



BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

EIS Working Group Meeting #1: Meeting Summary

Thursday, November 8, 2018 | 4 - 6 p.m.
Port of Hood River Commission Room

In Attendance

Committee: Betty Barnes, City of Bingen; Peter Cornelison, City of Hood River; Jon Davies, ODOT Reg. 1 ACT; Jessica Olsen on behalf of Lorrie DeKay, Gorge Commission; Rich McBride, Hood River County; David Poucher, City of White Salmon; Matt Ransom, SW RTC; Brian Shortt, Port of Hood River.

Guests: Kristen Stallman, ODOT; Michael Williams, WSDOT

Consultants: Angela Findley, WSP; Anne Pressentin, EnviroIssues

Members of the Public: John Everitt, Port of Hood River Commissioner

Port of Hood River Staff: Michael McElwee, Executive Director; Kevin Greenwood, Bridge Replacement Project Director; Jana Scoggins, Administrative Specialist

Media: Emily Fitzgerald, Hood River News

Anne Pressentin began the meeting with a review of the meeting objectives, which were to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of this Working Group and encourage feedback to seek and create collective recognition of project purpose, history, and EIS schedule. She noted the opportunity for public comment in the second half of the meeting. She also stated her role as a neutral facilitator, which is assist the committee in reaching its objectives. Her role is not to advocate for one position or another.

Working Group Charge and Purpose

Kevin Greenwood presented how the Working Group will influence the project to complete the environmental process for the bridge replacement project. He said the Working Group provides a feedback loop to the project support team. It is his goal to ensure everyone can be heard. He said the Working Group's tasks can be categorized into three areas:

- Areas that need refinement from the Draft EIS developed in 2003
- Community engagement and how to best communicate about the project
- If needed, collaborating to design a process to address a substantial change to the preliminary preferred alternative identified in the Draft EIS. He said if this occurs, the change would have to go back to the local governments for discussion.

The Working Group will not be discussing decisions unrelated to the NEPA process, including governance of the new bridge and setting of toll rates.

Member Introductions

Each Working Group member and members of the audience then introduced themselves, their role and goal for their participation in the group.

Members:

Jessica Olsen, Natural Resources and Land Use Planner, Gorge Commission: This process is an exciting fulfillment of the Gorge Commission's management plan. We are members of the community too are interested in the pedestrian facilities that will be added to the new bridge.

Jon Davies, ODOT Reg. 1 Area Commission on Transportation: The bridge is a big tie between communities. It's the most important thing to be improved for the future and economic vitality of the region.

Rich McBride, Hood River County Commissioner: My role is to learn information and provide it to the Hood River County Commission about what the Port is doing and ensure external folks have conduit to project information. The bridge is a critical piece of infrastructure.

David Poucher, Mayor, City of White Salmon: The bridge is the single most important piece of infrastructure in the region and decision for the next 100 years. We need to get the bridge built. It needs to be an affordable solution. We are one central community tied together by this bridge. Let's get a bridge built.

Brian Shortt, Port of Hood River Commissioner: I agree with the mayor's comments. This project will be a great enhancement to the community. I want to be able to look at a finished bridge and say, "Look at what WE did."

Betty Barnes, Mayor, City of Bingen: I agree with what everyone has said. For safety reasons, it's important to happen as soon as we can get it done. Would like to see it bring us together. We should be considered neighboring communities rather than separate states. The economic necessity is astronomical.

Matt Ransom, Executive Director, Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council: RTC led the prior studies. We provide a continuity role from the Draft EIS and Bridge TS&L. And, we are a link to the communities of Klickitat, Skamania and Clark counties. Bridge replacement is a strategic issue. Without hesitation, I can say it is a priority for our Washington partners. I will be a conduit back to the RTC Board and want to partner with both sides of the river.

Peter Cornelison, City of Hood River Councilmember: My goal is to work collaboratively and provide good direction to come up with a good replacement.

Others in attendance:

Michael McElwee, Executive Director, Port of Hood River: This is the number one priority for the Port Commission. We hope today is the beginning of increasing the sense of partnership among Oregon and Washington stakeholders and creating an intentional and collective vision. Hoping for a Record of Decision in 18 months.

Kristen Stallman, Oregon Dept. of Transportation: The Oregon Legislature prioritized this project with the funds to finish the environmental phase. My role is to ensure that the money is spent wisely and the project is a success.

Michael Williams, Washington State Dept of Transportation: I am a conduit to WSDOT. I will answer questions about connections to Washington roads. I'm here to help and support the work.

Angela Findley, WSP: I am with the consulting team to deliver the EIS. The team is committed to completing the environmental phase.

John Everitt, Port of Hood River Commission: I'm here because of the gravity of the bridge and agree with what I've heard this evening

Discussion:

Jon Davies said the project should build on the momentum started to get the project done. Brian Shortt said the project should be used as a model for how a project can be done quickly.

EIS Working Group Draft Charter

Prior to presenting the draft charter, Ms. Pressentin presented the key themes of interviews conducted in September 2018 with most members of the EIS Working Group and several stakeholders in the community. She then presented the draft Charter, which was informed by the interviews and defines the role of the Working Group to support the completion of the NEPA process.

Ms. Jessica Olson asked whether a member of CRITFC has been identified. Kevin Greenwood said that discussions with CRITFC were initiated, but that individual discussions with the four tribes will occur in the future. The tribal representative(s) may take some time to determine.

Commissioner Shortt asked that the project team spell out acronyms. He also would like to look for efficiencies by having all the agencies work together.

Mr. Rich McBride and Mr. Matt Ransom requested that additional changes are made to the methods of providing information related to the project outside of this working group. Kevin Greenwood confirmed that monthly reports will be sent out to the Committee, and additional information will be regularly updated on the Port of Hood River website.

Mr. David Poucher asked that the NEPA schedule is reviewed and adjusted to aim for a shorter deadline. This subject was generally agreed upon by all members of the working group.

Mr. Jon Davies wants to see momentum build in the community about the project. He feels the quicker the project can advance, the better.

Ms. Barnes recommended that the group put the pressure on ourselves to move this project forward.

Members agreed the following edits were needed before the Charter could be finalized:

- Add Working Group members' collective sense of urgency for getting the project done and members' desire to speed the completion of the NEPA process
- Add to the section on the role of project staff the importance of regular communication to inform the Working Group on both NEPA and non-NEPA activities related to bridge replacement

Anne Pressentin said a track changes version of the charter would be sent to the members for their review before the next meeting.

NEPA Process

Ms. Angela Findley provided an overview of key decisions documented in the Draft EIS , including the statement of purpose and need, alternatives development and screening, preliminary preferred alternative. Ms. Betty Barnes and Mr. Jon Davies commented that to move forward the Committee must recognize the sense of urgency in this project.

Ms. Findley noted that part of the NEPA process is to identify which alternatives are going to solve the problem statement. Corridors and facility types were evaluated and the alternatives with lowest impacts to transportation, environment, recreation and cost were selected to advance in further review. The preliminary preferred alternative is a fixed span bridge with 14 spans and 450-foot horizontal and 80-foot vertical navigation clearance. Ms. Findley reported that only 12 comments were received during the comment period from January 2 – February 17, 2004.

Ms. Findley reviewed the next types of decisions moving forward which include design refinements, architectural treatments, scope of environmental analysis, impacts to environment, mitigation measures and others.

Questions, comments and discussion. Some answers were provided by members with personal knowledge of the 2003 Draft EIS.

Q: Was light rail considered?

A: No. Transit vehicles using the bridge today would be accommodated.

Q: Is the bike/ped lane only on one side?

A: Yes. Having a ped/bike facility on two sides, the cost goes up.

A: In previous work, a stakeholder group wanted the bridge to fit in with the environment. Members wanted to keep the bridge narrow and thought the bike/ped lane was best placed on the west side.

Q: How many travel lanes?

A: Two lanes. The traffic analysis didn't warrant three vehicle travel lanes.

A: The bike/ped lane could be used as a third lane. The stakeholder group thought ahead and recommended a 12-foot bike/ped lane so it could accommodate vehicles during emergency response.

Q: Is designation of the existing bridge as a historic resource likely?

A: During the feasibility study, the project team did determine that the bridge is a significant historic property. A mitigation plan would be needed to remove the existing bridge. It is a manageable concern.

A: The USFS archeologist would need to be involved because the bridge is in the National Scenic Area.

Q: Has the landing on the Washington side been considered? Would it affect the planned park?

A: The park will be considered. No conflicts are seen.

Q: What about the Treaty Fishing Access Site?

A: Prior studies sought to avoid the site. The bridge landing would be east of the fishing site.

Q: Some new residents have asked if the new bridge can be more dynamic?

A: It's worth having a conversation about whether the concrete structure is still preferred. It will be massive. History of old bridge should be acknowledged.

A: At the end of the NEPA process, the bridge design will be approximately 10% complete. It's important to focus on items related to NEPA process.

A: Any change in the bridge type or other elements that increase the cost should be tied to a relative increase in costs or toll rates so that the community understands the linkage.

Q: In recent years both Washington and Oregon Departments of Transportation identified the Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge as part of the National Highway System which could be deemed beneficial during the replacement project.

A: It bolsters the importance of replacement.

The Committee requested more information be gathered about the cost of bridge types and what the trade-offs would be, including the effect to toll rates.

Q: Would the preliminary preferred alternative's location on the north shore require land acquisition and right of way dedication?

A: It's a question. Land owners include WSDOT, Klickitat County and a private entity.

Q: What Tribal conversations occurred in the past and how will it occur in the future?

A: It will be discussed with Federal Highway Administration and ODOT.

Q: What were key issues from tribal governments previously?

A: Unknown. Possibly there was a preference by Tribal governments for fewer piers in the water and a concern with snow plow discharge.

Q: Will removing the existing bridge be a mitigation?

A: There are impacts associated with demolition and many benefits with a new bridge.

Public Comment:

No members of the public audience provided comment.

Preliminary Preferred Alternative

Based on the presentation and discussion of the previous NEPA process, Anne Pressentin asked the group whether they supported the preliminary preferred alternative as the preferred alternative. All members present concurred with the preliminary preferred alternative by showing a "thumbs up."

EIS Schedule and Process

Angela Findley presented the project schedule, which currently would conclude by Jan. 2021. She said she heard the group's desire to move quickly. The project team is discussing possibilities of a shorter process with FHWA.

Adjourn

Before adjourning, the group confirmed areas of agreement and action items:

Areas of agreement from the Working Group:

- Get the EIS process done quickly. Need to figure out how this can occur.
- Add sense of urgency among the Working Group members to the charter
- Preliminary preferred alternative should proceed

Need more information:

- Can NEPA be complete in 18 months?
- Relative cost of bridge types and the trades offs of each
- Would the preliminary preferred alternative require right of way purchase?
- What were the Tribal government concerns previously – if any?

Parking lot/actions:

- Keep Working Group apprised of non-NEPA discussions.
- Communicate open house date/time/location to the Working Group

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