Question Summary & Responses

Project Need

Why do we need a new bridge? Maclay Bridge functions adequately, is a local iconic structure, and the people don't want it.

- *The project needs and objectives were summarized in the March 22, 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study where four (4) specific project needs were identified. The Missoula County Commissioners have formally moved to proceed with detailed environmental evaluation, and design of the South 1 Alignment option (3E.1) which includes a new bridge at the end of South Avenue and removal of the existing Maclay Bridge structure. Refer to the March 22, 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study for more detail, including Section ES.2 where project Needs and Objectives are presented.*

Why can't we use the old alignment

- *Several alignment alternatives, including the existing alignment, were evaluated in the March 22, 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study. Option 3E.1 (South 1 Alignment) delivers a transportation facility that meets current and future demands, addresses safety, and provides connectivity to the existing transportation network. The March 22, 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study includes more detailed information on the project needs, and evaluation criteria used for selecting the South 1 Alignment. Compared to the selected alignment, alternatives to rehabilitate the existing bridge or construct a new bridge on the present alignment either do not satisfy the project needs or rank less favorably considering the project evaluation criteria..*

Why isn't the Target Range Neighborhood plan being followed?

- *The Missoula County Commission has selected to proceed with an Option they are most comfortable with and that balances the transportation needs of the greater community. The Target Range Neighborhood Plan does not identify the need for a new bridge, which is not consistent with the option selected by the Commission. There are other elements of the Target Range Plan that the project environmental evaluation and design will carefully consider.*
- *The Missoula County Commission has an obligation to follow planning documents within a certain hierarchy. While the Target Range Neighborhood plan has goals and objects for areas east of the Bitterroot River, the 2010 County Growth Policy is the overarching planning document for consideration of such projects that are of regional importance. Both documents were considered during the Maclay Bridge Planning Study and elements of both documents will be considered as the design of the preferred option is moved forward.*

Environmental Document/Process

Why is this a Categorical Exclusion (CE) and not an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)? What are the criteria for a CE and does this project meet criteria?

- *Missoula County, under specific consultation with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), elected to scope the environmental review for the South Avenue Bridge project as a Categorical Exclusion level of environmental documentation. Categorical exclusions (CEs) are actions which meet the definition contained in 40 CFR 1508.4, and, based on past experience with similar actions, do not involve significant environmental impacts. A full environmental review for the alignment option selected by the*

Missoula County Commission will be conducted as part of the environmental review process. Regardless of level of environmental document, the proposed project will be designed and implemented in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), and other applicable environmental laws, regulations, and executive orders. Should impacts be identified during the environmental review process that would promote the need for an EIS or Environmental Assessment (EA), the decision to add that to the scope of services will be made by the Administrative Authority. A brief summary of the difference between an EIS, an EA and a CE is provided on the project web site at the following: www.southavenuebridge.com/faqs.

What is the approval process for the environmental document? Will Missoula County Commission be required to approve the environmental document?

- *The environmental document will be approved following the processes described within the MDT Environmental Procedures Manual (Chapter 12, Categorical Exclusions), MDT's Local Agency Guidelines (LAG) Manual (Section 10.4), and the FHWA Division Office Environmental Procedures. Although the project is being administered by Missoula County through the LAG process, FHWA and MDT retain approval authority for the environmental document.*

Will there be a public hearing on the final environmental document? Will comments be accepted on the final environmental document before it's approved and how will those comments affect the final decision?

- *There are no specific federal and state regulatory requirements for holding a public hearing following finalization of the Categorical Exclusion environmental document, nor are there requirements to provide for a public review period of the environmental document prior to state and federal approvals. Missoula County has elected to hold three public meetings throughout development of the project to provide ample opportunity for public involvement. The final approved environmental document will be available for public review and comment and, should an issue arise that was not previously considered during the environmental review process based on changed conditions, appropriate steps will be taken to reevaluate the environmental document. At their discretion, the County Commission may elect to hold a public hearing on the final environmental document.*

Will the environmental document include examination of other alternatives? Why not?

- *The environmental document will not be evaluating other alternatives, including a no-build option or any other build alternatives in different locations. This decision is supported, in part, by the fact that a proposed new bridge over the Bitterroot River has previously been examined in a 1994 Environmental Assessment and, more recently, in the 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study, both of which having determined a preferred alternative for the new bridge in the location currently proposed. Per NEPA regulation, a Categorical Exclusion document needs to evaluate the build alternative only.*

Isn't it a conflict of interest to do the environmental document AND design?

- *No. As specified in 23 U.S.C 112(f) for projects funded by the Federal-aid Highway Program, the contracting agency (Missoula County) may procure, under a single contract, the services of a consulting engineering firm to prepare any environmental documents and associated analyses as well as both the preliminary and final design engineering services on a project provided the contracting agency conducts a review that assesses the objectivity of the environmental documentation prior to its submission to FHWA.*

According to MEPA/NEPA, you make a CE/EA/EIS decision after studying the environment, etc. Saying you're doing a CE prior to this study is "pre-decisional" and contrary to MEPA/NEPA. This project doesn't qualify for a CE and it will be extremely difficult to prove a CE will be adequate for this project based on correct and current data.

- *It is standard procedure for the level of environmental document, or class of action determination, to be preliminarily determined early in project development. FHWA, MDT, and Missoula County have reviewed the project scope, potential impacts, and the project's eligibility for a CE, and have made the preliminary determination that the project as currently proposed qualifies for a CE per criteria in 23 CFR 771.117(a). If at any point during subsequent project development activities, impacts or issues are identified that may affect the class of action determination, the impacts or issues will be evaluated to determine if a change in the class of action is warranted.*

"No Change" needs to be one of the options.

- *Specifically identified as Option 4A-Do Nothing, this option was considered during development of the 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study. This option, however, was not advanced in the study because it failed to the meet the safety performance criteria established in the alternatives screening process. On October 23, 2015 the Missoula County Commissioners voted to move forward with the preferred alternative (South 2 Alignment Option 3E.1) to build a new bridge with an alignment on the extension of South Avenue. Refer to the above answer regarding evaluation of other alternatives for more information.*

Will estimates of the need for road improvements and "traffic calming" around schools be included in the discussion of impacts?

- *Potential impacts generated by actions outside of a federally-funded transportation project are generally considered under a cumulative effects analysis. A cumulative effects analysis considers other related actions or projects within the area and analyzes the impacts generated from those actions as a whole, regardless of who is administering the project or action.*

Bridge Design/Amenities

What will be the speed of the new bridge; what will you do about enforcing the speed on the bridge?

- *The project design speed and posted speed limit have not yet been determined. Missoula County will enforce speed limits in the area in a similar fashion to all County controlled roads.*

What aesthetics will be applied to the new bridge so it doesn't look like the Kona Bridge? How will the public's input be considered when determining the aesthetics?

- *The engineering Scope of Services includes a Bridge Alternatives Evaluation, Preliminary and Final Bridge Design. These work efforts are under-way, and (as a minimum) will consider aesthetics and recreational use. The engineering Scope of Services includes the development of a Technical Design Committee with representatives from the community to decide certain non-structural amenities and aesthetic options. In addition, there are 12 Stakeholder/Neighborhood Meetings scheduled in the Scope of Services to ensure public input throughout the design process. The second Public Meeting, currently scheduled for March, 2016, will provide for public input on aesthetic features of the bridge and roadway approaches.*

How many piers do you think there will be?

- *The number of piers has not yet been determined. The engineering Scope of Services includes a Bridge Alternatives Evaluation. Upon completion of that work, the bridge type, span length, and*

location of piers will be resolved. In general, the number and location of piers are based on several factors including river hydraulics, environmental impacts, and constructability.

Can you span the entire river?

- *The Bridge Alternatives Evaluation will establish criteria for evaluating bridge structure types and span configurations. Crossing the entire floodplain with a single span is probably not a practical alternative. Options to clear span the active river channel and minimize impacts to the river will be evaluated as part of the bridge alternatives analysis.*

How far across the floodplain and floodway does the bridge cross?

- *The final bridge length has not yet been determined. The engineering Scope of Services has assumed a total project length of 0.30 miles, with a total bridge length up to 900 feet. The length of bridge versus floodway fill for the roadway approaches is currently being evaluated..*

What is the elevation of the new bridge? What is the elevation of the new bridge in relation to the 100-yr floodplain?

- *The engineering Scope of Services includes a Bridge Alternatives Evaluation, Preliminary and Final Bridge Design, and Preliminary and Final Roadway Design. These work elements will develop the recommended bridge geometry, pier design, and roadway approach design. The elevation of the approach roadway and bridge, and its relationship to the floodplain elevation will be determined as these work elements are completed. The project will comply with county requirements for conveying river flows and providing clearance between high water and the low chord of the bridge.*

Why aren't you building a new bridge at the Maclay Bridge location?

This was an option that was considered during the corridor study and March 22, 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study. The Study found that compared to the existing Maclay Bridge location, a new bridge at the South Avenue location would best satisfy the project needs and objectives On October 23, 2015 the Missoula County Commissioners voted to move forward with the preferred alternative (South 1 Alignment Option 3E.1) to build a new bridge with an alignment on the extension of South Avenue.

Roadway/Traffic/Access

What is the plan for the rest of South Avenue? Why doesn't this project extend to Humble?

- *The funding identified for this project is through the Montana Department of Transportation Off-system Bridge Program. Consistent with this program (and as a starting point for the engineering services effort), the project limits have been established between the intersection of South Avenue and Hanson Drive to the east and River Pines Road to the west. Final bridge and roadway profile have yet to be determined; however, an increase in project limits is not expected. Any other identified improvements needed for the County's roadway system beyond the project limits will be addressed separately by Missoula County.*

How will the project maintain safety for kids crossing South Ave west of Clements Avenue?

- *The traffic analysis performed during the Maclay Bridge Planning study, as well as the anticipated growth in the Target Range Neighborhood Plan, show that traffic will increase regardless of the bridge location and this issue was evaluated during the study. The Target Range Neighborhood Plan suggested improvements to this intersection that may be considered independently from the South Avenue Bridge Project. In the case of the school there are appropriate safety considerations already in place, including school speed zones.*

Why have a 2-lane bridge with bike lanes on a 2-lane road with no shoulders?

- *The engineering Scope of Services includes a Bridge Alternatives Evaluation, Preliminary and Final Bridge Design and Preliminary and Final Roadway Design. Bridge alternatives evaluation and preliminary roadway design are currently under-way, and will consider the need for bicycle/pedestrian accommodations and recreational use. Questions regarding bridge design and roadway design will be addressed as the engineering work effort is completed.*

Will anything be done with the intersection of River Pines Road and Blue Mountain Road? Consider a roundabout, rotary, 4-way flashing red lights? What is the timeline for these improvements, if they are to occur, and how will those be coordinated with the bridge design/construction?

- *Adequate safety measures are currently in place for the intersection of River Pines Road and Blue Mountain Road. Althought the intersection with Blue Mountain Road is currently outside of the planned project limits, any other identified improvements needed for the County's roadway system beyond the project limits will be addressed separately by Missoula County.*

Include a separated bike/pedestrian facility.

- *The project bridge and roadway alternatives evaluations will take this into consideration.*

How will engineering improve the existing dip in South Avenue as the road travels westward into the floodplain?

- *The engineering Scope of Services includes a Bridge Alternatives Evaluation, Preliminary and Final Bridge Design and Preliminary and Final Roadway Design. These work efforts are under-way. Questions regarding roadway alignment and profile will be addressed as the engineering work effort is completed. The roadway design will conform to the established design speed and County design standards.*

Once the bridge is constructed, Highway 93 commuters will use Blue Mountain and the new bridge and this will increase traffic in the area. Has this been considered?

- *Previous planning efforts, including the 1994 Maclay Bridge Site Selection Study and associated EA, and the 2013 Maclay Bridge Planning Study considered both existing and projected traffic volumes.*

How will access be provided with grade issues on the east side (Hanson Drive area residents)?

- *The engineering Scope of Services will include a Bridge Alternatives Evaluation, Preliminary and Final Bridge Design and Preliminary and Final Roadway Design. These work efforts are under-way. Access to properties adjacent to South Avenue will be considered in the design. The concerns expressed for proper design of access for residents on Hanson Drive are noted.*

There are two ditches running down both sides of South Avenue between the river and Humble. What plans are being made to maintain access to the ditches and water rights?

- *The ditches in question will be looked at closely as the engineering design evaluations are completed for the identified alternatives.*

The Maclay Bridge Corridor Study analyzed traffic patterns for roadways in the surrounding area affected by any potential improvements this study might recommend, including South Avenue, S 3rd Street, Clements, Blue Mountain, and Big Flat Road, as well as other local roads in the area. The scope of work on this project does not address these roadways. Why?

- *The Corridor Study provided the basis for alternative development and analysis. Existing and projected traffic volumes on the surrounding roadway network were considered in the analysis and selection of the preferred alternative as part of the Corridor Study. Traffic demand modeling shows that traffic increases are not specific to this project, and traffic will increase in the next 40 years regardless of the project location. The scope of work on this project does include development of a traffic report that will outline recommendations associated with the future traffic operations and safety needs within the project limits. Additionally, consideration of estimated traffic pattern changes outside the project limits will be considered as part of the indirect (secondary) and cumulative impacts analysis of the environmental review as required under NEPA/MEPA. Any other identified improvements needed for the County's roadway system beyond the project limits will be addressed separately by Missoula County.*

Future of Maclay Bridge

Why can't we fix the existing bridge?

- *The option to retrofit the existing bridge was considered as part of the Corridor Planning Study and eliminated as a practical alternative. The Study found that rehabilitating the existing bridge would not correct the deficient safety features needed to serve the long term intended use of the facility. On October 23, 2015 the Missoula County Commissioners voted to move forward with the preferred alternative (South 2 Alignment Option 3E.1) to build a new bridge with an alignment on the extension of South Avenue.*

Why can't the Maclay Bridge be left as a pedestrian bridge?

- *One of the primary concerns about Maclay Bridge is the channel constriction caused by the inadequate length. The existing bridge was not designed for that crossing, but was a second-hand bridge that was "close enough" to spanning the channel when combined with approach spans and fill for abutments. That constriction has led to negative impacts to the natural performance of the river channel and potential scour that leaves the bridge at risk for damage since the foundations for the piers are really unknown. The same mitigation measures that are cost prohibitive for extending the useful life of Maclay Bridge as a vehicular bridge exist for maintaining it as a pedestrian bridge.*

Is demolition of the Maclay Bridge part of the project funding?

- *Demolition of the existing bridge has been included as part of the project funding.*

Floodplain/Erosion

How will the new bridge and de-construction of Maclay affect the floodplain and erosion? Will the embankment on the east side push water into their property (adjacent to the east approach)? Will removing the Maclay Bridge cause more erosion? (that bridge "armors" the channel, if removed, will there be bank erosion) What is the plan to prevent that? Will the existing riprap near the Maclay Bridge be removed? What are the effects to erosion and floodplains if it is removed? Will an engineering review look at sediment accumulation and sediment transport? We're concerned about sediments at O'Brien Creek confluence.

- *The engineering Scope of Services will include a Hydraulics and Hydrology analysis that will also include a floodplain analysis, scour analysis, fish passage analysis and bridge storm water analysis. These work efforts are under-way. Questions regarding the impacts from removal of the existing Maclay Bridge and construction of the new South Avenue Bridge, with respect to the*

floodplain and scour, will be addressed as the engineering work effort is completed. The concerns expressed about sediment transport are noted.

Project Funding

How much will this project cost?

- *Planning level cost estimates are currently estimated at approximately $13 million, including engineering and other indirect costs. Cost estimates will be refined as the project design elements progress.*

How much is paid for by Missoula County Residents?

- *The project is currently planned to be fully funded by the Montana Department of Transportation's Off-system Bridge Program.*

Is the road realignment of River Pines Road included in the overall cost?

- *The intersection of River Pines Road and South Avenue has been included in the overall project cost.*

Will my taxes go up because of this project?

- *An increase in taxes for this project is not necessary. Any improvements that are deemed beneficial or necessary beyond the project limits may be funded by the existing County Road Department budget, competitive grants or other state funding sources available through the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization.*

Public Involvement Process

What are you doing with our comments? Will our comments be posted on the website for others to see/can we see other people's comments?

- *All comments (received in person, via email, via mail, via website) will be posted on the project website.*

The format for the Informational Meeting No.1 did not allow for oral testimony.

- *MDT's Maclay Bridge Corridor Study provided extensive, repeated opportunities for public comment, much of which focused on whether or not Missoula County should proceed with a new bridge at South Avenue. Since the County Commissioners made their official decision to move forward with the new bridge, and that project is in the early development stages, we anticipated there would be more questions regarding the project scope, process, elements, next steps, etc. than actual comments regarding the project. This approach also provided an opportunity for written comments. We will evaluate adding opportunity for oral testimony at the Second Public Meeting that is currently scheduled for March 15, 2016.*

There was no overall presentation of the project, or progress to date. This is an inadequate means to provide history, intentions, status, or progress, all of which are important to the public.

- *Future public presentations will provide an overview of the purpose and need of the project, in addition to a timeline of Missoula County's steps leading to this point. Progress to date was provided on the project web site and on the slide show running during the meeting. Both included information on key project elements, including: schedule, hydraulics/hydrology, survey, geotechnical, environmental document, bridge alternative considerations.*

Information provided at the stations was lacking; people couldn't answer our questions.

- *Our intention was to provide the public an overview of the steps we would be taking in this project moving forward, and an opportunity for individuals to ask specific questions about different elements. Specific details on the project design elements were unknown at the time of the first public meeting.*

The unmanned slide presentation was poor quality with washed out images shown on a wall.

- *Comment noted. We will explore other options and venues for future presentations to provide better viewing of the presentation.*

The method of presentation discouraged asking the questions that needed to be answered.

- *HDR, MDT and Missoula County Staff were available throughout the night to answer any and all questions. Any questions that staff members were unable to answer at this time were requested to be submitted in writing. Stations, comment cards, and the website provide equal opportunities for all members of the public to equally submit their questions and comments.*

HDR's website states: "Conduction of a public participation process prior to any design to ensure that interested citizens and/or organized citizen groups can be involved on functional elements and the aesthetics to be incorporated into the project." What does that mean and how was that principal applied to the first public meeting?

- *This is a goal of the overall project, not specifically Public Meeting No. 1. Once we have the information necessary to better understand size and type of bridge that will be designed, we will allow the public opportunity to provide input on functional elements and aesthetics.*

People didn't have answers to our questions and we were often referred to another station.

- *Comment noted. The intent of the first public meeting was to provide stations for key project elements: Bridge, Environmental, and Project Management. Bridge engineering staff members were available to discuss questions regarding the bridge, environmental staff were available to discuss questions regarding the environmental document, and a Project Management station was provided to answer general questions. The information stations provided opportunity to solicit public comment to help identify key issues to be addressed as the project moves forward.*

It was difficult to ask questions or get information when tables were full of people; I would have preferred a straightforward presentation.

- *Comment noted. The meeting format was developed to allow the public to view and gain information at their own pace, on a flexible schedule, allowing folks to arrive at different times, leave early, focus on elements of interest.*

Other

Is this project part of the original Highway 93 Transportation Plan that outlined a west side bypass of Missoula. There will be an interchange at The Holiday Gas Station.

- *The project is not associated with the Highway 93 Transportation Plan west side bypass.*

What will the County do if more geotechnical investigation is needed, particularly on private property?

- *Additional geotechnical investigation may be necessary when the bridge alternatives evaluation is complete and location of piers is determined.. Missoula County will not access private property for geotechnical investigation until legal access is acquired.*

FWP COMMENTS AND INFORMATION RELATED TO MACLAY AND SOUTH AVENUE BRIDGES (received 11/24/2015, via email)

The information below summarizes and reiterates FWP's comments and recommendations related to the proposed South Avenue bridge construction on Bitterroot River. These comments pertain to fisheries concerns, protection of river and riparian integrity, and public access. Comments highlight the importance of lower O'Brien Creek as a spawning/rearing tributary and protection of adult trout that congregate near the stream mouth. In addition, public access for angling and recreation are important public considerations at the current (North Avenue) and potential South Avenue bridge locations.

Primary Concerns and Comments:

Riparian Buffer along O'Brien Creek: The proposed bridge alignment and current approach easement run parallel and adjacent to lower O'Brien Creek. As bridge and approach locations are designed and surveyed, a substantial (50-100 ft), no disturbance buffer should be included along O'Brien Creek and at the confluence with the Bitterroot River. A large public investment has been made in this reach over the 15 years through restoration work, fish passage improvements, as well as adoption and enforcement of protective subdivision covenants.

- *Comment is noted and will be considered during the preliminary planning and design effort.*

Minimizing Public Access and Disturbance on west end of proposed bridge : With the current easement alignment, the mouth of O'Brien Creek and fish holding water just downstream in the Bitterroot River lie directly adjacent to the west end of the proposed bridge. Both physical disturbance and public access should be limited at this location to minimize impacts to congregations of fish using this location. Specifically, mitigation measures should be incorporated to protect and enhance the buffer between the bridge and the confluence area, as well as discourage bank angling there.

- *Comment is noted and will be considered during the preliminary planning and design effort.*

Maintain Public access at Maclay Bridge Location and provide adequate public river access at east end of South Avenue site: Public demand for river access is high in lower Bitterroot River reaches adjacent to Missoula. This includes access for angling, as well as other recreationists (e.g. tubers/floaters). Reasonable public river access and parking opportunity should be maintained at the Maclay Bridge site and on the East end of a new bridge location at South Avenue. These sites will be important components of the overall public river access plan for the Lower Bitterroot River reach near Missoula.

- *Comment is noted and will be considered during the preliminary planning and design effort.*

Restore natural features to Maclay site if bridge is removed: If a new crossing is constructed at South Avenue, infrastructure associated with the Maclay Bridge should be removed and natural river features should be restored. This would include removal of bridge piers, pilings and abutments to an elevation below maximum scour depth, restoration of riparian buffers, and pulling back approaches to restore a normal cross-sectional width for this reach.

- *Comment is noted and will be considered during the preliminary planning and design effort.*

Design of new bridge should not constrict the Bitterroot River cross-sectional (bankfull) width, should minimize riparian disturbance, and consider location of bridge piers to minimize collection of floating debris (LWD).

- *Comment is noted and will be considered during the preliminary planning and design effort.*

General Biological Information:

Fish Species affected by Project: Lower O'Brien Creek in the project area supports westslope cutthroat trout (WCT), RainbowxWCT trout hybrids, brown trout, brook trout, mountain whitefish, and sculpin. The lower Bitterroot River has a similar species composition. No viable population of bull trout has ever been detected in O'Brien creek and population densities are extremely low in the lower main stem Bitterroot River. However, the mouth of O'Brien Creek is likely used seasonally by bull trout as it acts as a thermal refuge in summer and early fall. The lower Bitterroot River also provides important over-winter habitat for bull trout as this reach is heavily influenced by groundwater and generally maintains slightly higher over-winter temperatures than the Clark Fork River just downstream.

- *Comment is noted and will be considered during the preliminary planning and design effort.*