

## **Defining Characteristics of Icon Bridges**

### **Transportation Resources Board Bridge Aesthetics Sub-Committee**

Few creations of man define a place, an era, and a people like an icon bridge. Bridges are designed to provide access from one side of a separation to the other in a safe, functional, economic, and aesthetically-pleasing manner; icon bridges, however, serve an even greater function. They become an integral part of the identity of a place and its people, and they, in fact, help to shape that identity.

What makes a bridge an icon bridge? Are there any defining characteristics that allow us to label a bridge as an icon bridge?

Based on responses to a survey about icon bridges, as well as information garnered from bridge engineering references, the following are some of the defining characteristics of icon bridges. Although an icon bridge may not necessarily possess all of these characteristics, it can be judged based on the number and the extent of these qualities that it possesses.

1. **Size**. Icon bridges are often characterized by massive size, stretching the limits of man's ingenuity and resources. Whether they possess longer spans, taller towers, or higher superstructures, icon bridges often exceed the scale of previous similar structures.
2. **Innovation**. Icon bridges are generally ahead of their time. They provide unique and creative solutions to crossings that may have seemed impossible. They are original, not merely a copy of another bridge. They may push or break the limits of engineering knowledge for the era in which they were built. In addition, they are often constructed using advanced materials and techniques.
3. **Beauty**. Icon bridges are beautiful to behold. Whether through their form, their color, or their lines, an icon bridge creates a lasting impression. Icon bridges are among the most photographed objects in the world and are often featured on postcards and calendars.
4. **Location and surroundings**. Icon bridges appear to have been custom-made for their surroundings. They are often graced with beautiful settings and are often located along the mainstreams of society. Icon bridges are harmonious and complementary to their surroundings; they are ideally-suited for their location.
5. **Simplicity**. Icon bridges generally display how they work. They are natural; their behavior is obvious and makes sense. They are generally simple and understandable to the general public.
6. **Landmark**. Icon bridges become landmarks. They are easily recognized by the general public, and they take on a symbolism for the people or nation for whom they were built. Icon bridges are of their own time.
7. **Historical Significance**. Icon bridges frequently hold historical significance. They are often the first of their kind, and they sometimes possess a unique historical or engineering significance.
8. **Longevity**. Icon bridges are often characterized by longevity. Whether marked by age or simply age for the type of design, an icon bridge has stood the test of time and remains standing in all its glory, faithfully serving the people for whom it was built.