



BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

EIS Working Group Meeting #5: Meeting Summary

Thursday, September 17, 2020 | 4-6 p.m.
Port of Hood River – via Zoom
1000 E Port Marina Drive, Hood River OR 97031

In Attendance:

Committee: Kate McBride, City of Hood River; Jon Davies, ODOT Reg. 1 ACT; Lorrie DeKay, Gorge Commission; Marla Keethler, City of White Salmon; Matt Ranson, SW RTC; John Everitt, Port of Hood River; David Sauter, Klickitat County; Rich McBride, Hood River County; Kristi Chapman, Port of Hood River.

Consultants: Angela Findley, WSP; Scott Polzin, WSP; Anne Presentin, WSP

Members of the Public: Dale Robins

Staff: Michael McElwee, Executive Director; Kevin Greenwood, Bridge Replacement Project Director

Media: None.

Introduction:

The meeting began with member and public introductions.

Anne Presentin reviewed the meeting agenda which included project updates, Supplemental Draft EIS: Preview, and public involvement plans. Ms. Presentin acknowledged the meeting summary for September 2019. Summary will be finalized if no further comments are received.

Project Update:

Ms. Presentin turned to Kevin Greenwood to provide project updates. Mr. Greenwood commented that there has been a lot of early community outreach including surveys and interviews with people in the community. The 2003 Draft EIS technical analyses were re-evaluated. The purpose and need for alternative EC-2 was confirmed. Updated and conducted new environmental and traffic impact analysis. There has been extensive agency outreach and tribal consultation. Advanced the bridge approach design and working with WSDOT to incorporate their roundabout style. Obtained a preliminary navigation determination from the US Coast Guard that will widen the navigation opening and remove the lift. Prepared photo-simulations. Developed a conceptual aesthetic treatment. Also administrative drafts are in process so that the supplemental draft can go out in November.

Mr. Greenwood stated that Ms. Presentin was a huge help in preparing public engagement activities which included stakeholder interviews. Open house in 2019. Information tables at several locations. Extensive outreach to Hispanic and Latin American communities.

Mr. Greenwood provided an overview of work accomplished since September 2019 which included 4 administrative drafts of the Supplemental Draft EIS. Technical reviews from ODOT and FHWA. Also conducted historic property and archaeological surveys on both sides of the river. Prepared multiple conceptual construction scenarios which includes construction and demolition of the current bridge. Completed biological assessment and has been submitted to FHWA, NMFS, and USFWS. Prepared section 4(f) analysis that will be part of the Supplemental Draft EIS.

Mr. Greenwood noted the tribal consultation and outreach to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fishing Commission has been very important for this project. The Ports position has been to consult with tribes beyond NEPA through the development of design, permitting, and construction.

Mr. Green presented photos of the new bridge from the White Salmon treaty fishing access site to help the tribes have a better understanding of the project.

Mr. Greenwood stated that the Bi-State Working Group (BSWG) was established by six local agencies with the purpose of developing a regional governance structure for advocacy of policies, funding, and construction of the replacement bridge. The main purpose of the group is to establish a vision for long-term Bi-State Bridge Authority and developing a MOU that formalizes the interim BSWG. As part of the MOU there will be a work plan prioritizing required tasks necessary for constructing a new bridge.

Mr. Greenwood asked if there were any questions or comments and turned over to Matt Ransom. Mr. Ransom thanked Mr. Greenwood for the presentation he gave at the RTC board of directors meeting in July where he gave an update on this project.

Supplemental Draft EIS Review:

Mr. Greenwood turned to Angela Finley to review the Supplemental Draft EIS. Ms. Finley explained the two build alternatives. The preferred alternative is EC-2, and the alternative is EC-3. Ms. Finley presented images of the existing bridge opening versus the replacement bridge that will have a wider opening to navigate through. The replacement bridge will be a fixed span bridge with a maximum vertical clearance of 90 feet. The 90-foot clearance has been confirmed by the US Coast Guard to be sufficient for today's vessels and known future vessels.

Ms. Finley presented an exhibit of EC-2 which shows a new two-lane roundabout with marked crosswalks. New shared use path across bridge. New stormwater detention and water quality treatment facilities. Elimination of toll booth.

Ms. Finley reviewed the impact analysis starting with land use. EC-2 2.8 ac property acquisition; 3 full parcels; 12 partial parcels. EC-2 does impact Port property and operations. EC-3 has more property acquisition and similar numbers on the parcels that would be affected. There are 8 commercial businesses and 5 hotel suites that would be displaced from that alternative. Overall benefits would be a new shared use path for pedestrians and bicycles on the bridge with 2 overlooks. Improved travel times for all vehicles. Elimination of weight and height restrictions.

One member asked if the 2.8 ac on EC-2 includes the Port property. Ms. Finley responded by stating that it would include the Port property.

Ms. Finley continued with the impacts on minority and low-income populations. The main physical impact would be air and dust emissions, noise and underwater noise impacts, vibration, turbidity, in-water

obstacles and detours for tribal fishers. The financial burden to low-income households from any potential toll increases. Disproportionately high and adverse impacts to minority and low-income populations.

Ms. Finley went on to say that for local and regional economies there are overall benefits. Benefits include improved regional river connection for freight, workers and residents. The bridge would offer a reliable cross-river route to access jobs, services, shopping and recreation. Construction would provide 70-80 full-time construction jobs for 6 years.

Ms. Finley continued with parks and recreation. There are 3 facilities that need to be evaluated for parks or trails that include Marina Park and Boat Basin, Waterfront Trail, and proposed Bridge Park. There would be a wider bridge crossing over Waterfront Trail and Bridge Park. Also, a loss of 18 parking spaces at the Port (3 at boat launch, 15 at Port office).

One of the members asked if the loss of parking spaces was included in the 2.8 ac. Ms. Finley responded that it would be within that acreage.

Ms. Finley explained that the current bridge is a historic resource and by its removal it would be considered an adverse effect. The team will be working with both Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the Washington Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation to come up with a plan to resolve the adverse effects. Hood River Loops (HCRH), SP&S (BNSF) Railway, OR&N (UPRR) Railroad are also historic resources. Including 5 historic houses with no adverse effect.

Ms. Finley went on to talk about the waterways and water quality. There is potential for hazardous material spills during construction. There will be a lot of mitigation measures that will be in place to minimize the spills. Overall benefit with stormwater management to collect and treat runoff on bridge. Vegetation and wetland impact on EC-2 would be the vegetation removal of 3.32 ac; 0.26 wetland and buffer impact. EC-3 has a higher vegetation removal; 0.17 wetland and buffer impact.

Ms. Finley continued with the impact on fish and wildlife. Many of the impacts are related to construction activities. There would be limited work outside the regulated in-water work windows (Nov 15-Mar15 with possible early start on Oct 1). One of the biggest impacts would be pile driving – noise, vibration.

Dave Sauter asked if the waterfront park on the Washington side would be used as mitigation for those impacts. Ms. Finley responded by stating that they have not come to specific mitigation measures yet.

Ms. Finley continued with air quality and greenhouse gases. The impact to air quality would be low. There would be higher emissions during construction from equipment, dust during construction.

Ms. Finley briefly commented on the visual and noise impacts. There is a fair amount of visual simulations that have been done from multiple locations. Ms. Finley noted that the noise would temporarily increase during construction. It was determined that the noise impact is less from the traffic related to the bridge and mostly related to the traffic noise on I-84.

Ms. Finley noted that it is possible to encounter contaminated materials during construction. The benefit in the future would be that the spills from vehicles would be contained and treated.

Ms. Finley discussed other items that will be added to the Supplemental Draft EIS which include treaty fishing rights, archaeological resources, cumulative effects, section 4(f) and section 6(f).

Ms. Finley exhibited a timeline of the project. Supplemental Draft EIS will be published in November 2020. Public comment will run from Mid-November 2020 to the end of December 2020. Response to public comments will be conducted January-March 2021. Preparations for final EIS/ROD will begin April-July 2021.

Feedback on Community Interest:

Ms. Finley asked what topics the community would be the most interested in. One member commented that the community would be most interested in the time frame for the new bridge, and advised caution when talking about EC-3, and make sure EC-2 is well represented as the preferred alternative.

John commented that the current bridge can be quite loud near the recreation area by the hotel. John questioned if the new bridge would be quieter. Ms. Finley replied by stating that it is uncertain what the noise level will be with the new bridge. The tone will change, but in terms of decibel there is not a big difference. John asked if there was another noise model that could be used to measure the noise level. Ms. Finley turned to Jeff Buckland for a response. Mr. Buckland stated that the standard noise model is set by FHWA for these types of projects and are somewhat constrained in terms of what type of model is allowable.

Kate McBride commented that the community might be interested in the look of the bridge. Ms. McBride also noted that another big question would be the toll fees and requested that there be more information regarding the toll.

David Sauter commented that the community would be most interested in the timing of the project. Mr. Sauter added that people might question if this will ever come to fruition.

Matt Ransom noted that the community would be interested in the aesthetics of the bridge. Mr. Ransom also recommended a clear expression of what Washington's share might be.

Ms. Pressentin noted that there are current constraints such as COVID-19, attention spans, and digital divide. Ms. Pressentin reviewed the activities for public comment. Ms. Pressentin asked what audiences will be missed with planned activities, or what would expand the reach of outreach.

Mr. Ransom commented that the RTC Board of Directors meetings are broadcasted on local cable access tv and would be a great way to get the word out. Mr. Ransom also suggested online open house as another form of outreach.

Ms. McBride suggested signage on the current bridge noting where someone could get more information on the bridge replacement project.

Mr. McBride suggested a reader board on the waterfront trail that explains what is going on with the bridge.

Michael McElwee noted that there are two variable messages signs with public meeting information on them. Mr. McElwee commented that the Port has 23,000-24,000 Constant Contact accounts that could be used for notifications.

Ms. Pressentin asked if anyone has seen any other methods in the Gorge that have worked for public comment. David commented that if it's something that people care about; they will comment. David also recommended targeting people who use the bridge.

Mr. McBride emphasized the need to reach out to disadvantaged people. Mr. McBride suggested handing out information at the toll both for those who pay cash to inform them that they might not be able to pay cash tolls in the future.

Adjourn:

Ms. Presentin noted that the next meeting will be at the beginning of the year after public comment. Ms. Presentin also commented that there will be more information on the mitigation plans that will be included in the EIS. Ms. Finley commented that there were a few requests about the esthetics, and toll rate structure that should be talked about as well.

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