



BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

EIS Working Group Meeting #2: Meeting Summary

Thursday, February 21 2019 | 4-6 p.m.
White Salmon Room #112
Pioneer Center, 501 NE Washington St, White Salmon, WA

In Attendance

Committee: Tim Counihan, City of Hood River; Lorrie DeKay, Gorge Commission; Rex Johnston, Klickitat County; Rich McBride, Hood River County; Brian Shortt, Port of Hood River;

Consultants: Angela Findley, WSP; Mat Dolata, WSP; Anne Pressentin, EnviroIssues

Members of the Public: John Everitt, Port of Hood River Commissioner; Peter Cornelison, Friends of the Columbia Gorge; Krystyna Wolniakowski, Gorge Commission

Staff: Michael McElwee, Executive Director; Kevin Greenwood, Bridge Replacement Project Director; Jana Scoggins, notetaker, Kristin Stallman, ODOT; Michael Williams, WSDOT.

Media: Emily Fitzgerald, Hood River News

Meeting Objectives:

The meeting began with member and public introductions.

Anne Pressentin reviewed the objectives of the meeting which included finalizing changes to the EIS Working Group Charter, reviewing outcomes of recent public process, understanding member perspectives on results of traffic analysis, and identifying key questions for next phase of the study. The Committee members approved the final version of the November 8, 2018 meeting summary.

Mr. Brian Shortt announced his retirement from the Port of Hood River Commission and introduced John Everitt, Port of Hood River Commissioner, who will replace Mr. Shortt and serve on the Working Group Committee starting in July 2019.

Working Group Charter:

Ms. Pressentin noted recent language, schedule and formatting changes to the Working Group Draft Charter. During the review, Committee members provided their additional feedback.

Mr. Brian Shortt suggested that a narrative be included in this charter about the reason why Native American Tribes are not part of this Working Group.

Mr. Kevin Greenwood noted that when the project first started, it was determined during the meeting with Department of Transportation Representatives that the level of involvement with the tribes

should be more of a formal government to government consultation and thus will be integrated into the environmental impacts statement (EIS) process.

Ms. Angela Findley noted that a paragraph can be added under the Membership section of the Charter that acknowledges the Tribes' roles in this project. Ms. Findley emphasized that impacts to their land and resources will be researched, and consultation with the Tribes will occur as part of the NEPA process.

Ms. Anne Presentin commented that Kevin Greenwood and the Port of Hood River have engaged Native American Consultants to help coordinating Tribal community involvement.

The Committee generally agreed that a section about Native American Tribes' consultation and how that is going to be approached should be included in the Charter. With that addition, the Working Group approved the charter by consensus.

Project Updates:

Ms. Angela Findley provided an overview of key updates. The project team received an acknowledgment of project initiation from US Coast Guard. The team also coordinated a clear path with Federal Highway Administration to complete the NEPA process and conducted a work session with the Port of Hood River Commission regarding a "sketch-level" Traffic and Revenue study.

Ms. Findley continued that the team is coordinating with U.S. Coast Guard to confirm the navigational clearance which is currently assumed to be 80 ft high. In order to receive a preliminary determination of the minimum clearance, a Navigation Impact Report will be submitted.

Mr. Michael McElwee asked what constitutes a final determination of the navigational clearance since the preliminary decision will be received in June 2019.

Ms. Findley responded that the final determination will be received with the bridge permit.

Mr. McElwee noted that the final determination could be different from the preliminary decision which could result in some potential redesign. Presumably, it appears not to be likely that there will be significant deviation. However, Mr. McElwee continued that the if difference is substantial it would require significant changes to the engineering design. Mr. McElwee asked if the 20 ft differential is driven primarily by the dredge.

Ms. Findley noted that the US Army Corps of Engineers' dredge is the likely vessel that could require more than 80 ft of vertical clearance. She continued that the team is aware of the risk to the bridge regarding the vertical clearance but is not anticipating that to be an issue due to the length of the bridge. The touchdowns where the new bridge lands will not be affected if the navigational channel section needs to be increased. Preliminary discussions with the structural team indicates that additional vertical clearance may be addressed with larger bridge footings.

Mr. Brian Shortt noted that there is an increased concern of the delta build-up coming from the Hood River, White Salmon River and the Deschutes River. This build up creates areas for fish predation.

Ms. Findley stated that the project team met with Federal Highway Administration to establish an approach on how to pick up on the previous work that was done in the Draft Environmental Statement in 2003. A technical reevaluation was done to determine how much of the data from the Draft EIS are relevant. It was determined that the supplemental draft EIS is needed due to the passage of time, changes in the governmental regulations, and subsequent designation of critical fish habitat under the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, the traffic analysis is out of date.

Ms. Findley concluded that the project team created their own charter between the agencies to define everyone's role and to commit to a time schedule.

Mr. Kevin Greenwood reported on the Traffic and Revenue Work Session with Port Commission on February 19, 2019. Mr. Greenwood noted that Rich Gobeille, Stantec Consulting, presented an introductory path forward on how this project could be financed. Mr. Greenwood noted that the Traffic and Revenue study is separate from the NEPA process, and multiple "sketch-analysis" scenarios were presented to show how the assumptions and methodologies can be used to develop a strategy. Stantec reported the next step is to start developing regional policies related to toll administration. Such discussions are outside the scope of the NEPA analysis. Mr. Greenwood said they may need to be led by another entity as the Port of Hood River may not be the future owner of a new bridge.

The committee discussed that the presence of future tolls will be disclosed in the supplemental draft EIS. Staff will discuss with ODOT and FHWA how much detail is required for the NEPA analysis.

Public Outreach Update

Ms. Anne Presentin reported that the project team organized several public outreach events which included online surveys, an open house session, Latinos en Accion Meeting, information tables, and many others. Ms. Presentin summarized that there were 697 responses to the online survey. The key themes from the outreach involved the excitement and sense of urgency to move forward, support for preliminary preferred alternative, need of more information, support for multi-modal and fixed-span bridge as well as the importance of having a bridge that withstands a seismic event.

There was a discussion on how to cross the language barrier and involve all members of the community. Ms. Angela Findley noted that an outreach mechanism is required to comply with the presidential Executive Order to determine if the project would have adverse, disproportionate effects on low-income or minority populations.

Ms. Anne Presentin continued that the project team is working with The Next Door, Inc. to efficiently involve diverse populations. She asked the members for additional suggestions. Members provided the following ideas:

- Ask City of Hood River staff and Mayor Blackburn
- School-based outreach with interactive projects
- Hand out flyer with information at toll booth
- Distribute information to BreezeBy email list

Presentation of Traffic Analysis Results

Mat Dolata, Senior Traffic Manager at WSP presented the traffic analysis objectives to identify potential impacts of new bridge and to focus on traffic operations at study intersections. Mr. Dolata stressed that this is a preliminary analysis, and that many aspects of the study will be reviewed in greater detail. Mr. Dolata reviewed the assumed build and no-build scenarios and how that will affect the mobility standards and intersection re-design.

The analysis found traffic is predicted to increase about 2 percent annually from 2018 to 2045 under the no-build scenario. The results are similar to other studies. The biggest traffic impact would be at the SR-14/bridge approach road intersection. As part of the bridge replacement, a new intersection would be constructed and would be sized to address the increased traffic volumes in the area. Through coordination with WSDOT, the project team was advised to consider a roundabout for this intersection; other intersection types may be considered as well. Mr. Dolata concluded that no significant impacts at any intersections would occur due to bridge replacement; this is due to the capacity of the bridge remaining at two travel lanes (one lane in each direction).

Mr. Dolata answered several questions during the presentation:

Q: Has consulted ODOT engineers with regards to traffic effect on exit 63?

A: This is a preliminary analysis. A full, in-detail coordination with ODOT engineers will happen at a later date.

Q: Ms. Stallman asked if weekend traffic counts were analyzed.

A: Weekday and seasonal traffic data was looked at.

Q: Ms. Stallman asked if the project would evaluate the Button Junction intersection and determine if a signal needs to be added.

A: The project is not adding an significant volume to this intersection, so mitigation is unlikely needed.

Q: Ms. Stallman asked if the SR-14 roundabout is part of the project.

A: At this time yes, because the project relocates the intersection.

Q: How the presented intersections were chosen?

A: ODOT and the Port worked collaboratively on choosing these intersections, and the traffic data are presented on the overall percentage growth by 2045.

Q: Was a toll booth assumed and the associated congestion?

A: All electronic tolling was assumed in the 2045 build and no-build scenarios.

Q: Why was 2045 was selected for the analysis?

A: The planning horizon was selected in collaboration with staff and 20 years is usual.

Q: Is the Port still assuming a two-lane bridge?

A: Yes.

Mr. Michael Williams commented that the Washington State Department of Transportation will look at a roundabout intersection as the primary solution to traffic mobility. Other alternatives will be considered only if the roundabout will not be identified as preferred design. Ms. Findley said the intersection is being improved because the design assumes relocation of the current intersection, not because of any added congestion as a result of the project.

Q: Can a roundabout realistically be designed at the bridge head?

A: It will need to be sized correctly. Mr. Rex Johnston noted Klickitat County owns the property near the Washington bridge head. The City of White Salmon is proposing a park on this property, but the County wants to coordinate with the bridge project so conflicts are avoided.

Q: What is the vehicle capacity of the bridge?

A: About 1600 vehicles per hour each way. The traffic projections do not hit that. The intersections are the limiting factor.

Public/Member Comment:

Peter Cornelison: On behalf of Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Peter Cornelison said the aesthetics of the new bridge are important. His organization seeks to limit visual impacts on the surroundings from the new bridge. He requested information on the number of people in the survey results who desired a "statement" bridge in the Gorge. He also stated the importance of bicycle lane for the community. Mr. Cornelison also asked for clarification on how the 54% increase in traffic volumes by 2045 was calculated.

Upcoming Work:

Ms. Angela Findley reported that the project team is planning to invite agencies mid-March to be involved in the NEPA process as a "participating agency" which would allow for further review and comment role on Supplemental Draft EIS, Agency Coordination Plan, Mitigation Plan, and many others.

Ms. Findley continued that there are many technical studies such as Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Land Use and others that need to be evaluated.

Mr. Michael McElwee commented that archaeological resources are not widely publicized but important part of the project, and the effort to assess the archaeological, cultural and historic resources will need to be addressed early in the process. Ms. Angela Findley confirmed that that effort is scheduled for summer of 2019.

Ms. Anne Pressentin added that an analysis of toll rate sensitivity, bridge aesthetics, and development of bicycle and pedestrian connections will be researched. She asked members to provide ideas on considerations for the next phase of work.

Mr. Tim Counihan suggested that the bridge should be subordinate of the scenic area. Mr. Brian Shortt promoted the idea of taking photos from the bridge as opposed of the bridge.

Additional ideas included:

- Draw inspiration from the I-84 strategy on aesthetics
- Bridge should blend in with surroundings
- New bridge should be affordable and functional
- Consider non-vehicle travel, especially on the Washington side
- Coordinate with the Port of Cascade Locks on US Bike Route 20
- Connections from Hood River on the pedestrian bridge to the Hood River-White Salmon Bridge
- Connections from replacement bridge to downtown Hood river on bike

Adjourn:

Before adjourning, Ms. Anne Presentin summarized three major action items which were formulating letters for participating agencies and making available to Working Group members, making the traffic analysis results available online, and finalizing edits to the charter.