

Bitterroot River: Notify neighbors of bridge plans

Posted: Sunday, September 5, 2010 12:00 am

I received information about the recent meeting of the Montana Department of Transportation and county engineers to discuss the possibility of a new bridge across the Bitterroot River on the extension of South Avenue.

About 20 years ago, a group of us in this neighborhood of Hidden Heights, O'Brien Creek Road, Blue Mountain Road, Maclay Bridge, Target Range School and others met with the county commissioners to discuss the future of Maclay Bridge. At that time, then-Commissioner Barbara Evans assured us that there were no long-range or short-range plans for such a route or for any major improvement to Maclay Bridge. There were no funds for a project of that size, they said. Later there was a study to pick a preferred location for such a bridge, which, not surprisingly, came up with the extension of South Avenue. I was one of the participants in the public meeting that came up with suggested locations. It was like, duh - obvious.

Since then, there have been repeated denials of any plan for a western bypass out this way. Now we are learning that the contemplated new bridge would be approximately equivalent to the Kona Ranch Road Bridge in size and scope and that construction could begin in six to seven years and is a county priority for the special funding mechanism required. So it appears that the Maclay Bridge replacement, which is what this will be, has become a serious project. The implications of the new bridge on the feeder roads of Blue Mountain Road, Big Flat Road, Deschamps Road and beyond are major.

I, and many others, expect to hear from our county commissioners about this very important project, even if construction isn't expected to start for six or seven years. Please inform your constituents about what is going on - now!

Harold Ort, Hidden Heights Homeowners Association, Missoula

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