

As the ASCE Pittsburgh enters its 104th year of existence I'm honored and thankful for the opportunity to be the Section's President. I'm especially thankful to Past President Erin Feichtner as well as all the past presidents for showing me the ropes and for their continued leadership, mentorship, and friendship. I will try my hardest to continue to carry the Presidential torch and leave a lasting positive mark on the Section.

I would like to tell a brief side story for my first President's Message. I live in Wilkinsburg in the Regent Square area, halfway between Frick Park and the East Busway, along with my loving wife and our dog. Like many of you, I will never forget the morning of January 28, 2022. My regularly scheduled tooth brushing session that morning ranks right up there as one of the most memorable. Mid-brush around 6:30 am, I heard a low audible crunching and metallic scraping sound outside the bathroom window. The closest analogy I can think of would be the sound of a soda can slowly being crushed. Given it was a wintery morning, and schools were delayed, I thought nothing of it; maybe it was a local salt truck mishap or multiple vehicle accident on the Parkway East off in the distance. As I turned on the TV, breaking news announced the collapse of the Fern Hollow Bridge in Frick Park.

Like many of you I watched in disbelief and knew immediately what I had heard earlier was no salt truck. In between work conference calls that day, I feel like I went through the seven stages of grief. I know I spent a good amount of time at stage three: anger. How can we let something like this happen? We pride ourselves on being the City of Bridges. Deep down, I think it wasn't anger but embarrassment as I watched national news coverage and President Biden's news conference at the bridge. I was embarrassed as a civil engineer living in Pittsburgh.

Fast forward to Friday August 12, 2022. I took my lunch break early and watched from the corner of Braddock and Forbes Avenues as the final sets of 150 foot bridge deck beams were loaded backwards up the length of Braddock Avenue all the way from the Parkway East. It was a sun drenched day in the upper 70s, crystal clear blue skies with no humidity. There were about one hundred or so other spectators there with me. Young and old alike were cheering the arrival of the beams and the superhuman reverse driving skills of the semi-truck driver. There were families with baby strollers and folks with dogs on leashes. Parents with their children on their shoulders. People eating soft serve ice cream from Park Pizza and Cream. There were even picnic blankets laid out on the grass with snacks. In a 180-degree contrast to the day the bridge collapsed, I couldn't help but feel great pride for the civil engineering profession as I watched this beam delivery and public spectacle. I'll never forget the sense of community pride over a bridge that day.



*Community Gathering to Watch Arrival and Placement of Bridge Deck Beams on Braddock Avenue Side of the Fern Hollow Bridge on August 12, 2022 (Photo by Author)*

I think sometimes we forget the fact that the "civil" in "civil engineer" is short for "civilization" or "civilized." Webster's defines civil as, "of or relating to citizens." As civil engineers, we are the caretakers for infrastructure that citizens rely on daily to make civilization possible. Our underground networks of gas, water, sewer and storm pipes, treatment plants, locks and dams, roads, schools, hospitals, airports, public parks, and bridges... All of them are necessities for creating a vibrant and healthy civilization. Neglecting to maintain and periodically replace them when they exceed useful life is also not optional. Nothing lasts forever.

As I enter my presidency, I feel excited and optimistic for the future of civil infrastructure in Pittsburgh. The Fern Hollow Bridge incident was a wakeup call of sorts. I think we are on the cusp of an infrastructure awakening in Western Pennsylvania. Just look around: We have a new airport terminal being built, UPMC is erecting several new state of the art hospitals, Mayor Ed Gainey and council are making city bridges a major priority, and they also have a spending plan to upgrade the city's parks. ALCOSAN is embarking on several decade long plan to make our rivers some of the cleanest in the country, and PWSA is taking on two ambitious plans at the same time with its water reliability plan and strategic plan for stormwater while at the same time committing to removing all lead lines from the system. After decades of planning, the

Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission is finally going to make the Mon-Fayette Expressway a reality, and PennDOT is about to make major improvements to our Parkways. Momentum is building for better public transportation for underserved outer-ring communities, including the extension of the East Busway. Pittsburgh Regional Transit is also constructing a new rapid transit system between downtown and Oakland to link the second and third largest economic centers in our entire commonwealth. Finally, we have critical funding on the way from the federal government in the form of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Pittsburgh is going to be a national infrastructure leader in the next few decades, mark my words. I think there's no better time to be a civil engineer in Pittsburgh than now. Earlier this year on that wintery January day, I'm not sure I would have felt the same.

In closing, as Section president I promise to uphold our three core missions:

- To **engage** our membership in public, legislative, and the media outreach initiatives to spread awareness of infrastructure problems, funding shortfalls, and the need to take corrective action.
- To **promote** civil engineering as a career path for today's youth through educational outreach and participation in such events as Future Cities, Science Fairs, School Visits.
- To **build and maintain** professional and technical skills for our members to better meet the needs of today's marketplace.

I look forward to you joining me to fulfill these goals!

Thank you,

Tom Batrone, PE, M.ASCE