

Question Summary & Responses

General

How could the decision to build a new bridge on South Avenue have been decided already?

- The replacement of Maclay Bridge with a new bridge has been under consideration by Missoula County dating back to the mid-1990s. Independent alternative analyses conducted for the 1994 *Maclay Bridge Site Selection Study* Environmental Assessment (EA) and the 2013 *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* came to the same conclusion that a new bridge extending South Avenue across the Bitterroot River was the best location for a new bridge structure.
- Missoula County Commissioners held a public hearing on April 17, 2013 to discuss the final Maclay Bridge Planning Study. At this meeting, following a public comment period, they voted unanimously to accept the planning study's recommendation to replace the Maclay Bridge with South 1 Option (Option 3E.1) and to send a letter to MDT to request continued bridge project developments.
- On April 20, 2015, Missoula County Commissioners unanimously resolved their support for an agreement with MDT to manage the South Avenue Bridge project.

Why do we need a new bridge? Maclay Bridge functions adequately, is a local iconic structure, the residents don't want it, the feasibility and costs of rehabilitating it haven't been considered, etc.

- The 2013 *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* identified a new bridge was necessary to improve safety and operations of the river crossing and connecting roadway network and to address long-term transportation needs in the Maclay Bridge area.
- The project needs and objectives were developed in the March 22, 2013 *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* where four 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 Chapter 4 where project Needs and Objectives are presented.

The project appears to only deal with the bridge as an isolated standalone project. Costly infrastructure is ignored and costs not factored into the total project cost.

- The federal funding is specific to the bridge replacement and approaches; construction funds will not become available until 2020, at the earliest. Improvements to surrounding roadways would be paid for with Missoula County funds. Therefore, these improvements will be addressed as future, separate projects.

Environmental Document/Process

A Categorical Exclusion is inadequate. 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. Results from previous planning efforts, including resource agency consultation and public input, support this decision. A detailed 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.

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 two independent alternative analyses examining a wide range of alternatives has previously been conducted in both the 1994 EA and, more recently, in the 2013 *Maclay Bridge Planning Study*. Both studies have 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.

Does the CE include a purpose and need statement? If so, have you prepared it yet and is it available.

- The CE will include a purpose and need statement. The “Purpose and Need” statement will be consistent with the needs and objectives contained in the 2013 *Maclay Bridge Planning Study*. A draft environmental document is anticipated in November 2016. The entire document will be made available to the public following review and approvals by the administrative authorities.

My understanding of Section 106 [of the National Historic Preservation Act] is that alternatives have to be presented to account for possible adverse effects to Maclay Bridge. These alternatives would include rehabilitation options for the bridge. When will these alternatives be developed and evaluated?

- Rehabilitation options for Maclay Bridge were examined as part of the alternatives evaluation in the *Maclay Bridge Planning Study*. Rehabilitation of Maclay Bridge was not recommended because it failed to meet the needs and objectives identified by the study. As stated in the planning study, MDT would not contribute off-system bridge funds to an alternative that does not address safety and deficient standards including approaches.
- The Maclay Bridge has been previously been determined eligible by the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Because of this, as well as meeting other required criteria, the Maclay Bridge qualifies for MDT’s Adopt-A-Bridge program as outlined in the Programmatic Agreement for historical roads and bridges. The Adopt-A-Bridge program is intended to maintain the historical integrity of NRHP-eligible bridges impacted by MDT bridge replacement projects to the greatest extent reasonable and feasible. Under the Adopt-A-Bridge program, MDT must look at feasible alternatives to demolishing Maclay Bridge, which may include finding a new owner to “adopt” the bridge pending

a detailed screening process. The Adopt-A-Bridge program provides opportunity for a bridge to be adopted in-place or relocated, granted the entity adopting the bridge is willing to commit to maintaining the bridge and the features that make it eligible for the NRHP. More information on the Adopt-A-Bridge program can be found on MDT's website at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/bridge_adoption_details.shtml.

How do you see the CE dovetailing with Section 4(f)?

- Section 4(f) typically is addressed as a part of the process for compliance with the NEPA (42 USC 4321, et seq.) and the analyses and conclusions generally are included in the NEPA documentation. When a Categorical Exclusion is prepared, the Section 4(f) evaluation should be included in a separate document (see 23 CFR 774.7(f)). The Section 4(f) evaluation will follow established guidance, including information contained within the MDT Environmental Manual, and it anticipated the evaluation will be reviewed by MDT and FHWA concurrently with the CE.

No economic impact analysis is included.

- The economic impact analysis is coordinated as a part of the process for compliance with NEPA and MEPA. The environmental document will include an evaluation of the project's potential impacts, both positive and negative, on the economic conditions of the affected communities. The level of detail will be commensurate with the potential effects on the local economy.

What will be the cumulative effects of this project?

- The environmental document being prepared for the project will include an indirect (secondary) and cumulative impact analysis, as required by NEPA and MEPA. The analysis is currently in progress and will be included in the Categorical Exclusion environmental document, which is anticipated for submittal to Missoula County, MDT, and FHWA in November 2016 for their respective reviews. Public availability of the final environmental document will depend on the respective agency reviews and approvals. Updates to the project website will be regularly provided and final project documents will be posted in a timely manner.

Have studies been done for effect on the river?

- Environmental documentation includes a Biological Resource Report, which evaluates the potential effects on aquatic resources, including wetlands and water bodies, and species of concern and special status species. A Biological Assessment (BA) is being prepared as required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which will evaluate the potential effects on threatened and endangered species. The potential effects on bull trout and its designated critical habitat are assessed in the BA.

Additionally, HDR is developing a Hydraulics Report to document the project design criteria, assess the hydrology at the site, assess hydraulics of the Bitterroot River and impacts of the proposed project through the project area, and provide recommendations on the preferred bridge alternate that will advance into final design. This report will be posted to the project website once it is finalized.

There are three osprey nests present in the project site; what are the plans to mitigate the effect of construction/demolition and replacement of platform if lost?

- Osprey are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Contract special provisions will be developed to include pre-construction coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to determine specific mitigation requirements. The construction documents will also include a standard provision for MBTA compliance that avoids vegetation removal during nesting season.

How many acres of mitigation lands will be acquired to offset project impacts?

- This level of information is not known at this time. Presently the only land anticipated to be acquired is new right-of-way to construct the project. Mitigation measures will be incorporated into the project as needed to offset project impacts, and typically include items such as implementing best management practices and revegetating disturbed areas, neither of which include acquiring additional land. No wetland impacts are anticipated and therefore compensatory mitigation would not be required. Additional mitigation requirements will be determined during final permitting as required by the regulatory agencies.

Bridge Design/Amenities

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

- Constructing a new bridge in the same location as Maclay Bridge was examined in the *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* as a group of options, named Option 3A. Only Option 3A.2 (North 1) was carried forward in the analysis because it included realigning roadway approaches and therefore best met the needs and objectives identified by the study. The analysis concluded that Option 3A.2, however, resulted in higher private property impacts and did not rank favorably among other alternatives. Refer to Chapters 5 and 6 of the *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* for more detail on the screening process and results. 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 on new alignment as an extension of South Avenue.

How can I choose a walkway for the bridge if there is no walkway on South Avenue to connect to?

- The intention of the Walkway Options board was to demonstrate the options for accommodating pedestrians and bicyclists on the new bridge, and provide the opportunity for the public to comment on if and how these accommodations are incorporated into the bridge project.

Will a new bridge impact the aesthetics of the Bitterroot River and its integrity?

- The new bridge will be designed to minimize impacts on the river and surrounding environment. Options for bridge aesthetics will be considered as the project design advances.

Roadway/Traffic/Access

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

- The project design speed is 35 mph to meet County Road Design Standards. Missoula County will enforce posted speed limits in the area in a similar fashion to all County controlled roads. Enforcement of speed limits is a law enforcement issue, not public works.

This new bridge will not take traffic from Reserve.

- It is not the intention of this project to remove traffic from Reserve Street. This project is designed to provide safe and efficient transport over the Bitterroot River.

This new bridge will create a raceway on South Avenue and not be safe for our children.

- Posted speed limits within this area are 35 mph. As with any area with a speed limit, enforcement is the key to reducing/eliminating drivers who are violating the posted speed limits.

Children walking/biking to Target Range School will have to cross South Avenue to reach the paved path on the south side of the street.

- This is an existing condition on portions of South Avenue and is not associated with the South Avenue Bridge project. The provision of safe pedestrian crossings on South Avenue was included in accordance with design standards at the time of construction of those trails. The *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* and the *Target Range Neighborhood Plan* identified increased traffic volumes on all roads east of the Bitterroot River regardless of the bridge location. The County will continue to provide safe pedestrian crossings in accordance with the most current standards as the need for trails and associated pedestrian crossings are identified. How will collisions with wildlife and vehicles be prevented with higher speeds and car volume across the river?
- The project will be designed to provide adequate stopping sight distances in accordance with County road design standards. The project design speed is 35 mph but wildlife barriers to prevent animals from crossing the road are not included in the project scope and would be virtually impossible to provide given the number of intersecting roads and private approaches. As a relatively rural area, collisions with wildlife are not uncommon on a vast majority of roads in both the City of Missoula and Missoula County and are difficult to avoid through design. The volume of traffic is not as important or relevant as individual driver responsibility for appropriate speeds for known conditions. Additional driver responsibility is even more important for appropriate speed and attentiveness for potentially unknown conditions when driving in an unfamiliar area.

What evaluation has been done of South Avenue regarding traffic, car, bike and walkway beyond the end of the bridge and the Blue Mountain Road?

- The *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* utilized traffic data for area roadways obtained from MDT's Bureau of Data and Statistics. The data included 20 years of traffic data for two locations: One on River Pines Road just west of Maclay Bridge and one located on North Avenue just west of Clements Road. A Travel Demand Model (TDM) was developed as part of the planning study, utilizing future land use information from the Missoula County Growth Policy to model to project year 2040 conditions.

The maps don't show the affect beyond the bridge east or west?

- The scope of this project is the bridge and associated approaches. Missoula County will address outlying roadway improvements with future funding.

Future of Maclay Bridge

Why can't we fix the existing bridge? It's more economical to upgrade Maclay/It can be rehabilitated for a fraction of the cost.

- The option to retrofit the existing bridge was considered as part of the *Maclay Bridge 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 on new alignment as an 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.

Why are you not considering rehabilitating Maclay Bridge as part of your environmental process?

- The *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* eliminated rehabilitation of Maclay Bridge as a viable option; therefore, the environmental process is focused on the South Avenue Bridge.

Will you rock the bank north of the existing Maclay Bridge upon removal?

- The existing river banks at the Maclay bridge site will be restored using riprap or a bio-engineered bank.

Floodplain/Erosion

Does the new floodplain map affect future subdivision north of the current bridge?

- The Montana DNRC has requested additional study of the floodplain associated with O'Brien Creek. Additional information will be available during the submittal of the environmental document, scheduled for November 2016.

Who can we get a new floodplain map from?

- The revised floodplain map will need to be reviewed and approved by FEMA upon completion of the project. A draft version of the map is available on the project website (www.southavenuebridge.com), under "Documents" and Public Meeting #2 Boards.

Project Funding

The cost and how this will be paid for is not addressed.

- Estimated costs for the replacement alternatives were provided as part of the August 16, 2016 public meeting and are provided on the project website (www.southavenuebridge.com), under "Documents" and Public Meeting #2. The project cost estimate is updated as the design develops at project delivery milestones. All costs associated with removing Maclay Bridge and constructing the South Avenue Bridge are paid for by Federal Bridge Funds.

What is the cost of the new bridge as opposed to renovating the existing bridge?

- Renovation of the existing bridge is not part of the project scope. This option was eliminated as part of the *Maclay Bridge Planning Study*.

How is the project going to affect our tax base?

- There will be neither a special improvement district (SID) created nor additional tax revenue generated specifically for the Public Works Department to pay for any portion of the bridge or the approach roadways. All costs associated with removing Maclay Bridge and constructing the South Avenue Bridge are paid for by Federal Bridge Funds. While Missoula County requested that Bridge Funds be allocated to improve South Avenue to Humble Road since improvements there will be directly related to the project, the Montana Department of Transportation limited Bridge Funds to the point at which the designed approaches to the bridge physically intercept existing asphalt roads, whatever their condition. As an existing County-maintained road, any off-site improvements to South Avenue will be paid for entirely within

existing Public Works maintenance budgets and phased over multiple fiscal years, if necessary, so that regularly scheduled County-wide work will not be impacted.

Is there going to be a reduction of the speed zone?

- Local governments are limited by state statute for the establishment of posted speed limits. Montana Code Annotated (MCA) §61-8-310 limits the minimum speed limit to 35 MPH outside of an urban district. By MCA definition (§61-8-102), an urban district is “The territory contiguous to and including any street that is built up with structures devoted to business, industry, or dwelling houses at intervals of less than 100 feet for a distance of one-fourth mile or more.” There are three contiguous properties on the north side of South Avenue between Pleasant Avenue and Woodlawn Avenue that have property frontages of less than 100 feet. Given the limitations by state statute, Missoula County cannot legally post or enforce a speed limit on South Avenue less than 35 MPH.
- School zone speed limits are also addressed in MCA §61-8-310 and the required signs through the school zone are guided by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The MUTCD is a federal guideline that has been adopted by all 50 states as the standard for developing uniform and consistent traffic control. As a Federal Aid Urban (FAU) route, South Avenue is maintained by Missoula County but is under the jurisdiction of MDT. MDT approved the 25 MPH school zone for Target Range in the early 1980’s and that has been perpetuated ever since with the latest signing upgrade being in the fall of 2010 after the 2009 edition of the MUTCD was adopted. Missoula County communicated with the Target Range School superintendent and the Missoula County Sheriff’s Department about limitations, the proposed changes and how the school could assist with additional improvements. However, no additional improvements were requested by the school district.
- The project will be designed to provide adequate stopping sight distances in accordance with County road design standards. The project design speed is 35 mph.

Will South Avenue have the much needed width expansion to accommodate the additional traffic?

- The proposed bridge is two-lanes and Missoula County intends to maintain South Avenue as a two-lane road.

The public was told one-lane bridges could not get federal funds. Wrong.

- Funding for the South Avenue Bridge will be provided by Federal Bridge Funds. This funding source has the objective of addressing safety. As there are safety issues with the existing Maclay Bridge (travel level of a single-lane bridge, identified crash trends, and emergency services access to residents west of the river), Maclay Bridge, even if rehabilitated, would not qualify for MDT funds. Missoula County has confirmed with the MDT Environmental Services Bureau that funding is not available for rehabilitating Maclay Bridge whether it has historic status or not. Given the volume of traffic identified, Federal Bridge Funds cannot be used to construct a single one-lane bridge and a couplet with individual one-lane bridges is not financially feasible.

Public Involvement Process

Public participation must include Q&A pursuant to NEPA

- FHWA and Montana regulations for implementing NEPA and MEPA, respectively, include specific public involvement requirements that are linked to the level of environmental processing for a proposed action. These regulations require FHWA and MDT to provide early coordination and continuing opportunities during the project development process for the public to be involved in

the identification of social, economic and environmental impacts. Missoula County is following these procedures through development of the South Avenue Bridge Project by providing frequent and ongoing opportunity for public participation in a transparent and objective manner.

- In addition, in accordance with the provisions of Appendix A to 23 CFR 450 “Linking the Transportation Planning and NEPA Processes” and the Montana Business Process to Link Planning Studies and NEPA/MEPA Reviews, the results of public involvement conducted during the *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* are being used in the NEPA/MEPA process. Development of the *Maclay Bridge Planning Study* included four separate public meetings (MDT planning studies typically include only two meetings) providing opportunity for public participation in a variety of formats. Additionally, Missoula County Commissioners held a public hearing on April 17, 2013, hearing comments from the public regarding the replacement of the Maclay Bridge.
- The public is encouraged to keep up-to-date on project development and submit comments at any point by visiting the project website at www.southavenuebridge.com.

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.

- MDT has examined the north-south corridor through Missoula multiple times and has never identified a west side bypass as an alternative. There is simply no feasible or logical route through or around existing residential and commercial development or topographical constraints.

What are the plans for recreational river access (parking, boat launch, bike/ped access) either at South Avenue or Maclay Bridge?

- River access at either site is not part of the scope of this project. River access is being considered separately by agencies that have interest in and jurisdiction over recreational use of public lands.
- Dedicated river access will not be provided at South Avenue as part of this project.
- Accommodations of a parking lot, boat launches, etc., will not be provided at the Maclay Bridge site as part of this project.

Who are the individuals responsible for making the final decisions and will this be open for public vote when that happens?

- Following completion of the environmental document, Missoula County Commissioners will hold a public hearing to gather public input and the commission will authorize moving forward with the final design if all environmental documentation has been accepted by the administrative authorities.