

PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Complaint Docket No. 18925

BOROUGH OF HOMEWOOD and BOROUGH OF BIG BEAVER

v.

PENN CENTRAL TRANSPORTATION COMPANY, DEPARTMENT
OF HIGHWAYS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA,
PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE COMMISSION and COUNTY OF
BEAVER

INTERIM ORDER

BY THE COMMISSION, June 29, 1973:

This matter is before the Commission by reason of complaint filed May 6, 1970, by Boroughs of Homewood and Big Beaver, in Beaver County, which complaint was sustained by order issued August 23, 1971, relative to the need for a true and realistic determination of the structural adequacy of the existing viaduct structure carrying a public highway over and above the grade of three tracks of Penn Central Transportation Company and the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Accordingly, our order of August 23, 1971 directed the various responsible parties to conduct in-depth inspections and to report the findings thereof.

By reason of those inspections, and the resulting structural analyses of the various portions of the subject viaduct, as brought out at the subsequent field conference on January 22, 1973, Penn Central Transportation Company, which company is charged with maintenance responsibility for the major portions of the viaduct, advised of deteriorating conditions at certain locations on the structure which limit the safe loading thereon to vehicles of not more than 3 tons gross weight. In the interest of public safety, the company posted the structure with signs warning approaching traffic of the limitation at the bridge.

RECORDED
DUPLICATE
ORIGINAL CERTIFIED
COURT.

As a result of these developments, school buses and emergency equipment normally operating over this crossing structure were precluded from gaining safe access to the separate portions of the communities involved, and were forced to traverse circuitous and lengthy alternate routes. The particulars of the inconvenience, extra cost and increased time thus suffered by such vehicles denied use of the structure, were emphasized, inter alia, at the hearing held April 26, 1973. As a result of the information brought out at that hearing, representatives of Penn Central Transportation Company, Department of Transportation and Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission agreed to cooperate in further investigation and engineering assessment, to determine whether measures could be taken to allow use of the structure by vehicles in excess of the current 3-ton limit, and to what degree and gross weight such use should be restricted.

On May 17, 1973, eight individual engineering representatives of the above-named parties met at the site of the crossing structure, together with a member of this Commission's engineering staff. These nine men conducted supplemental inspections of the structure, concentrating their efforts upon those areas previously reported as governing the 3-ton limitation, and in addition, scrutinized closely several additional areas exhibiting progressive deterioration beyond that evidenced by prior inspection.

The consensus of engineering judgment resulting from those observations was that no increase in the present 3-ton load limit should be allowed, in that such restriction is governed by several primary load-carrying structural elements (e.g.-roadway stringers) in successive spans, and that no practicable means or measures could be taken to insure the

integrity of those members for loads greater than the current posting. Accordingly, use of the crossing structure by school buses and/or emergency equipment, if in excess of 3-tons gross weight, cannot be sanctioned nor rationalized under present conditions, even under single-lane conditions.

In addition to the foregoing conclusions, areas of advancing concrete deterioration, loss of reinforcement bar bond and decreasing bearing-area support for the outermost roadway stringers were observed at both ends of the pier cap cantilevers, at piers Nos. 10 and 12, in the southerly portion of the viaduct. Because of these conditions, which appear to be progressing at an ever-increasing rate over the past few years, it was deemed advisable to consider the installation of supplemental supporting elements at these locations. Engineering representatives of Penn Central Transportation Company present in the inspection party agreed to make recommendation to their superiors that the company promptly undertake a program to install such supplemental supports in order to preclude any future failures at these points.

These decisions, it is emphasized, met the full concurrence of each of the nine individual engineers present at the site, each of whom made their own observations and formed their separate opinions. This Commission cannot in conscience lay aside the unanimous agreements reached by parties steeped in the experience and expertise of such evaluations, especially when the safety and protection of the lives and property of the traveling public are so critically dependent upon those opinions. Accordingly, we will order the continuation of the current 3-ton posted load limit at this crossing structure, and will direct that the railroad company forthwith take such measures as necessary to bolster the fascia beam supports

at piers Nos. 10 and 12, pending further order by this Commission upon the matters and things involved at this location, THEREFORE;

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That Penn Central Transportation Company, at its initial cost and expense, forthwith erect and maintain on each approach to the subject crossing structure, above grade, signs of sufficient size and legibility as to provide adequate forewarning to the traveling public using the highway at this location, of the 3-ton vehicular load limitation on the viaduct.

2. That Boroughs of Homewood and Big Beaver, jointly, take all reasonable measures to enforce the 3-ton load limitation by the users of the highway, including the imposition of monetary fines or other punitive judgments against violators thereof.

3. That Penn Central Transportation Company, at its initial cost and expense, forthwith erect and maintain at substructure units Nos. 10 and 12, supplementary supporting structures to insure safe load-bearing capability beneath the ends of the outermost (fascia) roadway stringers bearing thereon; and to advise this Commission immediately upon the completion of the installation thereof.

4. That the provisions hereof shall remain in full force and effect until and unless modified by further order of this Commission.

5. That matters and things pertinent to the final disposition of this complaint proceeding, as adduced at the hearing held April 26, 1973, shall be disposed of by further order of this Commission, upon full and complete review of the record of said hearing.

PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

(signed) George I. Bloom

Chairman

ATTEST:

Secretary