



## Refurbish Two 1800s Bridges? INDOT Has It Covered

**(Posted July 31, 2015)** The light bulb hadn't been invented yet, but a new gizmo called the telephone debuted in 1876 – the same year that the Shieldstown Covered Bridge was built in Jackson County.

Ten years later, just after the invention of the automobile, the Scipio Covered Bridge in Jennings County was constructed.

To say that these two Seymour District covered bridges are historic is an understatement. Now, it's time to restore these granddaddies.

This summer, INDOT is facilitating the refurbishment of these two landmarks via Local Public Agency projects.

The Shieldstown bridge, which crosses the east fork of the White River near Brownstown, carried vehicular traffic until 1980, when it became a tourist attraction as one of the county's only two remaining covered bridges. The 355-foot-long wooden structure will be replaced board for board.

The \$1 million project uses a potpourri of wood: white oak in the floor beams, bracing, arches and posts; yellow pine in supports and rafters; yellow poplar in siding; and western red cedar in siding at the open entrances.

"The properties of certain types of wood are considered for strength and weight," Seymour District Area Engineer Joe Middeler said about the Shieldstown structure, which is the fourth-longest of the 84 covered bridges in the state. "Also, designers try to match the original types of wood used because we are trying to maintain the historical integrity of the bridge."

A new roof of corrugated galvanized metal will be installed on the double-span bridge, and a nearby visitors' parking lot will be built as part of the project. Work is underway and set to be complete by August 2016.



*The Scipio Covered Bridge (right side of photo) will no longer carry vehicular traffic. A new bridge (left), located 80 feet downstream, will carry Jennings County Road 575 West traffic instead.*

The Scipio bridge, which crosses Sand Creek near North Vernon and was last refurbished in 1984, will no longer carry Jennings County Road 575 West vehicular traffic. Instead, the 156-foot, wooden bridge will be preserved as a historic attraction and pedestrian bridge. County road vehicular traffic will now be handled by a

new three-span concrete I-beam structure downstream.

“The entire deck will be replaced, board for board, using southern yellow pine and native white oak for the runners,” said Middeler of the \$542,000 project that began this spring and is scheduled to open this summer. “The north side of the roof will be replaced, and the south side will receive roof patching.”

Andy Rebman, president of the Indiana Covered Bridge Society, is grateful for INDOT’s role in the future of the two bridges.

“Everyone at INDOT has been professional and helpful,” he said. “I understand that decisions have to be made with a budget in mind, because there is only so much money to spend on each project. What I have found is that INDOT does the best job possible.”

Rebman has a keen insight as to the importance of covered bridges.

“It is vital for future generations to see what our ancestors could do with their hands,” he said. “Building a covered bridge was a big deal and it took skill and an understanding of carpentry to do it correctly. There were no computers to assist with building the bridges; it was done by hand and knowledge.

“Some bridges have stood for well over 100 years, something that we do not see with the current modern construction methods. Being able to touch something that has been around for 100 years is not something that is easy to do. Restoring and keeping these treasures safe is an important goal.”

Covered bridges also play an important role in the economy.

“The expense in preserving and restoring covered bridges is out of reach for the small towns in which the bridges reside, so unless the state and INDOT step in to help preserve them, they would be lost,” said Rebman. “Preserving these treasures not only helps educate future generations, but also drives tourism and interest in local, small towns.”