

Bruce Peters
Agri-Mark Cabot Employee
Interviewed by Mountain Lake PBS on July 14, 2011

“My name’s Bruce Peters. I live in Crown Point New York. I work for Agri-Mark Cabot in Middlebury Vermont. I use the bridge for work and for personal use every day, to get back and forth from work and to come over and visit friends and family. It was something I depended on every day.

I worked from midnight to eight. I would leave around 11 from my home to get to work basically fifteen minutes early, when the bridge was there. After the bridge was closed I had to leave a half an hour earlier just to be able to make it to work on time.

Finding a boat

When I heard the bridge was closing what was going through my head was “How was I going to get to work? Was I going to be able to keep my job without having a reasonable transpo time for transportation? I was actually down in Ti at the time when it happened, and my cousin Tara made a phone call or text message to me on my phone and it said the bridge was closing at 1:00; and I had to work that night. So I called her up and said “Well what do you mean? This ain’t good.” And she’s like, “Well the bridge was going to be done. They’re closing it down, it’s not safe.” So I immediately started thinking of alternative ways on how I was going to get to work; and first thing that came to mind was a boat. How can I get a boat to get back and forth across the lake? And I fished one up, found a motor, got in touch with my uncle who lived across the lake and he said “Yeah come on over, we can dock it right here.” So the first night was a little hard to find a ride, getting transportation set up for to pick me up in Vermont to get me to work, but sooner or later it got things to where I had my own vehicle over there, on both sides of the lake, and started working on getting back and forth on the boat over to my car.

I would launch from my in-laws, my wife’s parents house. They live right on the Lake in Crown Point, and their neighbor had a dock set up and they got me out into the off shore enough to where I didn’t have to do a short landing every time; and I would launch from there, about 10:30 and it’s actually the first night I did it, I did it I launched at 10:30 and come to find out it was actually quicker for me to get in the boat and go across in the boat than it would’ve been to drive around even if the bridge was there. Because going from where I was, it was only a three minute trip across the lake, it’s not very wide maybe a mile, and I’d run up the bank and there was my car and it actually brought me out when I got on the- into the car onto the road, it would bring me out to the Boise CITGO and of course I’m already right up on my way to work. So I was actually able to shave a little time off of that in getting back in forth, so that was pretty... it was good in one sense, and a pain in the other, but all in all it worked out.

My family was great throughout the whole thing. They really were supportive in helping me get across; they're always worried about me coming across at night. My uncle would leave his lights on at his house, leave an outside light on if I ever needed to go in he left the door locked, left a key right there so I could get in, if I needed to get into his house. We had a hard time finding- at night we'd have a hard time finding the shoreline without a good marker, so I made up a barrel with reflective tape all over it, so that would help me when I scanned the shoreline with my flashlight I could pick that barrel out and knew exactly where I was coming into. My uncle went down there a couple of times, the wind would blow the barrel over or something like that, so he'd been down there a few times, he'd go down there regularly and check on it, make sure that it was still there. He actually gave me a ride to work a couple of times when the car wouldn't start, it was whatever had happened, the light had been left on, battery was dead, couple of times that happened to me. It was a pretty old car that I had purchased from a friend of mine, and basically he got it all set up for me to get back and forth to work, and it had, it had a few nicks and dents in it but it still had, still had a good, good motor in it I guess.

Bitter, hazardous conditions

The winter weather conditions were pretty brutal some days. As soon as the lake froze, you know obviously I took the boat out and started snowmobiling back and forth across the lake and a lot of times I would hit into snow storms at night, sub-zero temperatures, I mean it is common around this part. A couple of times would hit, you know, spots where it got real cold and there was, then all of a sudden it would warm up for a few days and spots on the lake would open up or turn into slush and you know, once you're going you can't stop so a lot of the times you just you'd hit those spots you'd hope you keep going. I know there was a few times, one morning, one night I had come through, came across, and it seemed like "Boy the ice sure is starting to give out here" and I just kept, I kept going and snowmobiles if you drive them fast enough can stay on top of open water as long as you, you know stay going fast enough. Well on my way back that next morning I followed my tracks and come to find out there was a twenty foot gap of open water where I was coming and it's very common for that part of the channel to open up right thru there, so I ended up going down, going north on the lake a little bit to try and get out of that and get back and had to re-route my trail to get back, to get back over. So, that was definitely some scary times, getting back and forth across that lake.

I was pretty comfortable going back and forth across the lake, right there I'd grown up, ever since I started dating my now wife. We, her parents owned a boat and we skied and tubed all over that part of the lake for years, and I knew right where my uncle had lived and it was, you know it was pretty, it was very comfortable for me to, to, to make a decision to start boating across and snowmobiling, cause It just felt, it felt comfortable where I was. You know, the water wasn't overly deep and it wasn't so wide that if anything was to happen, I mean the water was pretty cold

when I was boating. I'd hate to think that if I ever did tip over that it was, I could swim to it, but then depending on the cold temperature of the water, might not, might not be able to swim that far. We, we had some pretty rough mornings coming back on the boat, as to where we didn't know what was going to happen. You know, there's, some, one morning, four five foot waves, it's really hard to decide not to take the boat across when you can see your house on the other side of the lake, and so we'd ended up having to bail the boat out of water, because the waves would crash into the boat so much and fill it up with water. And when I dumped it all out we got in it and headed, there was a few times you'd hit the waves the motor would come out of the water, you know, you're looking up and then coming back down, it was just, it's not a very big aluminum boat, it was some pretty hairy mornings, but we made it.

Coming across one morning I had pretty big waves, four five foot waves, and we...there was a friend there riding with me actually, and when we got to the boat, the waves had filled the boat up with water, because they had crashed into it so much, and we ended up bailing the boat out and getting it into the water. We almost decided not to do it, but it was really hard not to when we could see where we wanted to be, you know, it was just right there. If we could make it across it was fine. And so we jumped in the boat and got to going across and there was a few times where the motor actually came out of the water, going over the waves, some of them were so big right there, it was and ah...we got half way across and the waves were really big, it just kept on putting the nose of the boat right down there in those waves and kept going. Eventually we made it all the way across but it was a few mornings like that...but like I said that was the worst one. But for the most part, some mornings were actually very nice, scenic very picturesque, beautiful mornings to where boy this is actually really nice, I wouldn't mind doing this more often, even after the bridge come up, you know what I mean, it was just I had fishing poles, every now and again we'd sit out there fish across. It was pretty fun ...sometimes... sometimes not.

Mixed feelings about losing bridge

When I heard the bridge was going to be demolished, I kind of felt undecided about it...just because you know the bridge had been there all my life, I grew up a mile, I was born, I grew up a mile from it...til I was...til the age I am now...so it's always been there and when I heard it was going to be gone, I was kind of upset, because it's just a part of this area, it's part of what we've grown up around and you hate to see any change. But, the other side of me, I worked construction for four years, I realize, you know nothing lasts forever, so you know, it's better than to see, better to see it demolished than to see a tragic accident where people are on the bridge when something happens or it collapses. You know, it's happened before and I'd hate to ever see it or experience it around this part of the area with people I know, family members, people I care for. So, it's really nice to see a new bridge coming up or the thought of a new bridge was going to be built was actually a nice thought after the

demolition of the bridge. So, I was a little undecided but I really liked the idea of getting a new bridge.

I worked at night and the reason I couldn't use the mass transit option that they had offered was that they close the Ti Ferry at a certain time at night...I think it was 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock which was too early for me to want to go to work and I would not...they close too early for me to be able to use it and to go up to Essex, didn't seem any different to me than driving all the way down to Whitehall and coming back up 22A. So neither of the options were appealing to me because it just seemed, it was too far of a travel and not that I don't like my job but it's just, I worked construction for four years prior to working at Agri-Mark and I quit the job because of the travel. I got three young children that mean a lot to me. I like to do a lot of stuff with them, as much as I can and for me to lose that time with them is just not worth it. I didn't like the fact of only being able to see my kids a couple of hours and not being able to spend more time with them. So, to take the boat and go the route I went was the better option for me.

I did go to the demolition of the bridge and I felt ...I felt happy when I heard the explosion actually. I felt like this is the start of the new bridge, the sooner they got it started. The sooner it was over. So, I was actually in Port Henry beach when the bridge exploded and we couldn't see 10 feet in front of us, let alone a half a mile over to the bridge, so we heard it. It was very loud but we didn't get to see really any of it. My father actually worked on the bridge during the, he was on the demo team and he worked for the guy that was, he was actually setting charges with the owner of the business that was the demo team and he was right there, he was pretty close, he got to see it, he was right on at the historic site. He took a lot of pictures and had a little rolling video feed on his camera there and caught quite a bit of it. But, yeah it was definitely a happy feeling to get it started.

My access to work has been affected yes definitely from the bridge closing. The ferries make it a lot easier as far as using the boat that I used to use. But I have to leave earlier just to catch the ferry on time and be able to get to work on time. So, it's making my commute a little bit longer, but it's not enough to affect my decision on using the ferry. It's a lot safer to use the ferry, than what I was using but I ah...it has affected it a little bit, yes.

When NYSDOT offered the transit to get to the ferry up in Essex, I didn't really like the thought of travelling up to Essex or heading down to Whitehall and coming up 22A because they're both a lot longer trips...you know transit than I wanted to take because I got three kids right now that I love spending time with. I, you know, we do a lot together. Losing that much time back and forth out of my day, really wasn't an option just because I have a lot I want to do with them and to lose that time with them isn't worth you know back and forth to work. I numerous times contemplated with do I get a different job over in New York where I don't have to deal with the transport...the transit over to Vermont. I just kept sticking with the boat because it shortened up all of my time because of the fact that I didn't want to lose all of that

time being home, be with the kids, be with my wife, be with the rest of our family. It just wasn't an option, really.

Ever since I was born I grew up within a mile from the bridge. My grandfather owned the farm just down the road. And that's where I grew up until I was five or six years old and I can remember the bridge, coming across to get ice cream over in Addison and it was just always there. When I heard it was going to be demolished, it did feel strange to see or to know that the bridge was going to be demolished and taken away kind of felt like a piece of a piece of our history, piece of me, piece of my town was going to be taken away. It was kind of upsetting, but nothing lasts forever."