

Decision on Johnson Bridge detour awaits bids

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TILLAMOOK — With bids for the reconstruction of the county's 55-year-old Johnson Bridge on Long Prairie Road set to be opened Feb. 7, county commissioners must decide whether to accept a low bid for just the replacement bridge or both the bridge and a detour bridge for the duration of the construction project.

The County Roads Advisory Committee (CRAC) is waiting to make a recommendation to county commissioners until bids are opened and actual dollar amounts for the project — with and without the detour bridge — are known. It is expected that CRAC will meet in February, following the bid opening, to discuss a recommendation.

The bridge at MP 3.18 on Long Prairie, the last in a series of six in the county that were targeted for repair or replacement, financed by a \$8 million grant from the Oregon Transportation Infrastructure Act (OTEA).

As explained by Pat Oakes, engineering project supervisor with county Public Works, some \$6 million of that amount has been spent or is already committed.

That leaves \$2,494,430 available for the Johnson Bridge project, which engineers estimate could cost \$2,278,458, with the alternate bridge cost estimate set at \$527,042. The total is \$2,805,500 for both the bridge and detour bridge, leaving a deficit of \$311,070 for the combined project — and doesn't include unforeseen change orders for Johnson Bridge, and the ongoing Sorenson Bridge project, bid last summer and currently under construction.

"Estimates (by engineers) were developed in 2002, based on costs and inflation at that time," said Oakes. "Since then, the cost of concrete have been going up, and fuel is going up." He noted that the grant money has generated some \$530,000, but that may not be enough to beat the rise in costs.

So, included in the CRAC recommendation to commissioners would be suggestions on where the estimated \$311,000 shortfall would come from if a detour bridge were included in the project. The amount, of course, will vary, depending on the bid numbers.

Funding options suggested for discussion, Oakes said, include:

- The \$400,000 to \$500,000

road fund contingency.

- Road fund unappropriated balance in the next fiscal year budget — \$1.1 million in unappropriated money to help absorb impacts of a future decrease in federal forest funding.
- STP (Surface Transportation Fund). In past years, \$200,000 has been available for funding road overlay programs, but if this money is available, it would still only be a partial solution.
- Transfer from the county's general fund. This would be a long shot, as such a transfer has not happened since the 1990s.

As for whether to build a detour bridge, Oakes said the options, with some of the pros and cons, include:

- Option 1 — A detour bridge would allow full, existing traffic — estimated at approximately 1,500 vehicles daily — with no direct traffic impact to downtown Tillamook. It would be built at the legal load limit. But since it would be built in winter, the contractor may incur additional costs in clearing debris.
- Option 2a — No detour bridge, with no designated detour

route, would mean no additional signs would be required. However, emergency services may be affected, and there may be heavy and oversize loads to and from the Port of Tillamook Bay, and the public would be inconvenienced with no assistance in identifying an alternate route.

- Option 2b — No detour bridge, but with McCormick Loop designated as the detour route. It would cost less than the bridge. However, some improvements would need to be made to McCormick Loop. In addition, little citizen support is expected from residential areas on Third Street, and the traffic addition would create a less than ideal intersection at U.S. 101.
- Option 2c — No detour bridge, but with a SR 6 and U.S. 101 detour route would accomplish a designated signed route, and would cost less than the detour bridge.

But little city support is likely for the oversize loads going through the city, especially when it adds to summer traffic congestion.

During a CPAC meeting last month, Oakes was asked whether a new bridge could be built next to the current bridge, with the old bridge then being down — saving the half-million dollars that would be spent on a temporary bridge.

Oakes explained that design issues, which were discussed two and a half years ago, showed that the perfect location for the bridge is its current location because of alignment factors. There is a residence at the northeast corner of the bridge.

The bridge construction project is expected to span two construction seasons, with in-water work — regulated by the Division of State Lands, Army Corps of Engineers and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife — running from approximately July 1 to Sept. 15.

The first construction season

(including a detour bridge) would include:

- Contractor building embankments.
- Construction of a contractor work bridge (upstream).
- Construction of a containment platform.
- Building of a detour bridge (downstream).
- Demolition of the existing bridge.
- Building of the interior bent.

Work outside the water would continue through the winter, if possible. In the second construction season, for about a month, the work bridge and detour bridge would be removed.

The county would determine who is the low bidder, Oakes said, as determined by the base bid, as well as the bid including the alternative bridge. The county has the option of choosing the alternative bridge, or not, Oakes said.

As County Commissioner Tim Josi put it, "We'll wait until we have the numbers in front of us."