

## ST. ALBANS-NITRO BRIDGE HISTORY HIGHLIGHTED NITRO MAN COMPILES HISTORY ON WEBSITE

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On the November day in 1934 when the St. Albans-**Nitro** Bridge opened, there was a parade featuring bands and floats. Mayors from just about every town in the Kanawha Valley were present for the opening.

"It was really a big deal," said **Nitro** resident Rich Hively, who has been delving into the bridge's history for his website about **Nitro** history, [www.historyofnitro.com](http://www.historyofnitro.com).

Now through May, the **Nitro** Public Library has a small display of artifacts relating to the bridge, which was later named the Dick Henderson Memorial Bridge.

There is renewed interest in the old bridge because it will be replaced in 2013. Work will actually start next year to prepare the existing piers for a new, wider, bridge deck.

"When it opened in 1934, it was a toll bridge built by the City of St. Albans," Hively said.

In his research, Hively found the first "mention" of a proposed bridge in 1925. It was a project pushed by the St. Albans Businessmen's Association as a way to increase business in St. Albans.

At the time, "there was no bridge (across the Kanawha River) between Point Pleasant and Charleston," said Hively, who has given talks on the bridge to such organizations as the St. Albans Historical Society.

Bonds were sold to finance construction. The project was approved for \$420,000, but the bridge came in under that at \$320,000.

According to Hively, \$320,000 in 1934 would equal about \$5.3 million in today's dollars.

When it opened as a toll bridge, the fee to cross was 25 cents per car and driver, with a nickel added for each passenger. Pedestrians could walk across for a nickel each. There was a tollbooth at the foot of the bridge on the St. Albans side.

"In 1939, it (the toll) was reduced to a quarter per car, regardless of passengers," Hively said.

Tolls were removed in 1947, and because it was expensive to keep the bridge in good repair, St. Albans eventually sold it to the state for \$1.

"There were people in St. Albans who were not happy about that," he said.

Hively has found old ticket books from when the bridge charged tolls, and he also acquired an official program that was published for the bridge's opening day. These are on display in the **Nitro** Public Library, along with a selection of old photos of the bridge. One of the metal plaques from the bridge is also included in the display.

Hershel Facemyre, president of the **Nitro** Development Authority, said getting a new bridge "is essential to the future growth of **Nitro**."

To prepare for when the bridge closes in 2013, Facemyre drafted a letter that "upper **Nitro** businesses" can give to their St. Albans customers explaining that alternate routes to **Nitro** are just a few extra miles out of their way.

For instance, the letter states that from the current bridge on the St. Albans side, motorists can take MacCorkle Avenue (U.S. 60) to Winfield Road (W.Va. 817) and cross the Interstate 64 Bridge, where they take the **Nitro** exit and continue on First Avenue (W.Va. 25) to the bridge on the **Nitro** side. This route is 9.5 miles.

A second route is from the current bridge on the St. Albans side, where motorists travel MacCorkle Avenue to Spring Hill and then cross the Dunbar Bridge. They then proceed to W.Va. 25 through Institute and continue to the **Nitro** side of the bridge. This route is 12 miles.

Facemyre said these are shorter distances than to Charleston Town Center, Corridor G stores or to the Huntington Mall.

Del. Bobbie Hatfield, D-Kanawha, stopped by the library to see the display.

"It brings back memories," Hatfield said.

The history of the **Nitro**-St. Albans Bridge is just one part of Hively's [www.thehistoryofnitro.com](http://www.thehistoryofnitro.com) website.

"It's a work in progress; there's so many things I didn't know, and I wanted to share what I've found," Hively said.

An old postcard showing the St. Albans-**Nitro** Bridge. Photo courtesy Rich Hively

Tickets from when the St. Albans-**Nitro** Bridge operated as a toll bridge (until 1947). Photo courtesy Rich Hively

Metro photos by BEN CALWELL

**Nitro** Mayor Rusty Casto holds one of the original plaques from the St. Albans-**Nitro** Bridge, which is slated for replacement in 2013. The plaque and other items related to the bridge are displayed inside the **Nitro** Public Library. With Casto, from left, are: Hershel Facemyre, president of the **Nitro** Development Authority; Rich Hively, who compiled a history of the bridge; Karen Boggess, **Nitro** Public Library manager and Del. Bobbie Hatfield, D-Kanawha.

Toll tickets, photos and an original, hardcover program published for the opening of the St. Albans-**Nitro** Bridge in 1934 are on display in the **Nitro** Public Library.