

Maclay Bridge Report #2

Sent: Sat 12/04/10 4:48 PM

All,

It was divulged by Montana Department of Highways that Missoula County nominated Maclay Bridge as their first priority for "Off System" bridge replacement.

On November 17, I appeared at the regular meeting of Missoula County Commissioners. I asked commissioners for a schedule of planned meetings or conference calls between MDT and Missoula County where Maclay Bridge is the focus of the meeting so that we could send representatives. I asked for notification when unscheduled meetings or teleconferences are called and I requested at least 24 hours notice if a meeting is canceled or postponed. The fourth request was that the county hold public hearings BEFORE a memorandum of understanding between the county and MDT is signed. Finally, I requested copies of any document(s) that established Maclay Bridge as a priority for the county.

I received a letter on Dec. 2 that says the county has assembled all known files associated with Maclay Bridge. I am presently trying to establish a time and date for our inspection of those files.

On November 23, Willis Curdy met with Commissioner Jean Curtiss. He requested that Commissioners address their plan regarding Maclay Bridge on their public meeting agenda next month. Commissioner Curtiss responded in writing that discussion of their plan was premature as they do not have any information from which to base a decision at this point in time.

Commissioner Curtiss went on to say that she had attached a Montana Department of Transportation sufficiency rating for Maclay Bridge to her message. She said Maclay Bridge is graded as poor.

She also said that MDT is working on a "preliminary field review" of the project. They will prepare a report and hope to have it completed by next spring. That report will identify the appropriate NEPA process for any bridge on this section of river. It will not address cost or location.

The document Curtiss had attached was an excerpt from the National Bridge Database. That brief report has this to say:

Route: 32101
Place: Missoula (County)
Facility Carried: County Road L1390
Feature Intersected: Bitterroot River 010
Location: W Missoula
Bridge Material and Design: Steel Truss
Sufficiency Rating: 32.5%

Structural Evaluation: Basically intolerable requiring high priority of replacement
Structure Length: 105.5 meters
Year Built: 1935 (I previously reported this bridge at over 100 years old)
Year Reconstructed: 1964
NBI Structure Number: L32101000+01001
This bridge is **Structurally Deficient**

My understanding of this report is that “Sufficiency Rating” can be from 0 to 100% with 100% essentially representing a new bridge. We were told some time ago that this bridge rated at 32.5% largely due to being a single lane structure with inadequate approaches by today’s standards. What concerned us was the structural evaluation. Therefore I Googled National Bridge Database to get more information on the structural defect(s) that caused this red flag evaluation. I was able to come up with the identical report as that provided by Curtiss, but I could get no further explanation of the defects. Therefore I wrote a message to Engineering Services Supervisor for Missoula District, MDT. I explained what I had found and asked him for information regarding structural defects.

His response was that National Bridge Database is **NOT** a government database but is privately maintained. (It is not current with respect to this bridge) The structurally deficient classification occurred in 2002 due to problems with the deck. **In 2003 the county made improvements to the deck so the bridge is no longer structurally deficient.** It is “Functionally Obsolete” which reflects on the single lanes and substandard approaches. The bridge was inspected again by MDT in 2005 and it was recommended at that time to limit the bridge to 12 tons, however the county had a consultant inspect the bridge with an outcome of 14 tons capacity. It is presently being used by school buses and emergency vehicles.

In short the Maclay Bridge appears safe for current usage. The Environmental Assessment conducted in 1993 for a bridge replacement pegged the cost of a new bridge, right of way, and its approaches at \$13 million. There has been no update to bring this estimate current. MDT requires Missoula County to pay for the approaches which was not the case in 1993.

Questions we continue to research include:

1. What is the rationale for the new bridge?
2. What impacts will a bridge at the South Ave. Extension have on traffic on South Avenue? River Pines? Blue Mountain Road? Big Flat Road?
3. Who will be responsible for costs incurred for either the EA or EIS?
4. Are there possible alternate sites?
5. What is the current estimated cost of bridge construction?
6. What is the estimated cost of bridge approaches?

7. What is the estimated cost for rights of way?
8. What is the contingent cost of rehabilitation and widening for South Avenue, River Pines, Blue Mountain and Big Flat Roads to accommodate increased traffic?
9. Will any of these costs be subject to Special Improvement Districts?
10. Will a SID be assessed to the entire county or just among homeowners in the district.
11. What is contained within the document that established this project as a priority for Missoula County?
12. Will the commissioners hold a public hearing on Maclay Bridge before they sign a memorandum of understanding with MDT?

As we move forward with our effort to uncover facts we will send future reports.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Bob Schweitzer
544-9066