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New Winooski River Bridge Gets \$23M Boost for Safer, Wider Upgrade

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Vermont has secured a major federal investment to replace the nearly century-old Winooski River Bridge, setting the stage for a safer, more durable structure to better serve motorists and pedestrians. The \$22.7 million grant, awarded through the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), marks a pivotal step in a \$60 million project to modernize a critical piece of infrastructure in northern Vermont.

Built in 1929, the existing bridge has long needed replacement due to age-related wear and increased stress from modern traffic demands. The new design will feature wider travel

lanes and expanded sidewalks, aiming to improve both vehicular flow and pedestrian safety. According to the Burlington Department of Public Works, the upgraded bridge will also include enhanced drainage systems to handle Vermont's increasingly volatile weather patterns, which have led to repeated flooding over the past several years.

The funding stems from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed in 2021, which allocated billions nationwide to upgrade transportation systems, bridges, and public works. Vermont's congressional delegation, Senators Bernie Sanders (Independent), Peter Welch (Democrat), and Representative Becca Balint (Democrat) jointly announced the award last Thursday, emphasizing the importance of resilient infrastructure in the face of climate-related challenges.

In a press statement, the delegation said, "The replacement of the Winooski River Bridge will boost northern Vermont's critical infrastructure, improve safety and accessibility, and make Winooski more resilient to extreme weather." While the statement underlined the state's need for federal partnership in infrastructure, it also pointed to the risks of underinvestment in aging assets like bridges and roads.

Infrastructure Investment

The project's scope goes beyond the bridge itself. Improvements will also target nearby intersections, including Riverside Avenue, Mill Street, Barrett Street, and Colchester Avenue. These upgrades are expected to reduce congestion and enhance mobility for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Road reconstruction and updated traffic signal systems are part of the broader strategy to streamline traffic patterns and improve safety.

Chapin Spencer, Director of the Burlington Department of Public Works, highlighted the effort's local significance. "This is more than just a bridge replacement; it's a commitment to safe, modern, and efficient transportation that benefits the whole region," Spencer said.

The project's total cost is estimated at \$60 million, and the financial burden is shared across multiple levels of government. The breakdown includes 80 percent federal funding, 10 percent from the state, and 5 percent each from the City of Burlington and the City of Winooski. Additionally, the delegation has nominated the project for \$8 million in Congressionally Directed Spending for Fiscal Year 2026.

The investment represents a needed upgrade and a strategic commitment to keeping regional infrastructure aligned with 21st-century standards. For Vermont communities, particularly in Chittenden County, it's a timely and necessary improvement. Residents and commuters will benefit from safer crossings, smoother commutes, and a bridge designed to endure the region's evolving climate conditions.

Construction is expected to begin following final design approvals and environmental reviews, with a multi-year timeline anticipated.