

The second act instructed the governor to appoint five canal commissioners, a majority of whom should constitute a quorum, to consider and to adopt measures directed toward the establishment of "a navigable communication between the eastern and the western waters of the state and Lake Erie"; to choose a president from their number and to engage a paid secretary; to appoint engineers, surveyors, draftsmen, and other personnel; and to cause to be examined not fewer than seven prescribed routes: one from Philadelphia through Chester and Lancaster counties and thence by the West Branch of the Susquehanna River and its waters to the Allegheny River and to Pittsburgh; a second from the Allegheny River to Lake Erie; a third from Philadelphia by the Juniata River to Pittsburgh and, from thence, to Lake Erie; a fourth from Philadelphia to the northern boundary of the state, towards the Seneca or Cayuga Lake; a fifth through Cumberland and Franklin counties to the Potomac River; a sixth by the Conococheague or Monocacy and Conewago creeks to the Susquehanna River; a seventh, the best route through the county of Bedford, to connect the proposed-but-never-built-in-Pennsylvania Chesapeake and Ohio Canal with the Juniata route.

The Act of 25 February 1826 provided for "the commencement of a canal to be constructed at the expense of the state and to be styled THE PENNSYLVANIA CANAL." It authorized the Board of Canal Commissioners to let contracts and to begin building the canal at three different points on its widely distributed range: along the Susquehanna River from Swatara Creek to the Juniata River; along the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh to the Kiskiminetas River; and down French Creek, to connect by feeder with Conneaut Lake. This latter authorization, enforced by an act of 1 April 1826 providing funds for the purpose, led to the first construction work, one year after the completion of the Erie Canal in New York State, on the Eastern Division of The Pennsylvania Canal on the east bank of the Susquehanna River; on the Western Division along the north bank of the Allegheny River above Pittsburgh; and on the French Creek Feeder paralleling that creek on its east bank southward from above Meadville.

From 1826 until the sale of The Pennsylvania Canal by the state in 1857 and 1858, both the construction and the operation of that widely-branching artificial waterway and of its adjunct railroads