lack of it. Edgil said the county usually gets \$500,000 annually in federal funding that could be used for the bridge, but those funds are tied up in resurfacing projects through 2007. It would take about two or three years to build up funds from the federal allotment to use for a new Ripley Cutoff Bridge, starting with 2008 funds.

Moreover, county officials would have to provide a 20 percent match for any new bridge, which could wind up costing the county \$300,000,



Daily Mountain Eagle - Ed Howell

The Steel Road Bridge, which has been closed since 2001 and would cost \$700,000 to replace, is one of several bridges in the county that are closed or which have a weight limit which blocks access to emergency vehicles and school buses.

Edgil said.

After Sherry Hunter, who lives next to the Ripley Cutoff Bridge, complained at Tuesday's commission meeting about the need to rebuild the bridge and pave detour areas around the site, Edgil rode some of the county roads in District 2.

He noted the large number of bridges that have problems, and the high cost that goes with them.

"Most of the bridges we're closing are on the average of \$1 million each," Edgil said.

Edgil was asked if it would cost the county about \$20 million to have all of its bridges reopened to all traffic and weight restrictions removed.

"That would be as good an estimate as any. And that doesn't count all the bridges closed and weight restrictions placed in the municipalities," he said.

"We've got several down

now," said Commissioner Ben Huggins. "Bridges don't happen overnight."

County commissioners across the state remember with fondness the state program voters approved in 2000 for spending \$250 million statewide to allow counties to catch up nearly 3,000 structurally deficient bridges statewide - more than half that could not be crossed by school buses, fire trucks and ambulances.

Walker County got \$3.25 million in 2002 to replace bridges and four were scheduled: Myers Road Bridge in the Rosehill community, Mill Creek Bridge on Smith Lake Dam Road, Cedar Lake Bridge below Goodsprings and the Ripley Cutoff Bridge.

Only three of the four got constructed. Commissioners had anticipated other city and county governments to turn down projects for various reasons, allowing some

funds to be leftover for the Ripley project.

However, those other commissions and councils were given an extension to work out their own problems, leaving no leftovers for Walker County to apply for.

"We need another state road and bridge bond issue. This was just a drop in the bucket," Commission Chairman Bruce Hamrick said shortly after the Ripley bridge was closed.

A similar bond issue looks doubtful, based on Gov. Bob Riley's comments on the subject recently.

"Do we have plans for another bond issue? Probably not," Riley told the *Daily Mountain Eagle*.

He added that any decisions will not be based on politics and that the first criteria for addressing bridge problems involves safety, followed by economic development.

Engineer

From A1

ed. The high positioning, probably about 50 feet or so, complicates matters.

Moreover, Edgil points out the wood substructure, and some of it is visible looking over the side of the bridge.

"The state tested it and it was rotten," Edgil said, adding the recommendation from the state was to close the bridge.

A 3-ton weight restriction had already been placed on the bridge before it was closed, he said.

Bridges closed as of Aug. 4, 2005

Bridge	date closed	proposed open	
Steel Road	Jan. 18, 2001	unknown	Gibson Hill Bridge - 13 tons
Lost Creek	Jan. 18, 2001	unknown	Hunter Chapel Bridge - 10 tons
Ripley Cutoff	Nov. 30, 2004	unknown	Pendley Creek Bridge No. 3 - 10 tons
Myers Bridge	July 1, 2004	late summer	Lockhart Hill Bridge - 10 tons
Pendley Creek	July 9, 2005	Sept. 1, 2005	Browns Bridge - 10 tons
			Mayo Road Bridge - 3 tons
			Smith Cemetery Bridge - 3 tons
			Johnsey Bridge - 3 tons
			Country Club Bridge - 3 tons
			Calumet Bridge - 3 tons
			Day Hill Bridge - 3 tons
			Kings Mill Bridge - 3 tons

Bridges with restricted load limits

- Haley Bottoms Road Bridge - 15 tons
- McClain Bridge - 15 tons
- Slick Lizzard Road Bridge - 15 tons
- Nichols Road Bridge - 15 tons
- American Junction Bridge - 13 tons
- Atkins Road Bridge - 13 tons

Source: Walker County Engineer's Office