

An overview of the triborough bridge building

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The Triborough Bridge

The construction of the Triborough bridge reflected the federal government taking action in New York against the Great Depression, as the bridge was mainly funded by a federal organization created in Roosevelt's New Deal – the PWA. The Triborough Bridge was the first and most expensive major effort of the PWA in New York to help the failing economy. This was achieved by the creation of jobs, while at the same time the bridge benefited the city. By hiring thousands of workers, money was funneled into the economy through the government. In addition, the city of New York gained a magnificent structure that would remain standing for a very long time.

The first plans for construction were announced by Edward A. Byrne, the chief engineer of the NYC Department of Plant and Structures in 1916. However, there was no funding for the project until 1925, at which point the city appropriated funds for structural testing. The bridge was begun by the Department of Plant and Structures on October 25th, 1929, when Mayor Jimmy Walker broke ground – the day after “ Black Thursday,” the fateful day of the stock market crash. However, by this point most of the city money was already gone due to surveys, test borings, and structural plans that had been carried out beforehand, and the construction on the bridge was discontinued because of a drastic lack of funds in the summer of 1930. Then, in late 1932, Parks Commissioner Robert Moses persuaded Governor Al Smith to continue work. Mayor LaGuardia appointed Moses the chairman of the newly formed Triborough Bridge Authority, an independent public-benefit corporation, in 1933.

The same year, the Public Works Administration (PWA) promised to fund the bridge with at least thirty-seven million dollars of federal money, allowing the project to be continued for a much longer time. On an average day, there were about one thousand workers at one time on the bridge. However, towards the June 1936 deadline, as many as 2, 800 could be seen working on the site at once. The Triborough Bridge Authority had to ask the PWA administrator Harold L. Ickes's permission to raise the work week to forty hours from thirty to finish in time (before, under the PWA grants, contractors had to limit the week to thirty hours), and four new contracts were drawn up and authorized by the PWA to allow this change in policy. The bridge opened to the public on July 11th, 1936.

Of the \$60, 300, 000 that went into the final bridge (42 million in 1936), the city of New York provided \$16, 100, 000 and the PWA provided \$9, 200, 000 and bought \$35, 000, 000 in bonds. Part of this money was used to turn the area underneath the bridge into parks and playgrounds. The millions of dollars that went into the bridge were eventually funneled into the homes of individual workers, all with newly found jobs. This response of the federal government to the Great Depression in New York led to two different effects: not only did it provide money and jobs for ordinary, jobless citizens; it also created more demand for other industries such as steel, used for cables, and concrete, used for the bases of the towers. Then, these industries were able to hire more workers, creating a sort of ripple effect. This shows how the federal government itself responded to the Great Depression in individual places, using programs from FDR's New Deal such as the PWA to pour money into the economy.

The construction of the Triborough Bridge clearly reflected the federal government's first efforts to turn the tide of the failing economy in New York by providing jobs for the jobless. In addition to the magnificent addition to the New York City skyline, all of these workers being hired raised the income, (and also increasing demand from the material need of the original Triborough Bridge), meaning that production increased, and thus the funnel of upward economic progress in New York began - literally - with the Triborough Bridge.