

The Fair Oaks Bridge

The cover photograph on this year's budget document is of the Fair Oaks Bridge. It crosses the American River less than one-half mile east of the Sunrise Bridge.

In 1900, farmers north of the American River petitioned the Board of Supervisors for construction of a bridge near Fair Oaks. The original bridge at this location was completed in 1901 but survived only until January 1907 when it was washed away in a flood. A hastily constructed temporary bridge was washed away again in March 1907. The existing Fair Oaks Bridge, with longer spans and a single pier in the deep water, was completed late in 1907. From that date until 1967, the bridge served as an important connector for the community of Fair Oaks to the greater Sacramento area.

In the early days, the bridge provided access for citrus growers, located on the north side of the river, to a rail spur built by the Southern Pacific Railroad on the south side of the river. The spur connected to the SP main line. The farmers and fruit companies reaped the benefits of the bridge by being able to distribute their products more efficiently to a much larger market.

The first motorized traffic crossed the bridge in 1915. Three newer bridges, built in the 1950s and 1960s across the American River, diminished the importance of the bridge. In 1967, the bridge was closed. The ownership of the bridge was transferred to the Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks. In 1973, after some re-decking and new paint, the Fair Oaks Bridge was reopened to the public as a pedestrian/bicycle crossing. In 2000, the south timber approach to the steel structure was replaced with a concrete structure and new decking and wrought iron fencing were also installed.

The bridge design is a combination of two Pennsylvania Petit through truss spans and a Pratt Pony truss span. At almost 500 feet long, it is the second oldest out of ten surviving bridges of this type in California. The oldest bridge, built in 1893, is upriver at the town of Folsom. The Fair Oaks Bridge was designated as a National Historic Site in 2006 and is on the California State Register of Historical Places.

Hollywood loves the bridge, too. Many film makers have come to Sacramento to shoot action scenes on the bridge and other scenes featuring the picturesque bridge in a background shot. "The Stunt Man," starring Peter O'Toole and "Letters from a Killer," starring Patrick Swayze are two such films.

