

Bridges add beauty, recreation to cities



The old and new Bay Bridge linking Oakland and San Francisco. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Bridges aren't just about getting people from point A to point B, they can be an architectural wonder – no matter when they were built.

This is true for two iconic bridges in the United States. The new San Francisco Bay Bridge, while it will always take a backseat to the Golden Gate Bridge, is more aesthetically pleasing than what was there. The Brooklyn Bridge, built in 1883, remains a visual beauty.

I had the opportunity to walk across both bridges this year. Doing so provides a more intimate experience with the structures compared to driving.



The foot path adjacent to the new section of the Bay Bridge.

Replacing the Bay Bridge became necessary after the 1989 earthquake saw the upper deck collapse onto the lower deck. But it has been one boondoggle after the next. Even to this day there are questions about how safe bolts are, as well as if and when the bike-pedestrian lane will be extended to Yerba Buena Island.

It's an out-and-back trek of about 7 miles depending on where one starts. This is the first time people have been able to walk on the eastern span of the Bay Bridge.

The only thing that could have made it better is if the path were on the other side – where the Golden Gate is.

While you are parallel to traffic, the vehicles seem far enough away to feel safe. And it was not nearly as loud as any of us expected.

Markings on the path indicate a separation of walkers and cyclists, which helps avoid unpleasant collisions. There is a lane in each direction for two-wheelers; one lane of the 15.5-foot wide path is for pedestrians.

In order to continue the non-motorized path the old bridge has to be removed – which is happening.



The Brooklyn Bridge was built in the 1800s.

When the Brooklyn Bridge was built it was the longest suspension bridge.

We opted to take the subway to Brooklyn and then walk into Manhattan. According to the New York Department of Transportation, 4,000 pedestrians and 3,100 bicyclists cross the Brooklyn Bridge every day.

It is 4-miles long.

What is great about this old bridge is the wooden walking path is above where the vehicles are. You don't even know cars and trucks are whizzing by below you. Maybe it's because the skyline is so mesmerizing. At one point the Statue of Liberty is the focal point.

While the United States has an infrastructure problem, these bridges are testaments to why keeping up with maintenance is critical. These are not just tourist attractions, but means of transport for commuters and others.



New York City's skyline from the Brooklyn Bridge.

According to the 2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure, "Over 200 million trips are taken daily across deficient bridges in the nation's 102 largest metropolitan regions. In total, one in nine of the nation's bridges are rated as structurally deficient, while the average age of the nation's 607,380 bridges is currently 42 years. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that to eliminate the nation's bridge deficient backlog by 2028, we would need to invest \$20.5 billion annually, while only \$12.8 billion is being spent currently. The challenge for federal, state, and local governments is to increase bridge investments by \$8 billion annually to address the identified \$76 billion in needs for deficient bridges across the United States."