

**Quechee Gorge Bridge  
Public Information Meeting  
July 24, 2018  
Hartford Town Hall**

A public information meeting to review design of a temporary safety fence on the Quechee Gorge Bridge was held on July 24, 2018 at 7 PM at Hartford Town Hall. Representatives from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) project team included: JB McCarthy, Project Manager, Matt Langham, Regional Planning Coordinator, Kristin Higgins, Structures Manager, Jill Barrett and Cindy Cook, Public Outreach.

Project Manager JB McCarthy made a brief presentation to the 20 members of the public in attendance about the work VTrans has done to progress a plan to install a temporary safety fence by the end of the summer. The presentation was followed by extensive discussion in which various views were expressed.

Two types of fence were evaluated by VTrans – welded wire and chain link. The wire thickness of the welded wire is generally smaller than chain link. This appealed to many meeting attendees as they believed it would have less visual impact, an important feature at this prime tourist location. JB McCarthy said VTrans considered and dismissed welded wire fence for the Quechee Gorge Bridge because the Agency believed there would be fabrication/installation issues. It's a less standard fence and would be less functional as a safety fence. Welded wire is not pliable and could not be curved at the top, making it easier for a person to climb over the fence.

Several photos of chain link fence of varying colors and different tops were shown. The advantage of the chain link fence is that supplies are readily available and VTrans has experience with this type of fence installation. The mesh material is pliable so that the top can be angled away from the gorge, making it difficult to climb. Options for wire mesh VTrans considered were galvanized (silver), black and green vinyl. VTrans suggested green vinyl may be the best choice for blending into the surrounding vegetation as the gorge area has many evergreens as well as deciduous trees. The chain link fence would have eight, two feet long and five inches wide viewing windows on each side of the bridge to allow people to look down into the gorge and take unobstructed photographs. These portals will be concentrated towards the center of the bridge where people spend the most time viewing the gorge.

Installation of a fence may take up to two weeks. The road will have one-lane travel while the contractor is putting up the fence. The bid specifications are prepared for release on July 25. VTrans has set a September 20 completion date for the contractor so Route 4 has two-lane travel in time for leaf-peeping season.

The following is a summary of questions/comments (in italics) by meeting attendees, with responses from VTrans staff and others.

***Welded Wire Fence***

*The welded wire is more attractive, could we explore options to have an angled piece installed at the top as we will have to live with the temporary fence for four years?*

Yes, VTrans could confirm if this is possible; doing so will take some time.

*I've seen welded fence before and you can actually see through it.*

*Is welded wire coated or painted?*

We do not believe it is coated, but it could be painted.

*Is the welded wire fence easier to climb?*

Yes. The space between the wire is wider than chain link.

*How big are the holes in the wire mesh fence?*

The space between wires are usually 3 x 5 inches, but the spacing can be customized.

*Would you find out if the welded wire fence installed in Ithaca has been effective?*

Yes, we will.

*You did a lot of work on developing the chain link fence option but not the welded wire fence.*

We considered the wire fence option but determined a chain link fence offered more protection. There is less space (for a foot hole) in the chain link and the curvature at the top makes it difficult to climb over. VTrans also has experience with chain link fence and no experience with welded wire mesh. This is a challenging site to install a fence and we know chain link material is readily available. It took a lot of work to develop specifications for a temporary fence – our bid package is 25 pages.

*Could you prepare a bid package with two options – welded wire and chain link?*

Yes, VTrans could do that but I'd be concerned about delaying installation.

*How much time would it take to prepare specifications on a welded wire fence?*

It would take 2-3 weeks. This would push back fence installation to fall foliage season, most likely into November.

### ***Chain Link Fence***

*We want safety on the bridge as soon as possible.*

*Lots of the people on the bridge take selfies. Either fence would interfere with people taking photos.*

*The gorge has had a history of death by suicide, going back to the railroad bridge.*

*I want something done by the budget allowed. I don't care if the chain link is ugly. Four people have died there this year.*

*This fence is a temporary measure – don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.*

*How long are we going to put this off? People's lives are in danger. We need to consider people's lives and the first responders.*

*With all respect to tourism, we need to make getting a fence up the priority. There are many ways to see the gorge from other excellent viewpoints. We should promote those. What is the effect on tourists who witness a death or the cleanup?*

*Part of the effectiveness of a chain link fence is how long it takes and how much gumption is needed to get over it. The longer it takes to circumvent a barrier, the greater the chance a person may make another decision, or the person will be seen and there will be intervention. The person needs to be both agile and have more than a fainting impulse to go over the fence.*

*If my son had that extra minute, he might still be with us.*

*Let's ask the emergency responders how much time is needed to intervene.*

Hartford Police Chief Phil Kasten responded that barriers are important, the taller the better as it gives a person time to reconsider suicide, have people passing by make phone calls to our department and enable intervention.

*We should be practical about the fence.*

*There are many ways to kill yourself. I do not want it to be off that bridge.*

*I have not heard anything that justifies a delay.*

Kristin Higgins, VTrans Structures Manager said the Agency had seriously taken the charge from the Governor's office to install a fence on the bridge. Some attendees expressed appreciation to VTrans, especially as this is a public empathy issue. While frustration was expressed that there was not as much focus on a welded wire fence as a chain link fence, most people believed there was urgency in moving forward with installing a safety barrier. Of the three choices in chain link fence, dark green coated vinyl is preferred.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 PM.