Rendering of the completed bridge. Image courtesy PennDOT.

A bridge, then, is infrastructure and also a part of this ethical system; an ordinary structure that makes continuity of connection possible.

The *Pittsburgh's Next Engineering Marvel* exhibition extends this idea into a contemporary civic setting. The JCC operates across a network of places, including the East End, Monroeville, the South Hills, and Morgantown, West Virginia, each connected through the shared movement of people.

The Pittsburgh Jewish community's geography has been shaped over time by migration from the urban core into surrounding suburbs, a shift that reconfigured how communal life is organized and where it is experienced.

To participate in this community is, in many cases, to travel between these sites, crossing bridges, highways and corridors as part of daily life. In this sense, the JCC gathers community across distance and depends on the same systems of connection that this exhibition brings into view.

For most who cross the Commercial Street Bridge, it will remain what it has always been: a way through.

What distinguishes this moment is the collective decision to recognize it within a museum setting. Through collaboration with PennDOT and S&B USA, this exhibition asserts that this phase—the active labor, coordination and even the disruption—is itself worthy of public attention and historical record.

In time, this moment will be absorbed into the completed structure. For now, it is made visible. As historian David McCullough, a native Pittsburgher whose identity was formed within a landscape of bridges, reminds us, "bridges are among the most visible and lasting symbols of human effort," whether or not we choose to see them that way.

—Melissa Hiller, AJM Director

CAN YOU FIND...?

- **A piece of real bridge material**
- **A job you didn't know existed**
- **Something that helps keep workers safe**
- **A part of the bridge before it's fully assembled**
- **A moment where the old and new overlap**

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- **What systems support your daily life without you noticing?**
- **What does it take to keep a region connected?**
- **Who are the people behind the structures you depend on?**
- **What stories exist inside the structures around you?**

Thanks to Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Fay, S&B USA Construction, HDR Engineering, and Michael Baker International. Specials thanks to The Senator John Heinz History Center for providing historic images of the Commercial Street Bridge.

COMMERCIAL STREET BRIDGE

Pittsburgh's Next Engineering Marvel

Through August 31, 2026

"Bridges are among the most visible and lasting symbols of human effort."

— David McCullough

JCC PGH | AMERICAN JEWISH Museum

Images courtesy Detre Library & Archives at Senator John Heinz History Center

The Commercial Street Bridge carries the Parkway East over Frick Park and the Nine Mile Run valley, forming one of Pittsburgh's most critical eastbound connections between the East End and the eastern suburbs.

When it was built 75 years ago, the bridge marked a pivotal moment of regional expansion that extended the reach of the city outward and strengthened the flow between neighborhoods, workplaces and communities beyond the city's urban core. As the historic images here show, this post-World War II initiative reshaped how people moved through the region and influenced how southwestern Pennsylvania could grow.

Today, that same structure is being replaced through a major reconstruction effort led by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and supported by Fay, S&B USA Construction (general contractor), HDR Engineering (design consultant), and Michael Baker International (construction manager).


Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Daily Magazine

Features — Tuesday Morning, May 3, 1949 — Comics

Parkway to Ease Pittsburgh's Traffic Headache

PERFECTLY BALANCED!

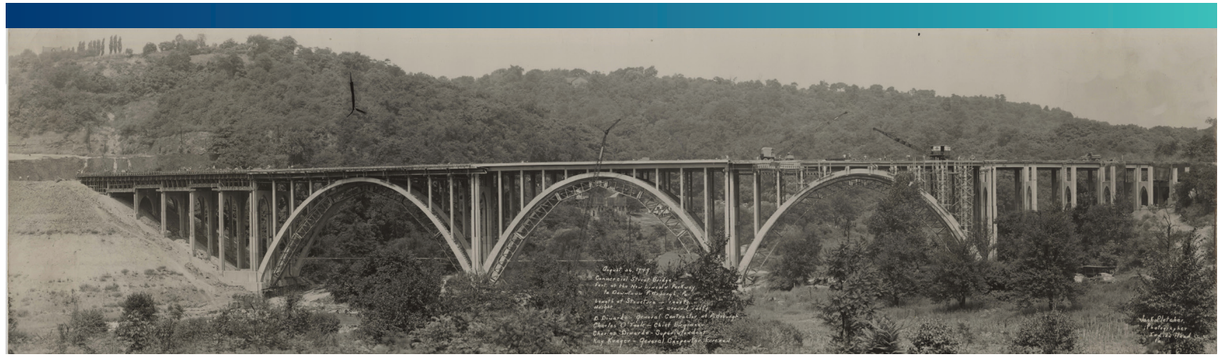
FORT PITT The Better Beer!

Image courtesy Pittsburgh Post Gazette

When it was built 75 years ago, the bridge marked a pivotal moment of regional expansion that extended the reach of the city outward.

Engineers, steelworkers, a range of union skilled craftspeople and specialist subcontractors are actively building the new structure while the current bridge remains in service. A feat of engineering, the new structure is being constructed adjacent to the current span using Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) methods. The new bridge will be laterally slid into place; this represents a highly coordinated engineering innovation that allows the bridge to be built in parallel and installed with far fewer disruptions to Parkway East traffic than a traditional bridge replacement.

Together with PennDOT, Fay crews coordinate work across live traffic, complex staging areas, and carefully sequenced construction phases to maintain continuous traffic movement while preparing for the transition. This work is unfolding in full view of the public, transforming construction into a visible civic process.



Original Commercial Street Bridge, completed in 1951. Image courtesy Detre Library & Archives at Senator John Heinz History Center

Through photography, video documentation, material samples, and construction artifacts, *Pittsburgh's Next Engineering Marvel* reveals the innovations, coordination and skilled labor that usually remain outside of attention in daily use. From the outset of the bridge project, there was an intentional focus on the people behind the work—built by Pittsburghers for Pittsburgh. This exhibition carries that focus forward, showing us what is built, how it is built, and who builds it.

We often move through infrastructure without noticing or thinking about it as exciting and noteworthy. Bridges become part of our daily routine, something to be crossed on the way to somewhere else.

Moments like this interrupt that familiarity. To watch a structure of this scale rise beside an active highway, assembled piece by piece in full view of daily traffic, creates a notable public experience that this exhibition amplifies.

It is inevitable, too, that construction brings detours, delays and temporary disruption to daily life. These interruptions are real, and they are felt across neighborhoods and routines.

Reflection on that disruption, however, reminds us how deeply connected daily life is to systems most people rarely see or ponder. It shows how much coordination and effort it takes to maintain the pathways that allow

The JCC gathers community across distance and depends on the same systems of connection that this exhibition brings into view.

a region to function. What feels temporarily inconvenient in the moment belongs to a longer story of renewal, repair and ongoing investment in shared infrastructure.

There is also a particular kind of awe this level of effort generates. There is a magic from the convergence of forces that draws people in, and a shared, intergenerational impulse to pause when something large and complex is underway.

This response also conjures more about public life and reveals that infrastructure is not separate from community, but is one of the systems that makes community possible. Roads, bridges and shared corridors connect our patterns of daily movement that most of us only notice when they are interrupted; the interruption amplifies their importance.

Interestingly, this understanding also points to ethical underpinnings. In Jewish tradition, communal life is inseparable from the maintenance of shared space. Centuries-old Rabbinic sources, developed within the realities of creating cities and towns, treat roads, gates, and pathways as collective responsibilities rather than individual concerns.

The removal of hazards, the protection of access, and the preservation of safe passage are understood as obligations that sustain communal life. In this framework, public space is actively cared for so that movement between people, places and obligations remains possible.

Continued on back

THE ORIGINAL COMMERCIAL STREET BRIDGE — FACTS

- Built: 1948–1951 as part of the Penn-Lincoln Parkway
- Length: 846 feet
- Design: Twin-arch reinforced concrete structure
- Location: Spans Nine Mile Run and Frick Park
- Builder: Dinardo Inc
- Cost: $1.78 million
- Structure: 3 main arches (170 ft each) + 12 approach spans (28 ft each)
- Height: Deck rises ~85 feet above the valley
- Earth excavated for the nearby Squirrel Hill Tunnel was used to fill the Nine Mile Run valley and create the bridge approach.

Source: Historic Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh