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From The Morning Call -- April 3, 2004

Solid rock will add to cost of bridge

PennDOT unsure how much more work is needed on Route 33.

By Steve Esack
Of The Morning Call

Solid rock lies more than half a football field below the surface on the north bank of Bushkill Creek, and the unexpected depth will add to the construction costs for a new Route 33 bridge in Northampton County, according to the state Department of Transportation.

But an exact dollar amount for the replacement of the sinkhole-damaged bridge is unknown, said Karl Kroboth, PennDOT's bridge engineer.

"The deeper the depth, the more pilings you use, so the more it's going to cost," he said Friday. "Right now, the contract is set up in terms of unit cost, so obviously the more you do, the more expensive it's going to be based on material and labor costs."

The original northbound bridge, which was not anchored to solid rock when built in 1970, sank 6 inches on Jan. 24 after a sinkhole

undermined a pier on the south creek bank. Traffic was diverted over the southbound bridge's passing lane, the bridge was removed, and the federal government agreed to cover 90 percent of the estimated \$6 million cost.

Heavy drills had to be trucked to the site in Palmer Township this week after construction was partially halted March 24 because smaller drills couldn't reach solid rock for one of the new bridge's abutments on the Bushkill's north bank.

On Wednesday, crews started hitting rock at 170 to 250 feet, PennDOT spokesman Ron Young said.

"The subsurface is not level, so the rock varies," he said. "It's similar to if you were looking ... at a mountain slope."

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While test drilling was shut down last week on the creek's north bank, it continued on the creek's south, where drills struck rock at 70 to 90 feet. Young said PennDOT is confident that the south bank's rock can support up to 150 tons, and production drilling has begun for the abutment's concrete-filled steel pilings.

Don Lerch, PennDOT's assistant district engineer in Allentown, said the north bank's abutment will be deeper than most structures. "It's not abnormal, but it's not routine," he said.

Nicholson Construction Co. of Pittsburgh is drilling the pilings as a subcontractor for Nyleve Bridge Corp. of Emmaus, which received the emergency contract to build the bridge.

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