



BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

EIS Working Group Meeting #6: Meeting Summary

Friday, March 4, 2021 | 4-6 p.m.
Port of Hood River – via Zoom
1000 E Port Marina Drive, Hood River OR 97031

In Attendance:

Committee: Jon Davies, ODOT Reg. 1 ACT; Lorrie DeKay, Gorge Commission; Kate McBride, City of Hood River; Marla Keethler, City of White Salmon; Matt Ransom, SW RTC; John Everitt, Port of Hood River; Margie Ziegler, Port of Klickitat; Bob Benton, Hood River County; Jacob Anderson, Klickitat County; Katherine Kiewit, City of Bingen - alt.

Consultants: Scott Polzin, WSP; Anne Presentin, WSP; Brian Carrico, WSP.

Members of the Public: Sally Bird-Gauvin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Jeff Buckland, ODOT; Michael Williams, WSDOT; Brian Carrico, WSP; Arthur Babbitts, Hood River County - alt.; Kristi Chapman, Port of Hood River - alt.; Kristen Stallman, ODOT

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 the outcome of the Supplemental Draft EIS Public comment period. Discussion of mitigation commitments. Followed by public comment and next steps.

Presentin asked if there were any questions or corrections for the September 2020 meeting summary. No questions or comments were received.

Presentin reviewed the accomplishments they have made thus far. Presentin commented that EC-2 continues to be the preferred route. EC-3 is still being analyzed.

Outcomes from Public Comment Period

Scott Polzin reviewed the notification activities that took place for the public comment period. Some forms of outreach included social media posts, news media, and emails. Several notifications were done in both English and Spanish. In total, there were 150 submittals and about 250 comments.

Polzin continued with the top 5 comment themes. The first theme was the Share Use Path with 86 comments. Most comments were supportive of the shared use path. They recommended that the path be

wider, use both sides of the bridge, and separate pedestrians from bicyclists. Second on the list was Miscellaneous Bridge Design Features such as wind protection, and speed limits. Third was the Union Labor. There was a clear drive by a labor union to get their members to write in and support the use of union labor during construction of the bridge. Fourth on the list is Bridge Aesthetics and the desire for an aesthetically pleasing bridge that fits with the scenic area. Finally, the fifth most popular comment was Tolling. Additional comments included general project support, process & timeline, treaty fishing rights, and water quality. Five comments specifically supported EC-2. Two comments supported EC-3. One comment supported both EC-2 and EC-3, but slightly preferred EC-3. There was also a comment that supported the no build alternative. There were also 7 comments asking if the existing bridge could stay.

Ransom said that based on the comments, the community wanted to aspire to have a better bridge and better outcome. Ransom believes this is a very strong signal for the group to keep moving forward.

Pressentin asked the Committee if they continued to recommend Alternative EC-2 as the Preferred Alternative based on Public Comment. The consensus was to continue to recommend Alternative EC-2 as the Preferred Alternative.

Mitigation Commitments

Brian Carrico reviewed the draft commitments outlined in SDEIS. One of the mitigation commitments is the 3.5 Treaty Fishing Rights. There would be ongoing consultation with the treaty tribes on pier design. For example, tying up boats and gill nets to the bridge. There was also some concern regarding the location of the new bridge in relationship to the tribal fishing access site. The bridge would be closer to the access site making it easier for people to view or throw garbage into the treaty fishing access site. This mitigation would explore opportunities to place screening along that area to mitigate for that impact.

Carrico continued with 3.9 Environmental Justice Populations which also includes Native American tribal members. This mitigation would consider incentives for hiring Native American companies for future construction-related work. Next would be to continue consultation with the tribes regarding impacts that could occur during construction.

Sally asked if they were coordinating directly with the tribes or just the tribal agencies. Carrico replied that they were coordinating with the tribes and the tribal agencies, as well as individual tribe members. Kevin Greenwood added that there have been at least 9 tribes that they have reached out to.

Carrico continued with tolling regarding 3.9 Environmental Justice Populations. The mitigation would involve developing a public engagement program and evaluation to assess strategies that could be used to mitigate undue burdens from tolls. Some strategies include reduced toll rates, toll revenues that would benefit low-income populations, and a variety of toll payment options.

Matt Ransom asked if any of these policies or ideas currently exist in the Port policy, and could it be noted in the final EIS. Greenwood responded by stating that one of the tasks that the post NEPA phase will include is a traffic and revenue policy discussion. Greenwood added that there first needs to be a public discussion on what the toll policies will be. One of the policies that is currently in place at the Port is for mass transit. There is an exemption for regional bus services. The Port also works with citizens on delinquent tolls and provides translation for informational materials.

Katherine Kiewit commented that the mitigation solutions are very specific in some areas, but the environmental justice portion seems to be recommendations. Kiewit asked if there was a way to clarify in the EIS that the mitigation recommendations in this area will be done. Carrico replied by stating that the

impacts are less known, and that its future decisions on tolling and how that is implemented, will need to be made by the Port. The EIS does set up the commitment to have a process to review those items, but it is too early to commit to a specific action.

Carrico continued with 3.13 Historic Resources. The removal of the Hood River bridge represents an adverse effect. Other resources were looked at within the area but found that the project would have no adverse effect on those resource, so no mitigation was needed. A draft mitigation plan is in preparation to account for the removal of the existing bridge. This would identify measures to be undertaken by the project to mitigate for that adverse impact. Archeological resources within the area are still being explored and have not made a final determination on whether there would be adverse impacts.

Arthur Babbitts commented that people keep asking him why the old bridge cannot be kept for ped and bike use. Babbitts asked if this was clearly explained in the EIS. Scott Polzin responded yes. The main reason is because the bridge would still need to be maintained. There would also be two bridges in the water obstructing navigation. One member commented that the grate is not good for riding bikes. The lift span would be another issue.

Greenwood stated that there was a comment on the Riverfront Park, and whether the current approach to the existing bridge could remain as a pedestrian access to the Riverfront Park. Carrico said that that could be explored in future design efforts.

Carrico moved forward with the 3.19 Visual impacts. There are three different aesthetic concepts: Historic, I-84 Design, and Contemporary. The EIS identifies a commitment to convene an advisory committee to review and recommend aesthetic treatments on the bridge.

Carrico asked given attendees' local knowledge what engagement processes are best suited to meet the mitigation commitments? Who and how should they be involved? What should be considered for the draft mitigation plan for the loss of the bridge?

Ransom commented that on bridge aesthetics there is an opportunity for momentum to be built and awareness. The Port could have two concurrent processes to continue to build support within the community. Ransom likes the idea to convene a group to make important decisions about the aesthetics.

Babbitts commented regarding Economic Justice that he would engage with groups like Mid-Columbia Community Action Group that administers utility bills or assistance for utility bills here locally.

One member commented on aesthetics. Public outreach should lead with national scenic area guidelines, so that people understand basic construct of being visually unobtrusive.

Another member asked if the tribes are being kept involved as they cross the river to meet fishing and ceremonial needs.

Marla Keethler suggested *Comunidades* to the list. Their focus is on civic engagement on environmental and social justice issues in the gorge.

Pressentin commented that there is a draft mitigation plan that needs to be developed for the loss of the bridge which is a historic resource. There is both documentation of it, and public engagement. Carrico added that the Seattle bridge took elements of the old bridge and incorporated it into the new bridge. Carrico also said that pieces of the old bridge could be displayed in a museum. These are examples of what can go into a mitigation plan.

Sally commented that both Oregon and Washington have an online historic encyclopedia. In Washington it is called History Link and in Oregon it is called The Oregon Encyclopedia Project. Sally said that these are excellent sources for the public.

John Davies said that he has received several comments asking how the bridge will be deconstructed and knowing that everything will be recycled. Davies believes this is more important than historical documentation.

Keethler commented that if it were feasible to keep some of the existing bridge, it would provide an opportunity for people to still experience that structure. Keethler added that it would be a great opportunity to take advantage of the available advancements and do an augmented reality on the pedestrian access of the new bridge. People walking across the new bridge could use their smartphone and see what the old bridge looked like.

Kate McBride commented that getting to work is a high priority for many, and costs need to be weighed when it comes to addons.

One member suggested incorporating a mural on the Washington side that would help with littering, cultural history, and privacy for the fishing site.

Presentin asked if there were any comments for the committee and or staff. No comments received.

Completion of Environmental Process & Next Steps:

Greenwood reviewed the project schedule. Greenwood commented they conducted drone and street photography that was requested by the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation in Washington. There will also be hydrographic evaluation on the North approach next week. The tribal fishers survey has been developed. Greenwood noted that they are still waiting for the biological opinion from NOAA Fisheries addressing the endangered species act policies.

Greenwood continued with the Bi-State Working Group (BSWG) activities which included the P3 Public Panel that occurred last month. BSWG will be reviewing the AE Design request for proposals. The government affairs team continues to meet with legislators and agency staff to generate feedback on the Bi-state Bridge Authority. Steve Siegel will be giving the BSWG an update on the governance phase for the 22 session on the next BSWG meeting. Port of Hood River Commission conducted a bridge replacement work session last week to review the capital maintenance plan on the existing bridge. They are also developing a project strategy for bridge replacement and reviewing the project communications.

Greenwood noted that the next meeting is scheduled for early fall of 2021.

Babbitts asked about the subsurface scan. Greenwood responded yes once the results come in it will be shared with the group.

Ransom thanked the BSWG for all their work. Greenwood asked Ransom what he has heard regarding bridge authority and i5 bridge replacement. Ransom gave a quick overview of what he has seen.

Adjourn:

Greenwood noted that all BSWG meetings are posted on the Port's YouTube channel. Presentin asked if there were any other questions or comments. No questions or comments received.

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