

Hackensack River Lift Bridges

In the wake of World War I the United States economy was booming but transportation networks were not keeping pace. In 1924 the United States War Department decided that, in order to keep the economy in the Port of New York and New Jersey vibrant, commodities had to pass smoothly over and under the bridges and roads throughout the Port.

The existing swing bridges over the Hackensack River were too low and too dangerous to passing ships, so they needed to be replaced. State-of-the-art vertical lift bridges, which open the widest-possible channel between the bridges' towers, were constructed to replace the swing spans.

Between 1928 and 1930, all four swing bridges that crossed the Hackensack River between Kearny and Jersey City were replaced with steel vertical lift bridges. The replacement bridges included:

- Lower Hack Draw Bridge over the Hackensack River, completed in 1928. This railroad bridge was operated by the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad as part of its Morris and Essex Division.
- Pennsylvania Railroad Harsimus Branch (Conrail/CSX) Bridge over the Hackensack River, completed in 1930. This bridge carried railroad freight over the Hackensack and routed it towards the Pennsylvania Railroad's Harsimus Cove terminal on the Hudson River in Jersey City.
- Pennsylvania Railroad (PATH) Bridge over the Hackensack River, completed in 1930. This railroad bridge still carries passenger traffic over the Hackensack from Newark to Jersey City. Riders then continue on to Manhattan.
- Wittpenn Bridge (NJ Route 7) Bridge over the Hackensack River, completed in 1930. This vehicular bridge carries cars and trucks over the Hackensack to major road intersections on the east side of the river. A bridge crossing for over-land travel has existed at this location since at least 1795.

Historic District



Top: Photograph of the Hackensack River Lift Bridges Historic District taken in 1979. In the foreground is the Lower Hack Draw Bridge. In the middle-ground are the Wittpenn (NJ Route 7) Bridge, the Pennsylvania Railroad Harsimus Branch Bridge, and the Pennsylvania Railroad (PATH) Bridge. In the distance, the Pulaski Skyway and the Lincoln Highway Hackensack River Bridge are visible. Historic American Engineering Record #NJ-42 — Erie & Lackawanna Railroad Bridge [Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Bridge]; *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Background image: This 1931 photo looks westward over the new Pennsylvania Railroad (PATH) Bridge; partially visible on the right are the freight and vehicular bridges. Image from *Railway Signaling*, May 1, 1931.

Wittpenn Bridge Replacement Project

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) is in the process of replacing the historic 1930 Wittpenn Bridge with a new vertical lift structure. In 2019, the NJDOT executed an Amended Memorandum of Agreement to mitigate the effects of replacing the Wittpenn Bridge, which included multiple forms of public outreach. This document was produced as part of these public outreach efforts. More information on the Wittpenn Bridge replacement project can be found at <https://www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/roads/rt7wittpenn/>.