

NEWS



Figure 4. Former Lift Bridge Removed in 1985

Photo Credit: Provided photo

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For nearly 60 years, the Old/Sandusky Bay Bridge allowed traffic through, connecting Erie and Ottawa counties through Bay View.

Reconnecting history?

By ALISSA FISHER
Greater Sandusky Partnership marketing and creative services director Jan 16, 2025 12:00 PM

PORT CLINTON — The city of Port Clinton recently received federal funding through the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program.

The funding, through a grant program coming from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, will be used to plan a proposed connected multi-use pathway that could transform pedestrian and bicycle travel between Erie and Ottawa counties.

Out of more than 350 applicants nationwide, only 14 — including Port Clinton — received funding for this project.

"This award will help link the city with popular destinations for residents to enjoy as well as drive new traffic to the great businesses and local amenities our community offers residents, neighbors and visitors alike," Port Clinton Mayor Mike Snider said. "The award will allow the region to further leverage this great location along Lake Erie and continue to provide world-class outdoor recreation opportunities."

Progress on the pathway

A key element of the plan is a 14-mile extension of the Sandusky Bay Pathway, which would connect Sandusky to Port Clinton.

This means, for the first time in more than 35 years, this initiative aims to reunite communities that were once linked by the now-decommissioned Sandusky Bay lift bridge in Bay View, familiarly known as the Old/Sandusky Bay Bridge.

[The Sandusky Bay Pathway is part of a 100-mile vision to connect communities around the greater Sandusky Bay region.](#)

Currently, 20 miles are completed or funded — and the U.S. 6 corridor in Erie County represents one of those critical pieces. In a separate grant, awarded in 2022, [this project received \\$24.5 million to, among other aspects, build a pathway along this road.](#)

Future connections include Sandusky to Huron and expanding as far as Vermilion.

"The Sandusky Bay Pathway extension is a bold step toward creating a regional trail network that redefines how people experience our region," said Jeff Kerr, director of planning and policy for Greater Sandusky Partnershp.

"It will establish our region as a premier destination for recreation and community connection, offering residents and visitors alike a unique way to explore, engage and enjoy the beauty and vibrancy of Greater Sandusky Region," Kerr said.

The study will involve robust public engagement and preliminary engineering design to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

If and when completed, the connection will become a vital link in the region, providing safe, sustainable and enjoyable transportation and recreation opportunities for all.

Speaking up

Several area organizations — including the city of Port Clinton, the Park District of Ottawa County and the Greater Sandusky Partnership — worked in collaboration to complete and submit the application for the grant.

This initiative represents a partnership for a vision of strong regional connectivity.

"Bringing communities together through innovative projects like the Sandusky Bay Pathway is a testament to the power of collaboration," said Jannah Wilson, the park district's executive director. "This transformative initiative not only connects people but also opens the door to opportunities for outdoor recreation and regional growth."

Many federal lawmakers, including U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Toledo, played a vital role in providing funds for these aligning initiatives.

"I am thrilled to see this additional federal funding come home to this joint effort from the city of Port Clinton, the city of Sandusky, the Greater Sandusky Partnership and the Park District of Ottawa County for the Sandusky Bay Pathway," said Kaptur, who represents many northern shore communities across Ohio hugging Lake Erie.

Kaptur attributed the bipartisan nature as a key element in securing these funds, which would enhance connections in communities she represents.

These additional federal dollars advance the work to bring the proposed 100-mile Sandusky Bay Pathway to fruition.

Residents of Bay View look forward to the bridge coming back online, re-establishing a connection to Ottawa County. As of today, the road on either side dead-ends in Bay View, separated by Sandusky Bay/Lake Erie, which limits how many people travel through the village.

"It has been an honor to work with our regional stakeholders to build bridges between lake-oriented communities and put new emphasis on our Great Lake Erie," according to a joint statement from Bay View Mayor Larry Gwinner, and village council president Kimberly Broker.

"We are incredibly grateful the Greater Sandusky Partnership is committed to the village of Bay View," they stated. "This project is a powerful reminder that every community, no matter its size, truly matters. The connection through the Sandusky Bay Pathway will not only benefit Bay View but also strengthen ties across the entire region."

The bridge will provide many benefits to residents and tourists alike, according to Larry Fletcher, president of Shores & Islands Ohio, the area's flagship tourism bureau.

"A pedestrian-friendly bridge linking Erie and Ottawa counties would be an attraction, an economic driver and yet another high-profile amenity for the region's residents and the millions who visit us each year," Fletcher said. "Thank you to those whose hard work resulted in this grant."

Special thanks have been extended to both Ottawa and Erie counties for their leadership and commitment to this transformative project as well as to Shores & Islands Ohio as a supportive partner.

Q&A

Here are some additional answers to questions some might have about this project:

Q: Is this project definitely happening? Will the bridge be reconnected?

A: At this stage, reconnecting the bridge is not guaranteed.

The \$100,000 federal planning grant — along with \$30,000 in local match funding from the city of Port Clinton, the Park District of Ottawa County and the Greater Sandusky Partnership — will fund a comprehensive study.

This study will evaluate the feasibility of rebuilding the missing bridge span, including engineering requirements, permitting, design considerations, cost estimates and input from stakeholders. There will need to be an elevated portion to allow for boats so they can travel underneath this structure.

While the bridge component is the most prominent aspect of the study, equal importance is placed on advancing the broader vision of the Sandusky Bay Pathway.

This 100-mile vision includes evaluating the route from Sandusky's western border to Bay View and the bridge as well as the connection from the Ottawa County side to the city of Port Clinton.

If deemed viable, the next steps would include securing funding for preliminary engineering and eventual construction, which would depend on securing approvals and financial resources.

Q: What does the project timeline look like?

A: The study is expected to take no more than one year to complete.

Following this, further funding would need to be secured for preliminary engineering and detailed design work.

Construction would be much further off, likely depending on the willingness of the community to prioritize funding for the project.

At this point, no timeline for construction can be determined.

Q: Will the bridge be solely for pedestrian and non-motorized travel? Will vehicles have access?

A: The primary intent is for the bridge to support pedestrian and bicycle traffic, however, at a minimum, it will also need to meet engineering standards to allow access for emergency vehicles, ensuring flexibility and safety.

Q: How long will this span need to be?

A: The missing span, which was removed in 1985, is approximately 2,000 feet long.

The study will assess the specific requirements for rebuilding this section.

Q: Will there be any tributes to the former bridge in this construction process?

A: It is too early to determine whether there will be tributes to the former bridge. These types of details would likely be explored in later phases if the project progresses to design and construction.

Q: How much was the grant amount in total?

A: The project has a total funding amount of \$130,000.

This includes \$100,000 from the Federal Highway Administration and a \$30,000 local match (\$10,000 each) provided by the city of Port Clinton, Park District of Ottawa County and the Greater Sandusky Partnership.

The \$130,000 will fully fund the entirety of this initial planning study. This study represents the first step in determining the overall viability and costs of reconnecting the bridge.

If the project is deemed feasible, additional funding will need to be secured for future phases, including preliminary engineering and construction.

Q: What is the project's biggest challenge?

A: The absence of the Old Bay Bridge poses a significant barrier to community connectivity.

This missing link forces non-motorized users to take a four-plus-hour/50-plus-mile detour, severely limiting access to safe mobility options and economic opportunities.

The detour impacts local residents, particularly those without access to cars, such as visa employees who rely on seasonal tourism work.

The disconnection hampers access to key workforce destinations, including parks, resorts, marinas and local businesses, thereby affecting the regional economy and quality of life.

History lesson

[With help from Sandusky Library's history blog](#), here's a quick timeline to better understand the Bay Bridge:

• Feb. 2, 1929 — The Sandusky Bay Bridge was dedicated, providing a direct route for automobiles across the bay between Erie and Ottawa counties. This marked the first time automobile traffic could cross Sandusky Bay. Upon being constructed, the Sandusky Bay Bridge in Bay View was the longest bridge and causeway in Ohio. A large celebration occurred on this day, which included a luncheon, a release of carrier pigeons, music and many dignitaries speaking

• May 1, 1936 — The State Bridge Commission of Ohio took over operations, immediately reducing the toll from 50 cents to 25 cents. A toll collector was stationed near the drawbridge. It was originally operated by the Sandusky Bay Bridge Co.

• On Aug. 30, 1946 — Ohio Gov. Frank Lausche cut ceremonial tape across the bridge span near the toll gate, signifying a toll-free Sandusky Bay Bridge.

• 1960s — The state of Ohio widened Ohio 2 into a four-lane highway. Then the four-lane Edison Memorial Bridge was constructed, running parallel to the Sandusky Bay Bridge. A majority of traffic was rerouted from the Bay Bridge. Both bridges were used from 1965 until 1985.

• 1985 — The state removed the Bay Bridge's steel center because of high maintenance costs. It's this year in which the Bay Bridge ceased operations.

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