



Frequently Asked Questions

NEW BRIDGE DESIGN

Why was a Feasibility Study completed on the current bridge?

The Bridge Street Bridge has deteriorated and will continue to deteriorate. Without repair or replacement, the bridge's use will continue to be reduced and, eventually, will be closed. This study was an initial step to identify options to repair, replace, or rehabilitate the existing bridge and seek public comments.

What did the study recommend?

The Feasibility Study recommended removing and replacing the existing bridge with an overhead steel truss, carrying a single lane for vehicles and a separated walkway.

Who did the study?

MDT hired a consulting firm, KLJ, to complete the study on behalf of Flathead County.

Will the new bridge be a modern, two-lane bridge?

It was considered but not recommended. Flathead County and MDT recognize the unique nature of Bigfork and low traffic numbers. Because the community values the one-lane bridge, MDT moved forward with a design that is a continuation of the current one-lane width. Widening the bridge was also anticipated to require additional right-of-way at the roads leading up to the bridge, which was strongly opposed.

Will the bridge have a sidewalk (area for pedestrians)?

Yes. A walkway has been identified as a requirement and would provide a single walkway meeting current ADA (or Americans with Disabilities Act) standards for accessibility.

Will the footprint of the current bridge be the same as the existing one?

The goal is to keep the footprint of the new bridge as similar as possible to the existing bridge. The new bridge will be slightly wider by a few feet and may be longer to meet modern hydraulic and environmental design standards.

Is access to the river by path or stairs included in the new bridge design?

The construction of a public river access point is beyond the scope of this project. River access is a challenge due to the site's size constraint, lack of right-of-way, and budget. Possible river access should be addressed separately by the community and neighboring landowners.

Will electrical outlets for the annual bridge holiday lights be installed on the new bridge?

MDT recognizes that electrical outlets for the holiday lights are a desired feature for the community. MDT will coordinate with the county to work towards this goal.

Will there be weight restrictions on the new bridge?

The new bridge will safely support all legal weight limits for the various vehicle axle configurations. However, the new bridge may be load posted and restrict certain vehicles by weight and axle configuration as determined appropriate by the county.

Will there be height restrictions on the new bridge?

Yes! There will be height restrictions due to overhead steel trusses as part of the bridge structure. The height restrictions will be clearly marked.

Will certain types of vehicles be prohibited from using the bridge?

MDT understands the community is concerned about large vehicles, such as semi-trucks and large motor homes, using the bridge. Flathead County can choose to limit the type of vehicles that can use the bridge by imposing certain height and weight restrictions. It is a decision the county must make and enforce.

What is going to happen to the old bridge? Will it be available for preservation?

The old bridge will be removed and disposed of by the contractor. If the community wants to preserve the old bridge or parts of it, then the relocation cost and delivery location need to be provided by the community. Removing the existing bridge in one piece will be challenging due to site constraints and the bridge's condition, so it may need to be relocated in pieces.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION

How long will the existing bridge be open?

Due to the uncertainty of corrosion and use, we cannot predict how much longer the bridge will remain open. However, historical records and observed deterioration indicate the bridge is near the end of its ability to carry traffic. Regular bridge observations and inspections by Flathead County and MDT will continue and may determine the bridge needs to be closed.

When will construction on the new bridge start?

Currently, construction is scheduled to begin in 2024. This timeline is subject to change due to factors such as funding availability, availability of contractors, and other unforeseen issues.

How long will the construction of the new bridge take?

The project is anticipated to take one construction season to complete; however, it could potentially take longer due to project site constraints and complexities. A more accurate estimate will be available as we get closer to construction.

Will a pedestrian walkway be made available during construction?

The bridge will be closed during construction, and there are currently no plans to build a temporary walkway at this time. Constraints of project site size, lack of right-of-way, and the number of utilities in the area make the construction of a temporary walkway infeasible.

Will pollutants be contained during construction?

Yes! We have a dedicated environmental team who will test the current bridge for lead and asbestos prior to construction. Soil contamination has already been identified around the bridge. The contractor will be obligated by special provisions in their contract to safely handle, remove, and dispose of all contaminated materials. It is a priority for MDT to clean up existing and minimize future pollutants.

What are the alternative routes for drivers?

Alternative routes will be determined and communicated as we get closer to construction.

BRIDGE FUNDING**How would a bridge project be funded?**

Flathead County has received approval for funding from the federal Off-System Bridge Program, which helps fund bridge reconstruction for locally owned bridges.

Is there special funding available for a historic bridge?

There are no funds reserved solely for historical bridges in the most recent federal highway bill.

How can I ask questions and provide comments and/or concerns?

MDT encourages public input. You can submit comments or questions to MDT via the [MDT comment form](#) or by contacting Sloane Stinson, the communications manager for the project, at sloane@bigskypublicrelations.com or by calling the project hotline at 406-207-4484, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.