

The High Level Bridge: its early construction mirrors its modern rush hour traffic flow

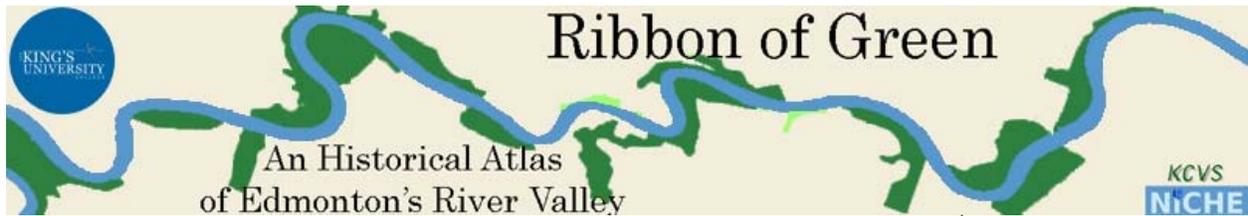
Written by Katie Wallbaum

If you have resided in Edmonton in the last four years chances are you have been angered, or at least annoyed with the on-going construction on the Quesnell Bridge. This type of prolonged project of civic infrastructure is not new to Edmonton. In fact, the High Level Bridge which spans the North Saskatchewan river, connecting Old Strathcona to the downtown core, had a long and arduous process similar to today's current Quesnell project. The High Level Project began in 1903 when a group of C.P.R. officials came to scout the ideal location for the bridge along the river valley.¹ After this initial assessment, ideas about the bridge got set aside until the town councils of Edmonton and Strathcona took up the cause again in late 1904. The issue was again dropped until January 1906, when the *Bulletin* reported that, "ex-Mayor Davies of Strathcona, has a letter from William White of the Canadian Pacific in which he states positively that the construction of the bridge will be started in the early spring."² The letter was only slightly off in its estimation of when construction would start. In July 1906, surveyors from the C.P.R. arrived in the city to take measures of water levels and finally the plan for the bridge was able to be developed at the company's headquarters in Montreal.³ In November the City of Edmonton and the C.P.R. finally established an agreement about the construction of the bridge, and one might think that construction could now officially begin but this was not the case, "... the ratification of the agreement may not be in the hands of the present council at all as in all

¹ "C.P.R. Officials Visit," in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, August 29, 1903.

² "Engineers Sounding For High Level Bridge," in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, January 13, 1906.

³ "The C.P.R. Bridge," in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, July 14, 1906.



probability it will be in the business that will be carried over to next year.”⁴ The *Bulletin* was right, work was only just beginning to get underway in May of 1907, when grading work for the southern approach was started.⁵ In 1908 the real discussions about the bridge started to take place, including the cost estimates and the exact location. Five years after the initial suggestion, construction had yet to take place and, in fact, would not begin until 1910.

⁴ “Tentative Agreement For High Level Bridge,” in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, November 14, 1906.

⁵ “C.P.R. High Level Bridge Rumors,” in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 2, 1907.