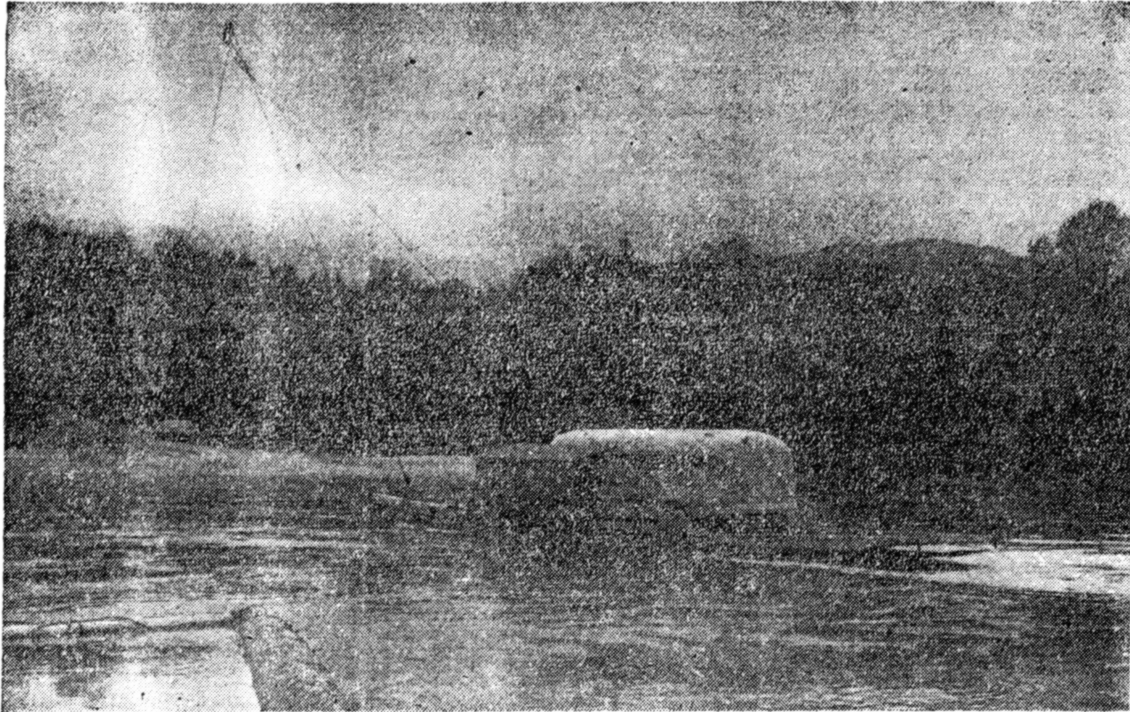


An Accident Here Would Dwarf the Chelan Tragedy



ON BOARD THIS SCHOOL BUS crossing the Skagit river on the Faber ferry above Concrete, 28 children cross daily to attend school. This together with the Concrete and Birdsvie ferries, plus private boat crossings, brings the total of school children crossing the river to attend school each day to 60. A bridge at or near Concrete would eliminate the danger and risk faced many times each year by children of school age, and others.

Danger To School Children Who Cross Skagit On Ferries Cited

(Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles on the proposed bridge across the Skagit river near Concrete.)

Those who know the Skagit river and have seen it a raging torrent of swollen flood waters each year, can readily appreciate the danger faced by the 60 school children who must rely upon ferries 180 days out of the year to further their education.

From the lips of countless numbers of persons residing in the Concrete school area in the past few years, has come the warning: "The Chelan school bus tragedy would be dwarfed in comparison should one of our school buses ever topple into the Skagit river while crossing on the antiquated ferries."

That is one of the strong arguments being voiced today in favor of constructing a bridge across the river near Concrete which decision will be up to the voters of the county during the general election in November.

It was only a short while ago that parents of school children who have to cross the ferries to reach school, put their collective feet down and refused to allow their children to risk the crossing during high waters. That drew statewide attention to the situation but there was little or no remedy that could be done without the actual construction of a bridge. This year, for the first time, these people and all residents of the county can voice their opinion in the form of a ballot.

Scow On Cables

The typical river ferry is a steel or wooden scow with railings on each side and a hinged ramp at each end. They operate solely by the power of the water against the side of the scow, the scow being swung on cables that permit it to be set at an angle against the current which pushes the scow sideways to the opposite landing. The entire mechanism hangs from a rolling trolley riding a taut cable stretching across the river from high poles on each side. Due to water variations, landings at each side of the river are impossible to maintain at one level. As a result the cars attempting to board or leave the ferry scow have considerable difficulty. Each ferry has a capacity load of five cars. As many as 45,000 crossings have been tabulated on one ferry in a single year.

The ferries operating two shifts of 9 hours each, or 18 hours a day. However, they must be closed down in high water due to danger of floating debris and the extra strain on cables, and in low water because of insufficient draft to float the scows. Also in low water the natural eddies at each landing tend to swing the ferry scows around and send them into the current with the cables on the lower side of the scow. On several occasions this has resulted in capsizing the ferry.

Slip Away From Landing

Other hazards of ferry operation include the danger of the ferry slipping away from the landing as the cars attempt to drive aboard—the ferry moves out and drops the car into the river. Other instances have found cars sliding off the opposite end of the scow in loading. Fortunately, to date, no lives have been lost, but there is an impres-

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Danger To School

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sive list of persons who have been forced to swim for their lives due to ferry accidents.

The proposed Skagit river bridge in the vicinity of Concrete will immediately eliminate two of the four ferries, and will eliminate a third within the very short time needed to build a few miles of access road. These ferries will be the Faber ferry, the Concrete ferry and the Pressentin ferry (Birdsview). This will leave only the Rockport ferry operating. Elimination of this ferry for school bus use is possible in the next few years by building a few miles of roads to connect South Rockport with the Marblemount bridge and south up the Sauk river to the Sauk river bridge.

Daily School Crossings

Every day of the school year approximately 60 grade and high school students cross the upper Skagit river by ferries and small boats to receive an education. The risk of crossing the river, periling the lives of 60 children, 180 school days, or 360 times a year, can be eliminated by the building of the proposed bridge.

Faber ferry, three miles east of Concrete, alone accounts for 28 of the total. These children range from the bewildered primary youngsters of six years of age to the more mature high school seniors. Their school bus is a large, modern, comfortable vehicle—built especially with a sloped up rear body to allow for the steep ferry ramp. It contrasts sharply with the antiquated river propelled ferry on which it rides. The scene is reminiscent of 100 years ago but set down in the midst of an air and atomic power age.

The Faber ferry has capsized in the past. It and others have broken loose. Aprons of the ferries have dropped down and caused the ferry to submerge. Many of these occurred while vehicles and passengers were aboard. Fortunately this has never happened when the school children were crossing in their bus, although there have been several close calls. The Faber school bus carries 28 lives each day.

At high water periods, the upper Skagit is swollen and violent. Crossing is very dangerous and at those times the ferry does not run. Last school year this happened on a total of 15 days. Sixty children had their school year shortened—their instruction they should receive short changed by half a month.

The last two years the parents and students who wished to participate in graduation exercises were forced to drive around through Snohomish county on Snohomish county roads to see their children graduate. Operettas, plays, PTA meetings, games, teen age parties and other events are denied to people of Skagit county just 300 feet south of the upper valley's main highway because there is no safe crossing of the river.

The extreme danger of taking a large group of children across the Skagit river is not lessened by repairing or improving the ferries. In the words of County Engineer H. O. Waiberg: "... no amount or quality of men or equipment will ever make a ferry operation as safe as travel on a road, and ferry travel will never be completely safe for small children."