

# Bridge placed for rail trail

**The crew from Bruschi Bros., of Ludlow, had less than a hundredth of an inch leeway to make the connection.**

**By FRED CONTRADA**  
fcontrada@repub.com

**NORTHAMPTON** - In what resembled a slow-motion aerial ballet, two cranes maneuvered an iron bridge that is part of a new rail trail extension into place above North Street Friday.

The operation, performed in numbing cold, was directed by Bruschi Bros., of Ludlow, and required the cooperation of the Massachusetts Highway Department, National Grid, the Northampton Department of Public Works and police.

The 65-foot span plugged the last gap in an 8,000-foot length of rail trail that runs from the Roundhouse parking lot to King Street. The section includes another bridge that was set in place over Main Street last month. The trail will not be paved until the spring and the bridges are not accessible to the public until then.

About two dozen officials in hard hats gathered at 9 a.m. near the PanAm railroad tracks where the bridge section had been stored as police blocked the section of North Street to traffic. With the railroad overpass on one side and power lines on the other, a pair of cranes set up to perform a high-wire act, maneu-

vering the 30,000-pound bridge into place with inches to spare.

One crane lifted the span onto a flatbed truck, which rolled it to the northern side of the overpass at 10:45 a.m. There it stayed until it was lifted into the air by cables at 11:10 a.m. and set down on wooden blocks.

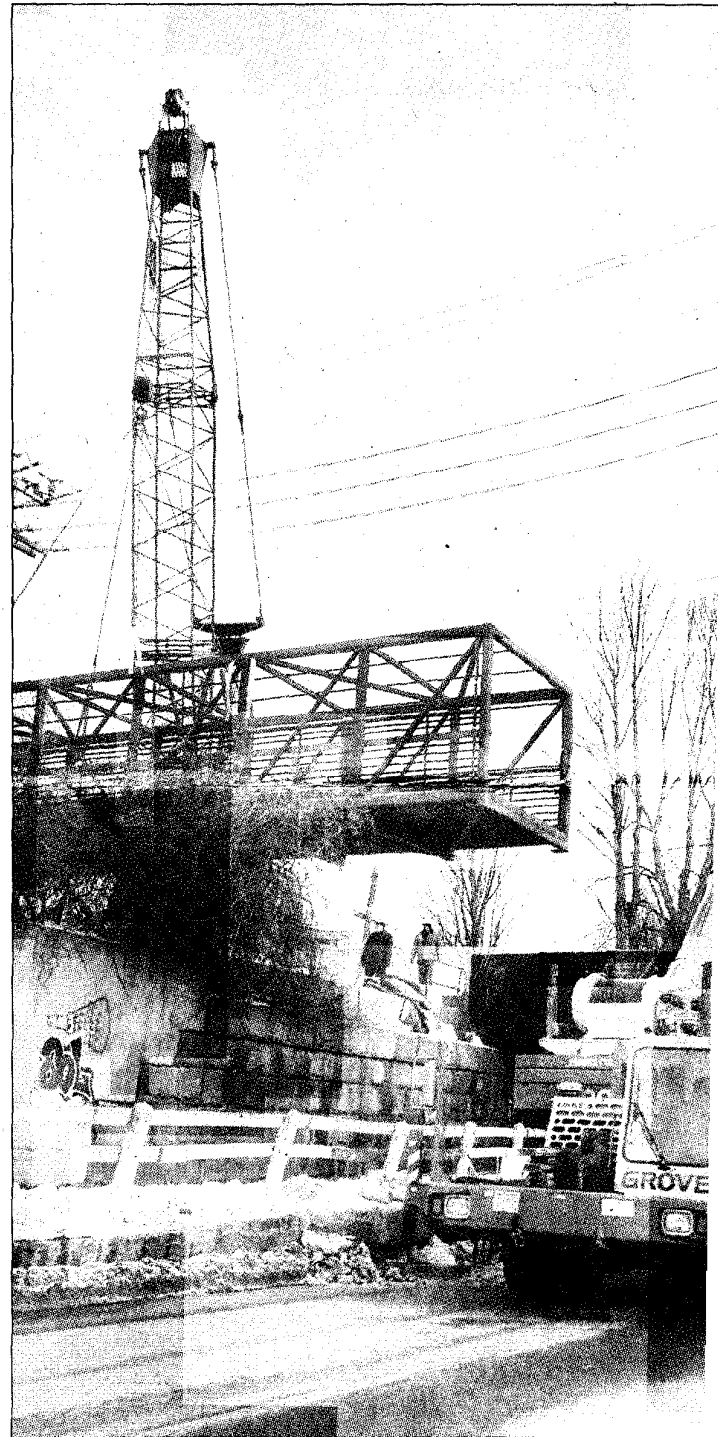
Meanwhile, the second crane moved into place below on North Street, sliding under and past the overhead wires. Workers set hooks from the second crane into the bridge and at 11:35 a.m. the two machines began lifting it out over the street.

Construction workers wrestled with the bridge as a foreman called out instructions to the crane operators. Inch by inch, the 15-ton iron mass of metal was ferried slowly to the other side, swinging this way and that to avoid poles and wires. Finally, at 12:12 p.m., it nested down on four groups of bolts pre-set in the concrete abutments on either side.

According to Bruschi Bros. President Joseph A. Gallo, the crew had less than one one-hundredth of an inch leeway.

"The anchor bolts have to be right on the money," he said.

Jeffrey G. McCullough, a senior transportation planner with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, was on hand to record the operation on video. He called the extension an important link in the region's expanding rail trail system. Crossing lights have been installed on King Street



**Two cranes maneuver an iron bridge that is part of a new rail trail extension above North Street in Northampton on Friday.**

Please see Rail, Page C2