

# Gov. Evers: Joins Chippewa County, WisDOT to open Cobban Bridge over the Chippewa River

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JIM FALLS — Gov. Tony Evers today joined Chippewa Economic Development Corporation, Chippewa County, and Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) officials to open the new Cobban Bridge over the Chippewa River between Cornell and Jim Falls.

“Folks rely on safe roads and bridges to get them from point A to point B, and my administration has remained committed since Day One to building the resilient, safe infrastructure needed to support our communities, economy, and Wisconsin’s quality of life,” said Gov. Evers. “The new Cobban Bridge illustrates this commitment, and I’m grateful to Chippewa County, the Chippewa Economic Development Corporation, and WisDOT for working together to build a crossing that will last for generations.”

The bridge closed in August 2017 after a routine inspection noted some deficiencies that meant the bridge could no longer safely support vehicles. Chippewa County received state funding for the final design and construction in 2018 through the Local Bridge Improvement Program, with the remaining 20 percent of the funding provided by Chippewa County. The \$4.6 million project began in August 2022 with the demolition of the former bridge. Almost a year later, the Cobban Bridge is officially open, more than three months ahead of schedule.

“The Cobban Bridge project involved planning and coordination at all levels of government to successfully deliver this project,” said WisDOT Northwest Region Director Jerry Mentzel. “We are proud to work with our county partners to build a safer and more reliable structure across the Chippewa River. We are also delighted

that parts of the previous Cobban Bridge are restored in the nearby state park as a lasting reminder for residents and visitors.”

Built in 1908, the former two-span Pennsylvania through-truss bridge was the oldest of its kind in Wisconsin. In addition to WisDOT’s efforts to preserve the bridge’s history through awareness and local education efforts, the steel beams from the former Cobban Bridge were recently recycled to build a 200-foot fence at the overlook at Lake Wissota State Park, northeast of Chippewa Falls. Educational signage is expected to be in place by next season.

“I’m extremely pleased to have this incredible project completed,” said Chippewa County Highway Committee Chairman Glen Sikorski. “We had been working on funding of this project for my entire time on the board, and I felt very strongly that it was necessary to maintain a Chippewa River crossing at this location. Time will prove the benefits of a bridge at this location, particularly during future work on the County Y bridge in Jim Falls.”

“It was clear when the previous bridge needed to be closed that another structure must be built. Years of hard work have taken place behind the scenes to obtain the necessary funding, study the possible alternate crossing locations, complete the design, and move into construction,” said Chippewa County Highway Commissioner Brian Kelley. “There were numerous environmental and historical challenges associated with this project, and it was only through collaboration with all of the project stakeholders that we were able to achieve our goal. I’m very proud of the amazing work done by the entire project team to get a new Cobban Bridge built within budget and well ahead of schedule.”

“People loved the Cobban Bridge. It was scenic. It carried people and goods since the horse and wagon days. And it had a great story—how many bridges have ever been in two spots? But even the most scenic and storied bridge will fail with enough time, hard use, and weather,” said Chippewa County Historical Society Director Frank Smoot. “The Chippewa County Highway Department worked tirelessly with the Chippewa County Historical Society to preserve the story of the Cobban Bridge and salvage some important relics. A new bridge will carry new generations of travelers, and meanwhile, we all can carry the stories of the old bridge with us.”

“Our neighborhood on the east side of the bridge has been anxiously waiting for its completion,” said local resident and advocate for the new bridge, Marilyn Murphy. “Although many of us loved the history and character of the old bridge, we are so

pleased to be able to now use a safe and convenient crossing to Highway 178. That access has been truly missed since the old bridge had to be closed six years ago.”