

Maclay Bridge Common Sense Coalition Meeting
September 4, 2012
10:00 AM to Noon

The meeting was attended by representatives from the following:

- Maclay Bridge Common Sense Coalition (MBCSC)
- Missoula County
- Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
- RPA

Updated Schedule for the group – paper copy of schedule was handed out.

The next public informational meeting is to present the Needs & Objectives and Improvement Options Under Consideration, where opportunity for public comment will be provided.

Stakeholder Feedback and Questions

1. What is the format of the upcoming public meeting and how long can the public comment?
Recommended a time frame for comments. A time frame is a good idea because there is risk that one group would be able to dominate all the time.
2. What is the purpose of the next public meeting? *The purpose of the meeting is to share the Improvement Options Under Consideration and gather feedback. The other purpose is to share the Needs & Objectives and get feedback.*
3. Will there be NEPA in the future? *If the county decides to move forward with a project there will be NEPA if any Federal Aid is going to be spent on a project.* The question was then what problem is being addressed. The bridge is regularly inspected and from those inspections it was determined the bridge is eligible for federal aid. The study purpose is to provide viable options to roll into NEPA if the county decides to move forward with a Federal Aid Project.
4. It appears the screening has started. There is concern with how the Needs & Objectives and the E&P Report are written such that options are already being screened out. One concern is that the piers may be susceptible to scour. Without having that in place in the various documents the no build option is a strong possibility. There is concern that comments are not being listened to, which creates frustration with the process. The floodplain is also a concern for the existing location. *RPA is adding language to the E&P Report to include the scour discussion.* Other concerns were that the bridge may not survive a 500-year flood or even a 100-year flood. There was a request to get information out in something similar to a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document.

MDT discussed the piers and wants to capture the uncertainties that the MBCSC is concerned about in the E&P Report and also in future cost estimates.

What about the environment? The current bridge is potentially already having environmental impacts.

5. There were questions about the upcoming meeting and getting feedback from the public that attends. The reaction from the public may not be based on information from the meeting, but from their own thoughts that they already have regardless of the facts. There needs to be time to comment after the meeting so that people have time to digest all the information.

RPA explained that we won't make any recommendations right after the meeting. We still have to screen and consider other factors before the administrative draft report is prepared. We will come back to the public after the screening process.

6. Concern with using "aesthetics" in the Needs & Objectives because this screens out some options. There was discussion about how aesthetics could be measured.
7. Concern that dominant groups are guiding the process too much. There should be explicit examples of why we should not keep the existing situation - such as safety of the bridge and school buses crossing it. Safety is not a public decision; it is a decision that the county and the state should be making. The middle pier has changed the river flow. Photos from 1935 and a recent year showed how the river has changed.
8. It was suggested to use the term "Visual Quality" instead of "Aesthetics". *MDT suggested dropping the aesthetics terminology and keeping the historic wording.*
9. Member asked that the "improvement options" be changed to just "options".
10. Current pictures of the bridge (showing areas of concern) were passed around. Member mentioned that there was no PE inspection on the bridge (*this has not been verified*). When this individual was a child there was a school bus that went through a bridge in another state. After that the protocol changed such that all the kids were required to get off the bus, and then the empty school bus would cross the bridge by itself. Once safely across, the kids would walk across the bridge and get back on the bus.
11. Members shared the belief that the bridge is not adequate and the report needs to say that.
12. Suggestion for section 4.8 - that a loaded school bus is at or near the limit of the bridge and that if a bus crossed with other traffic there is a higher risk of a failure. Requested the facts need to be shared with the public. The media will show grandstanders and not share the facts. The grandstanders will share misinformation and the public will believe it. Therefore a sheet with facts and information should be shared with the public. Requested other pictures other than aesthetic pictures of a bridge such as the pictures showing the parts of the bridge that are deteriorating be included.
13. County recommended the group attend the next public meeting and share their thoughts. MBCSC state that the planning team's job is to take the comments from here and adjust the document.
14. MBCSC member wanted to make sure that the public meeting is safe for all people to comment and that it is productive.
15. RPA commented that at the public meeting, part of the presentation will highlight new information in the E&P Report that has been generated since the last meeting.
16. MBCSC can offer opinions, but MDT and County have to share the facts.
17. Make sure to clarify how the decisions in the future will be made and who will make the decisions.