

**HEARINGS ON OHIO RIVER
BRIDGE AT PARKERSBURG,
W. VA. APRIL 7, 1909**

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Hearings on Ohio River Bridge at Parkersburg, W. VA. April 7, 1909 by Various

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OHIO RIVER BRIDGE AT PARKERSBURG, W. VA.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 1909.

The subcommittee this day met, Hon. Charles E. Townsend presiding.

Mr. TOWNSEND. I will say to you, gentlemen, that this hearing is entirely informal; that the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce for the Sixty-first Congress has not been appointed. We have been acting on the assumption that possibly it would be appointed and that the subcommittee which had been appointed at the last Congress might possibly be excused by the whole committee for having accommodated Mr. Woodyard and other gentlemen by giving them a little time this morning. I will state, furthermore, that we have to be in session in the House at 12 o'clock and if the gentlemen who have the matter in charge can divide the time between them, those in favor of the proposition and those opposed to it, each taking one-half an hour, I will attempt to hold you gentlemen down to that rule.

Mr. Woodyard, if you will present those gentlemen who are in favor of this proposition, we will hear them.

Mr. WOODYARD. We appreciate very much, Mr. Chairman, your kindness in calling the committee together under the circumstances, but I do not know whether this case could be presented, on our side at least, in the time allotted. Could you not extend the time fifteen minutes? I appreciate that that would throw us into the House.

Mr. TOWNSEND. I do not think that you had better take more time, because if you have anything prepared and will submit it to the stenographer it will be printed and read.

Mr. TILLEY. As representing the other side, we have not come here to present our side in full and we are quite willing that these gentlemen shall take forty-five minutes. We do not know what testimony is to be submitted and we are rather on the defensive. They can take forty or forty-five minutes, and then we would like to submit our side when the committee is regularly organized.

Mr. MOSS. We respectfully desire to object to that. This gentleman was before the committee and he gave his evidence. We have come here this morning prepared to discuss this matter and we do not want something to come up afterwards when we are not present.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Are you in favor of the proposition?

Mr. MORSE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HUBBARD. These gentlemen can not be denied the right to be heard when the committee has been organized.

Mr. MOSS. But we want to be present.

Mr. HUBBARD. Notice will be given of the meeting and everybody can come.

Mr. BARTLETT. Mr. Chairman, I have no objection to accommodating anybody on earth, because my nature is to accommodate anybody

I can, but this seems to me to amount simply to marching up the hill and then marching down again, and I do not see the use of wasting the time, and I do not see why the committee should do it. I am perfectly willing to accommodate anybody.

Mr. WOODYARD. This is for the purpose of making this a matter of record and to save these gentlemen the trouble of coming down here again.

Mr. BARTLETT. You understand that we can not report this bill. I do not know that I shall be on the committee, as far as I am concerned, and nobody would undertake to say that the committee would not hear anybody if he had not been heard.

Mr. WOODYARD. Certainly not.

Mr. HUBBARD. If you will allow me, there would be this value, there would be a definite statement of each side, and this is rather an important matter in that part of the country.

Mr. BARTLETT. I am perfectly willing to hear you gentlemen.

**STATEMENT OF HON. H. C. WOODYARD, A REPRESENTATIVE
FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA.**

Mr. WOODYARD. Mr. Chairman, I will not take up any of the time of the committee, because we have other gentlemen here who will present this matter. I have introduced a bill the purpose of which is to authorize the construction of a bridge across the Ohio River at Parkersburg, which authorization has been denied by the Chief of Engineers, and, as our people believe, unjustifiably so.

The CHAIRMAN. Is that bill similar to the one that was introduced at the last session of Congress?

Mr. WOODYARD. Yes, sir; the same bill. This is a very important matter to the people of that section of the country. We appreciate that the navigation of the river is the paramount thing to be considered, but we do not believe that the proposition that the bridge people submit in this matter will obstruct navigation, and for that reason I have introduced this bill and these gentlemen are here to be heard on it.

STATEMENT OF HON. HUNTER H. MOSS, OF PARKERSBURG, W. VA.

Mr. TOWNSEND. What is your business?

Mr. MOSS. I am judge of the circuit court, the fourth judicial district of West Virginia.

I desire to say that I am a property owner in Belpre, Ohio, across from Parkersburg, and have been a lifelong resident of Parkersburg, W. Va.; so I have a selfish interest in this matter as well as the interest of a citizen, but I come here representing the people of Parkersburg, who are very much interested in this project.

Parkersburg is a city of from 25,000 to 30,000 inhabitants, and Belpre is a town of from 1,500 to 2,000 indirect inhabitants. I make the statement that in that portion of Ohio there is more population; that the ratio of population is greater than in any other portion of Ohio, except it be in the mining regions, so that in looking at this matter I would suggest that we look at it not only from the standpoint of Parkersburg and Belpre, but from the standpoint of the people in the vicinity of both of these places; in other words,

the western portion of West Virginia and the eastern portion of Ohio.

The river at Parkersburg is of the usual width of the Ohio River, of course, and various efforts have been made from time to time to secure a bridge. The proposed bridge is to be built, if built at all, 650 feet above the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad bridge which crosses the river at Parkersburg.

Without going into detail as to the efforts to secure the assent of all interested parties on the part of these bridge people, I will simply say that the bridge people finally consented that that bridge should have a span of 800 feet. I desire to say to the gentlemen of the committee that there is no bridge on the Ohio River that has any greater span. There is only one bridge at Rochester which has as much of a span. These gentlemen thought that 700 feet would be ample, but in accordance with the objection of the river interests they finally conceded that they were willing to build a bridge with an 800-foot span. That would make no pier on the Ohio side, and the only pier in the river would be a pier near the West Virginia shore, and as will be shown by the engineer, Mr. Morse, who prepared the plans for this bridge, it can not possibly interfere with the navigation.

Now, on the question what are the objections to this bridge, in the first place let me say, gentlemen, that Parkersburg has been trying to secure a bridge there for ten or fifteen years.

Mr. BARTLETT. How do you get across the river now?

Mr. MOSS. By a little ferryboat. Parkersburg has been trying to secure this bridge for ten or fifteen years. First, it tried to secure a bridge at the mouth of the Little Kanawha, just below the city of Parkersburg. That was opposed by the river interests and abandoned. Then it tried to secure a bridge below the city of Parkersburg several miles. That was opposed by the river interests and was abandoned. Now, for, I believe, going on two years—is that right, Mr. Newell?

Mr. NEWELL. One year.

Mr. MOSS. One year; it has seemed two years ago to us—they have been making an effort to get started on a bridge across the Ohio River at Parkersburg. Now, what are the objections? The objections come from two sources. First, from the owner of the little ferryboat. It may seem remarkable that the owner of a little ferryboat should have such an influence as to be able to block a project which would afford convenience to 100,000 people. That may seem strange, but nevertheless it is true, and I am prepared to prove everything that is stated, if the committee desire it. This little ferryboat, and I know by actual experience, is crowded on almost every trip. The management, I submit, while the gentleman is a friend of mine, and I have a high regard for him in some particulars, is not particularly accommodating. You go over the river when the ferryboat gets ready to take you over, and as soon as the shades of darkness come you do not go over the river unless you pay double price, and when the winter time comes you do not go over the river at all, sometimes, on account of the floating ice. So it is that these two communities are absolutely shut off from each other.

Mr. BARTLETT. What was the reason given by the Chief of Engineers for disapproving the building of the bridge?

Mr. Moss. I will come to that in a few minutes. I do not wish to speak any further of this ferryboat matter, except to say that any statement I make I will very cheerfully verify. Now, the other opposition comes, and I say that with entire respect, from what is known as the coal combine of Pittsburg, represented by these gentlemen who are here to-day, otherwise called the Coal Exchange. These gentlemen object to this bridge on the theory that it will interfere with navigation. When they are asked why it will interfere with navigation, what is their answer? You will find their answer in the testimony of Mr. Tilley, which was taken before this committee previously. Mr. Tilley says that it will interfere with navigation going upstream. Now, the coal barges are brought downstream and they must pass through a 320-foot span there on the Baltimore and Ohio bridge—they have only 320 feet for that—but he says it is not downstream but it is going upstream that this bridge will interfere with navigation.

In other words, that in bringing down the empty tows some of them may knock against the pier or the bank or something else. Gentlemen, I submit to you in all candor and in all earnestness that even if that was so, even if an occasional barge was smashed to pieces, that the interests and the convenience and the welfare of thousands upon thousands of people who dwell on the opposite sides of the river are as much to be considered at least as the welfare of these river interests. But I submit to this committee that Mr. Tilley is mistaken in that. The river law, which will be quoted to you later, is to the effect that a 500-foot span must be built for downstream navigation. This committee will find out before it is through investigating this subject that this is the first time in history that anybody has ever claimed that a bridge of this kind would interfere with upstream navigation, but it has always been downstream navigation that they have based their objections upon, and yet for the first time we come in here and find that objection is made to this improvement because it will interfere with upstream navigation. I submit to this committee in all fairness and in all candor that any pilot who is not able to go through a 800-foot span is not fit to run a boat. I submit to this committee that the chances of an accident there are reduced to the minimum. It is unnecessary to call the attention of the committee to the fact that the larger the bridge the greater the cost. It is unnecessary to call attention to the fact that these gentlemen proposed to build a span 700 feet and that that was ample, and they came up to 800 feet in order to accommodate these interests, and yet now when 800 feet is proposed there is objection to it.

Now, gentlemen, on the subject of the report of the engineers, it is true that the engineers who made the report said that this bridge could be built right next to the Baltimore and Ohio bridge or could be built 2,000 feet above the Baltimore and Ohio bridge, which would take it away from the center of gravity between the two points and make it almost useless, and they thought if a bridge was built at the proposed location, two of the three engineers, that it ought to completely span the river. Major Newcomer said that if it were 850 feet it would be all right at the present proposed location. This board of engineers, gentlemen, we respect. We have the highest regard for

them simply because they are engineers, but we respectfully submit that when the board of engineers' report is examined into and when the evidence on which they acted, which was produced by this coal combine, is brought before this committee that in all fairness this committee must conclude that the board of engineers erred in their statement. I do not come here as an engineer. We have an engineer here who has had a great many years of experience. I speak from information; I speak to you simply as a reasonable man and ask you if on the face of things at least it would not appear to you that 800 feet was enough for a tow to go through and whether or not, gentlemen, notwithstanding this report of the engineers, if this committee believe from an investigation of the record that they are mistaken, I know that this committee will so decide.

Mr. BARTLETT. What do you mean by 800 feet being sufficient for a tow? I am an inland man myself.

Mr. MOSS. I mean by that that there will be 800 feet of clear space between the piers.

Mr. KENNEDY. The channel span of the bridge is 800 feet long that these people propose to build.

Mr. WOODYARD. They go through a 320-foot span now.

Mr. MOSS. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad bridge which crosses there has a span of only 320 feet.

Mr. BARTLETT. And these tows go through that span?

Mr. MOSS. Yes, sir; they have to. I do not want to take any more time, on account of the fact that our time is limited. I desire to make a fair presentation of this case and I want to submit to you these facts, and I submit them because I believe I am right.

Mr. KENNEDY. That part of your argument you had better put in a brief.

Mr. MOSS. Yes, sir. I am closing now. I simply want to submit to you this proposition. Here are the river interests opposing this bridge—

Mr. BARTLETT. Who do you mean by the "river interests?"

Mr. MOSS. The coal combine of Pittsburg, sir. The coal combine is opposing this bridge. Their steamboats ply up and down the Ohio River and they have a free roadbed. The opposition to that is the railroad. The railroad constructs its roadbed at a great expense. That river does not belong to any river interest. It belongs to the people of this country, and they get the use of that river free.

Mr. BARTLETT. God Almighty's highway.

Mr. MOSS. God Almighty's highway, and thank God for that; and yet we are met with the proposition that because they think it might be a little inconvenient that these people there who have been struggling for ten or fifteen years and when there is great necessity for this bridge shall be shut off from the change in order that these men may continue their steamboats up and down the river.

Mr. TOWNSEND. What is the population of Parkersburg?

Mr. MOSS. Between 25,000 and 30,000.

Mr. TOWNSEND. And Belpre?

Mr. MOSS. Between 1,500 and 2,000, the indirect population. We believe that we are right about this matter, and we trust that you will give it careful consideration.

**STATEMENT OF MR. J. FRANK TILLEY, SECRETARY PITTSBURG
COAL EXCHANGE, PITTSBURG, PA.**

Mr. TILLEY. First, I wish to thank the committee for its courtesy in granting us a few minutes at this time. I have listened with considerable interest to Judge Moss's remarks on this question. He spoke of a coal combine. We deny the existence of any such thing as that.

Mr. BARTLETT. You all do that.

Mr. TILLEY. I represent the river interests of Pittsburg and possibly 80 or 90 per cent of the river interests of the Ohio Valley. I wish to deny, in the first place, in the strongest terms I can use that we are influenced in the slightest degree by the little ferry company which Judge Moss mentions as crossing the river at Parkersburg. I did not know that this gentleman had a ferry there until after this bridge question came up, and if he had twenty ferries it would not influence the coal exchange one iota, although we feel friendly to any man who is in business similar to our own.

We are opposed to this bridge bill for two general reasons. First, that the bridge would be an unreasonable obstruction to navigation, and when the opportunity is given to establish that fact in a complete manner we will produce the testimony to do it. If one of you gentlemen had appendicitis you would not go to a doctor who could administer soothing sirup or who could pull a tooth, but you would go to an appendicitis specialist. At Pittsburg is located what is known as No. 25 American Association of Master Pilots, consisting of about 185 members, who navigate the Ohio River, and who are the pilots on steam vessels navigating this river—practically the only men who pilot vessels of the class which tow these large assemblies of coal craft. This association is represented here by Capt. James Wood, and he will tell you that this bridge is an unreasonable obstruction to navigation and he will tell you why.

On the face of it it seems very strange that a tow which can go through a bridge with a 320-foot span should find a channel span of 800 feet an unreasonable obstruction to navigation, but that is the case at this place, and I wish you to note particularly that we do not oppose the construction of this bridge per se, and if they will take the bridge up the river 1,500 feet, as has been recommended by the engineers, they can build the bridge with a 725-foot span. If they will come down so near the present Baltimore and Ohio Railroad bridge as to make the act of running through one continuous act in passing through their bridge they can build the bridge with a 715-foot span.

Mr. WOODYARD. Do you not know that that would be impossible? Do you believe it would be possible to construct the bridge there?

Mr. TILLEY. I am not familiar with the shore end of the bridge.

Mr. WOODYARD. I would say that it is impossible, and I do not think that I am misstating the situation.

Mr. KENNEDY. I would like to inquire what action you have taken with reference to the existing piers in the river, maintained there by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company?

Mr. TILLEY. The Pittsburg Coal Exchange instituted proceedings some three years ago by presenting a petition to the Secretary of War