

Missoula County  
South Avenue Bridge Project  
Public Comment

Taken at 3100 South Avenue West  
Missoula, Montana  
Tuesday, August 16, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

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1 Tuesday, August 16, 2016

2 MR. STEPHEN SENINGER: My name is  
3 Stephen Seninger, and I live at 9601 Cedar Ridge  
4 Road, on the other side of the river. And I'm a  
5 professional Ph.D. economist with 40 years of  
6 experience in project evaluation and environmental  
7 analysis and social impact analysis. And I have  
8 some comments about the bridge.

9 I am in favor of rehabbing Maclay  
10 Bridge, just from the onset. And I have a number  
11 of reasons for that. Number 1, my concern is that  
12 the process has not allowed adequate discussion of  
13 that alternative. And, in fact, the process is  
14 controlled with minimal kinds of public input.  
15 And even the solicitation of comments is not clear  
16 to me that those are going to be listened to by  
17 the commissioners in the final decision process.  
18 It seems more like this whole thing is driven by  
19 the engineering company and the consultants.

20 Secondly, the analysis so far has  
21 ignored the alternative of rehabbing Maclay  
22 Bridge. And it's just a nonexistent alternative  
23 in all of the discussion at this point. And so  
24 any environmental analysis that's being discussed  
25 here tonight should be, according to this

1 presentation forthcoming in October or November --  
2 is going to be hollow because it's not going to  
3 have considered all alternatives.

4           And so the third point really relates to  
5 that. There has been no comprehensive  
6 environmental or social impact or economic cost  
7 analysis of this proposed new bridge. And  
8 speaking as a professional economist, I just find  
9 that terribly inadequate.

10           Point number 4, the whole issue of  
11 public safety even with removal of Maclay Bridge,  
12 which seems to be a foregone conclusion, does not  
13 address the fact that the beach area around Maclay  
14 Bridge is a public beach. And what's going to be  
15 done about that in terms of access, in terms of  
16 law enforcement patrolling? And likewise, what  
17 about public safety issues around the new bridge  
18 in terms of whatever may develop there, as far as  
19 bridge jumpers, floaters, et cetera?

20           And then, finally, coming back to the  
21 cost analysis. It really has been totally  
22 nonexistent at this point. The only cost they  
23 have even hinted at is the cost of the bridge.  
24 There has been no discussion, nor does it seem  
25 like there will be, about feeder roads, traffic

1 control, law enforcement, traffic densities,  
2 increased traffic flows, and the fact that South  
3 Avenue might become an expressway that goes  
4 through a school, a hospital, a high school, and  
5 this new public park.

6           So, overall, those are my concerns. And  
7 I fear that this may be a foregone conclusion on  
8 the part of the Missoula County Commissioners, and  
9 that my relevant points and concerns are going to  
10 go unanswered.

11           Thank you.

12  
13           MR. DON STEVENSON: I'm Don Stevenson.  
14 I live at 4528 Edward. I've lived there near the  
15 bridge, near Maclay Bridge, for 47 years now.

16           Basically, I have been concerned, I  
17 guess, with the safety thing. The first 12 years  
18 I lived there someone died every year jumping off  
19 the bridge. So I have been kind of active in  
20 trying to get something done with the bridge. I  
21 have stayed abreast of the -- I'm kind of on the  
22 technical design committee here, so I've been  
23 staying abreast of what's going on. One concern I  
24 have now is when they remove the existing bridge,  
25 the Maclay Bridge, it shows the barriers they're

1 going to put up are kind of right down near the  
2 tow. And I really think that the barriers ought  
3 to be more toward the junction of Edward, Edward  
4 Court, and South Avenue. If they're not, I'm  
5 afraid that that's going to become another parking  
6 and garbage-collection area. And that's kind of  
7 been one of our main objections of living there in  
8 the neighborhood. We're picking up garbage up and  
9 down the road there.

10 So I guess that's about it for now.

11 Oh, one thought I had, you know, on the  
12 new bridge. I don't want the new bridge to turn  
13 into a site, a recreation site, like the old  
14 bridge. But, however, it does provide access to  
15 the river for floaters. And there are accesses to  
16 the river. If you go upstream to the Maclay Flats  
17 area, there's an access to the river there for  
18 floaters to put boats in and take boats out. And  
19 then on Spurgin there's another place where you  
20 can take boats in and out.

21 As far as the design, there should be a  
22 pedestrian walkway on one side or the other; not  
23 both sides. I think one side is enough.

24  
25 MS. VICKIE MIKELSONS: My comment is

1 that this format doesn't allow for us to hear  
2 other people's questions, nor for responses to  
3 those.

4 And all along it had been said that  
5 there would be a no-build alternative, and that's  
6 not even being discussed.

7  
8 MR. GARY BOTCHEK: One of my biggest  
9 concerns is the choosing of engineering firms that  
10 basically are limited in merely the bridge design  
11 and approaches. And so that particular company,  
12 in doing that design, is limited to the impact  
13 to -- from the approaches east and west. And so  
14 when they come off the approach Pine View -- is it  
15 Pine View -- the road that currently serves the  
16 old Maclay Bridge from the intersection of O'Brien  
17 Creek and Blue Mountain, from that approach to the  
18 intersection and the intersection itself, one,  
19 there's no cost. Two, there is no agreeable  
20 method in how it's going to be handled. And so  
21 it's very difficult to understand how that  
22 approach will fit, who is going to pay for it, and  
23 what the existing cost ends up being.

24 And more importantly, on the east end of  
25 the bridge going from the bridge to Reserve

1 Street, there's critical issues that even in the  
2 very first public meeting generated through our  
3 P.A. -- I believe Jeff Key -- the head engineer --  
4 Even before they even discussed bridge design, he  
5 was much aware engineering-wise that the  
6 intersection of Reserve Street and South Avenue  
7 was already in, at best, an unmanageable condition  
8 due to traffic coming from Community Hospital, Big  
9 Sky High School and the Target Range area.

10           And without being able to assume that  
11 review, by now, at an even higher-step design  
12 process, the criteria that ends up is how are you  
13 going to manage it? And who is going to make the  
14 decision whether or not it's functional or not,  
15 because now we've added the regional park, a  
16 roundabout, a -- The city has ownership of the  
17 Knife River property, which will be probably be  
18 turned into a recreational park a lot like  
19 Frenchtown Pond, which will generate, potentially,  
20 a lot of traffic.

21           And it will also, then, probably  
22 eliminate some of the public concerns of  
23 existing property owners that exist on the old  
24 Maclay Bridge now, because it would be easier to  
25 access the Bitterroot River and recreation in a

1 design process that eliminates illegal parking and  
2 things like that.

3           So I think it's -- Commissioner Curtiss  
4 had indicated in that very first meeting that none  
5 of any funding would be outside of the federal  
6 process. In other words, it could not be taxation  
7 money, SIDs, things like that that would go into  
8 it. And so it kind of leaves that process without  
9 answers. And to me, to evaluate not only traffic  
10 conditions that will change, but also changes that  
11 need to be made in the existing infrastructure,  
12 both with roadway widths, road negative  
13 alignments, a huge amount of --

14           The irrigation company has a significant  
15 right-of-way that is not attainable by any other  
16 public organization, county or city. It has to be  
17 negotiated. And if the irrigation company says  
18 no, that's our easement no different than the road  
19 is your easement, and we're going to leave it the  
20 way it is, these issues, I believe, need to be  
21 adjusted and spelled out before we get into a  
22 process of a final design of a bridge that may be  
23 totally affected by some of these questions.

24           Thank you.

25



1 MR. GEORGE SCHREINER: First thing off,  
2 we are, as of about 14 years ago, California  
3 refugees here to enjoy what's left of the United  
4 States before our rights are legislated away by  
5 individuals that really don't understand what the  
6 community wants.

7 I retired from the California Department  
8 of Transportation Division of Highways. We have  
9 had bridges and road and so on like that. This is  
10 the Eastern Sierras Mountain Division.

11 The bridge we have is very serviceable.  
12 We don't need a new bridge. We have a perfectly  
13 good line of site.

14 We have a definite need in the community  
15 for road repair, sidewalks, curbs. The money  
16 should be spent -- It's out of our tax -- our road  
17 tax money, gasoline and so on like that. It  
18 should be spent in the community; not for a bridge  
19 to bring rock trucks across from the gravel pit  
20 using Blue Mountain and Big Flat Road and the  
21 junction in between with the bridge. As of this  
22 last crack seal out on 93, we saw the type of  
23 traffic that that new bridge is going to bring  
24 through to us.

25 My daughter, she rides, and we have

1 these rock trucks, heavy equipment, coming down  
2 from Osprey Heights. They will turn on their Jake  
3 brakes or Blue Ox, and our horse will go up in the  
4 air. There are no riding trails. We could have  
5 riding trails. The money could be spent on those.

6 Sidewalks for little kids I think are  
7 imperative.

8 We would like to know when we would be  
9 asked to vote on this large financial undertaking  
10 that's already preplanned and we have to accept  
11 it. It should go on the ballot. Either that or  
12 some resourceful individual should go to the court  
13 and get a stay of execution until the time that it  
14 can be placed on the ballot.

15 My address is 855 Big Sky Lane,  
16 Missoula, Montana.

17  
18 MS. SHERI NAGY: I just want to say I am  
19 against the South Avenue Bridge. I think it  
20 should be left at the Maclay Bridge with possibly  
21 another one-lane bridge added. For the cost it's  
22 pretty ridiculous on the other one.

23 And I don't believe that it would really  
24 take very much traffic off Reserve. I think the  
25 Blue Mountain Road is so inadequate that people

1 still aren't going to be rushing to the South  
2 Avenue Bridge at all.

3           And with the roundabout on there and all  
4 of that traffic, they've never put a four-lane up  
5 to the high school even. And the lights are all  
6 screwed up on South Avenue and Reserve. I think  
7 all of that is going to contribute, and people are  
8 just not going to use it. It's money wasted.

9  
10           MS. DERE E RICCI: I think the South  
11 Avenue Bridge is a very bad idea. I think it's  
12 going to cost the taxpayers, when it's all said  
13 and done, between 20 million and \$25 million  
14 dollars. And I can't see the cost being justified  
15 with a little bit of traffic that it's going to  
16 handle. And I think it's very upsetting to spend  
17 that kind of money with not a good, clear goal in  
18 mind.

19           And our elected officials are not  
20 listening. And we live in the neighborhood, and  
21 we're just going to watch. This is going to be a  
22 catastrophe. And the roundabout on South Avenue  
23 is going to be a problem if there is an increase  
24 in traffic. And they are not telling us how much  
25 the approach work is going to be for the bridge.

1 That's why I'm thinking around \$20-million-plus.

2           And so I'm not happy. And you can put  
3 that in there too.

4  
5           MS. LINH HOANG: I want to make a  
6 statement about the speed. The design speed for  
7 the bridge at 35 miles per hour is way too fast  
8 for that neighborhood. I asked if they could have  
9 designed with a design speed for something lower  
10 so that it could never, ever go to 35, even though  
11 they could have a different one posted. They  
12 could post it for lower, but in the future they  
13 might want to put it to 35 because it actually can  
14 do 35. That design speed for 35 will never be  
15 acceptable for that sort of community where we  
16 have children, and we have animals crossing that  
17 area.

18           So I guess to add onto that, I would  
19 like them to look at redesign of this for design  
20 speed that is equivalent to what's at Maclay  
21 Bridge right now. And we were told that there  
22 wouldn't be any increase in traffic from this.  
23 And if there's no increase in traffic, they won't  
24 need to have a speed that's greater than what it  
25 is right now if they are expecting the same amount

1 of use.

2 My address is 2498 Green Bench Court.

3  
4 MR. FRED STEWART: These projects  
5 started over 20 years ago, and the county has  
6 never, ever had a qualified bridge engineer look  
7 at Maclay Bridge to determine what could be done  
8 with it. They have always made the assumption  
9 that nothing could be done with it. And then they  
10 do their plans based upon that assumption, that it  
11 can't be replaced -- not replaced -- that it can't  
12 be upgraded or repaired.

13 So the two previous studies are not  
14 valid because they are based on untrue assumption.  
15 And this current study is now building on those  
16 two previous studies. So the county has never had  
17 a qualified bridge engineer look at Maclay Bridge  
18 to tell us what could be done with it.

19  
20 MR. GENE THOMPSON: My name is Gene  
21 Thompson. I live at 4320 Sierra Drive, Missoula  
22 59804.

23 The substance of my question really has  
24 to do with the public safety aspect which drove  
25 the removal of the bridge -- or drove the decision

1 to remove Maclay Bridge. Part of the public  
2 safety concern, which was one of the five criteria  
3 that was used or was evaluated by the review  
4 committee, had to do with the fact that there was  
5 a dangerous feature in the river, a whirlpool.  
6 People would jump off the bridge, they would get  
7 into the whirlpool, and there were some number of  
8 drownings associated with that whirlpool  
9 specifically. I understand that the decision to  
10 build a new bridge on South Avenue crossing or the  
11 South Avenue alignment would result in the removal  
12 of the Maclay Bridge.

13 County Commissioner Jean Curtiss at the  
14 fourth public meeting where they actually -- where  
15 the county commissioners actually made the  
16 decision that they would support the  
17 recommendation of the review committee -- During  
18 that meeting Jean Curtiss was asked about the  
19 ultimate status of Maclay Bridge. And she said,  
20 well, the bridge could be used, could be utilized  
21 as -- or might be utilized as a public bicycle  
22 and/or pedestrian route.

23 One concern I have is when she made that  
24 statement, did she not fully understand the  
25 ramifications of the vote that she was about to

1 take or about the make? She certainly implied  
2 that it was possible that the bridge would remain  
3 as a recreational feature.

4 In fact, I believe once the decision was  
5 made to support the South Avenue Bridge alignment,  
6 you also got a decision to remove Maclay Bridge.  
7 It was simultaneous because the fact that one of  
8 the five consideration criteria was associated  
9 with public safety, public safety associated with  
10 people drowning -- jumping off the bridge and  
11 drowning in the whirlpool.

12 Okay. And here is, I guess, what I  
13 would want to know: If the whirlpool is a public  
14 safety issue, and if the whirlpool is a result of  
15 the configuration of the fill on the west end of  
16 the bridge --

17 All right. The whirlpool isn't created  
18 by the bridge. It appears as though it's created  
19 by the infill that the bridge sits on. So in  
20 order to alleviate the public safety hazard of the  
21 whirlpool, are they prepared to take that fill  
22 back to its original alignment, to the original  
23 alignment of the river? If they do that, there  
24 would be no need for riprap, which was suggested  
25 by one of the engineers just a little bit ago. So

1 if the question is if the whirlpool is an issue,  
2 which drove -- which was one of the things that  
3 drove the decision to remove the bridge, are they  
4 prepared to completely mitigate the physical  
5 feature that creates the whirlpool now?

6 I guess that's the question. Thank you.

7  
8 MR. WAYNE BURTON: I don't live out  
9 here, but I just know that probably a lot of  
10 people would like to ride their bicycles across  
11 that bridge, the old bridge, and that they would  
12 probably like to walk across it. And, you know,  
13 that would probably be disappointing when it's  
14 gone. I know that, you know, progress -- you  
15 can't stop progress. So the new bridge will  
16 probably be very nice, but several of us will  
17 probably miss the old bridge. I guess that's what  
18 I'd like to say. We will miss the old bridge.

19 (End of public comment.)  
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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STATE OF MONTANA            )  
  :    SS  
County of Missoula         )

I, Jennifer K. Wells, Freelance Court Reporter for the State of Montana, residing in Missoula, Montana, do hereby certify:

That I was duly authorized to and did report the public comment in this cause.

I further certify that the foregoing pages of this transcript represent a true and accurate transcription of my stenotype notes.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand on this the 18th day of August, 2016.



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Jennifer K. Wells  
Freelance Court Reporter  
State of Montana,  
Residing in Missoula, Montana