Can a Wildlife Bridge Fix America's $8 Billion Roadkill Problem?

Balmori Associates' proposal to build cheap animal-crossing structures over highways could relieve some of the burden.

We all know that roadkill is a tragic corollary of car culture. What you might not know is that it's also mega-expensive. Vehicle-animal collisions cost Americans a whopping $8 billion a year (download a PDF here).

Design can help. Balmori Associates, a New York City landscape design firm, proposes building simple, inexpensive wooden bridges over highways, then covering them in native vegetation to...
create a sort of wildlife crosswalk. Each bridge would be so wide and the greenery so diverse, it'd appear like an extension of the forest, and animals, the thinking goes, would be less inclined to go galloping across roads helter skelter, resulting in fewer accidents (and a slimmer cleaning bill).

Balmori came up with the idea for the ARC International Wildlife Crossing Infrastructure Design Competition, which bills itself as the “first-ever international design competition... intended to solve the problem of ensuring safe travel for humans and wildlife.” The contest ends in January, when one of five design teams is selected to build a bridge over West Vail Pass in Colorado.

ARC expects the winning design to serve as a model for other parts of the country (clearly, the only way to make a dent in that $8 billion figure is to repeat the idea elsewhere). To that end, Balmori’s bridge isn’t specific to Vail. “It is a kit of parts,” the press materials say, “that can be applied and adapted to various conditions and sites.”

The main thrust is to keep the bridge as low-tech as possible so it can be constructed easily anywhere in the United States without disrupting the road or the natural environment. By using cheap native wood -- beetle-killed blue pine, in the case of Colorado -- you can create a simple structure that actually stores more CO2 than it needs for production; no heavy machinery required. What’s more, much of the bridge can be prefabricated, then assembled on site, cutting back on the hours construction interferes with traffic.
FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks for stopping by Fast Company's Co.Design. Here, we try to bridge the fuzzy border between design and business. We started this site with a few simple premises in mind. First, design is a window onto the world at large, and the culture we live in. When a designer sets down to make something new, she can’t help but have some idea about how some object could be so much better than ever before...read more »

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