

## Long Bridge History

In 1808, by an Act of Congress signed into law by President Thomas Jefferson, the “Long Bridge” was constructed as a toll crossing of the Potomac River. For its first 50-years several historic battles demolished the bridge and there were also subsequent reconstruction efforts at different crossing locations in the immediate vicinity. Only foot, horse and stagecoach traffic used the structure until the mid-1850s.

Starting in the mid-1850s, at which time no physical tracks were on the bridge, a number of railroad lines were either operating or planning operation on the Long Bridge. Goods had to be removed from the railroad cars and transferred to horse-drawn wagons to cross the bridge. Once arriving on the other end of the bridge, the goods were then transferred to railroad cars to continue to their destination.

In the 1860s, rails were added to the Long Bridge, bringing into question the weight capacity of the structure to safely support the locomotives and freight cars. Lightly loaded railroad cars were used to cross the mile-long structure, pulled by horse power until 1863, when a new, stronger, parallel structure was completed; one which could hold the weight of newer, heavier locomotives and freight cars. Both structures remained in use throughout the Civil War.



Throughout the latter half of the 1800s, the area around the Long Bridge was reclaimed and constructed by filling swampy and shallow spots to create now familiar areas such as: East & West Potomac Park, the Tidal Basin, Hain’s Point and the Maine Avenue Waterfront. By the end of the 1800s, the Long Bridge was also being used for District trolley service to Virginia. No fewer than 250 trains of all classes were scheduled on a daily basis.

Approximately 150 feet upriver from the original Long Bridge structure, a new 13-span steel truss bridge was built having a total length of 2,500 feet. The double-tracked structure was opened for traffic in 1904 and is the bridge alignment that the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Virginia have known for the last 100+ years. The current Long Bridge is comprised of multiple low level spans and a two span through truss swing bridge.

In the 1940s, during World War II, the Long Bridge's weight restrictions became an obstacle for transporting heavy military cargo. This warranted the replacement of truss spans, except the swing span, with new supporting girders and new piers placed between the old ones to support the additional weight. Additionally, coinciding with a replacement of the trusses with girder spans, numerous additional piers were added to support the shallow girders. The last known operation of the swing bridge was in March 1969.

The Long Bridge continues to be maintained.

