



10TH STREET BRIDGE, GREAT FALLS, MONTANA

The Historic Tenth Street Bridge in Great Falls, Montana, built in 1920, is the longest and oldest concrete arch bridge in the upper Great Plains. Yet this historic bridge was slated for demolition by the Montana Department of Transportation, when an adjacent new bridge was completed in 1995. The historic bridge was saved from the wrecking ball at the eleventh hour by the City of Great Falls, thanks to the City's long-term vision, and an innovative public-private partnership involving the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The City is now in the process of rehabilitating the historic bridge for incorporation into the City's riverfront trail network. But for Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, this bridge would have been destroyed by the State.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Federal Highway Administration to save the bridge. The Council issued formal comments in 1988, urging the highway agency to give more meaningful consideration to preservation alternatives, and characterizing the FHWA's rationale for demolition as "less than compelling."

Nonetheless, even though rehabilitation of the bridge was estimated to cost only \$167,000 more than demolition, the FHWA rejected the Advisory Council's comments, and refused to preserve the bridge. Section 4(f), however, requires more – the avoidance of harm to historic sites if a feasible and prudent alternative can be found. In 1995, when the Montana DOT hired a demolition contractor to begin destruction of the historic bridge, the National Trust and local preservation advocates went to court to enforce Section 4(f), arguing that preservation was a "feasible and prudent alternative" to demolition. In July 1996, an injunction was issued, prohibiting demolition of the historic bridge until the litigation could be resolved. Immediately after the case was argued in December 1996, the federal appeals court took the extraordinary step of assigning a senior judge to work with the parties in an effort to mediate the case. A year and a half of mediation led to a unique public-private partnership for the preservation of the bridge. The City of Great Falls assumed ownership of the historic bridge, while the local preservation advocates raised more than \$300,000 for rehabilitation of the bridge. The National Trust made available a \$100,000 line of credit for the project, and helped the City to obtain a Save America's Treasures grant of \$250,000.



Rehabilitation is not yet complete, and more funding is needed, but the Historic Tenth Street Bridge will be a centerpiece of the Great Falls riverfront for generations to come – thanks to Section 4(f), and to the vision of city leaders in Great Falls who were willing to invest in the City's future.