



7th Street Bridge Project Community Advisory Group (CAG) Meeting Notes July 30, 2014

The July 30, 2014, Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the 7th Street Bridge Project was held from 10:10 a.m. to 11:50 p.m., in the Basement Training Room at 1010 Tenth Street, Modesto, California.

CAG Members Present:

Brian Gini, Collins Electrical Company, Inc.
Nathan M. Houx, Tuolumne River Regional Park Commission
Bill Hudelson, Stanislaus Food Products
Seth Neuman, Wille Electric Supply, Inc.
Larry Robinson, Wille Electric Supply, Inc.
Pat Robinson, Wille Electric Supply, Inc.
Cecil Russell, CEO/President, Modesto Chamber of Commerce
Dave White, The Alliance

Staff Members Present

Matthew Franck, CH2M HILL
David Leamon, Deputy Director, Stanislaus County Public Works
Brent Lemon, Quincy Engineering, Inc.
Chris Serroels, CH2M HILL
Hans Strandgaard, Project Development Team Manager, CH2M HILL
Judith Buethe, Buethe Communications

Judith Buethe, Public Outreach Coordinator, opened the meeting and invited all present to introduce themselves.

Hans Strandgaard, Project Manager, and other team members reviewed the project with a PowerPoint presentation to discuss the project status.

David Leamon commented that the bridge was originally signed as Hwy 99 and was a signature gateway into the City when it was built. People in the community like the idea of something signature with this new bridge—a bridge drawing attention to Modesto. Regarding the possibility of including a signature span on a new bridge, if it is shown to be reasonable and prudent, Caltrans and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will fund it. The community needs to decide if they want an iconic bridge; and the County, the City and the business community need to be involved in that decision.

Hans reviewed past public and CAG meetings and the overall schedule, which shows the bridge likely going to construction in 2017/2018.

Brent reviewed the controlling features of the four alternatives. The project team is trying to minimize the footprint on the surrounding neighborhood and on impacts to existing buildings and structures. The new

bridge must be raised significantly to provide adequate clearance for water to pass below it. Year 2020. is being used as the opening target date, but the design period is 20 years resulting in a design year of 2040. The bridge must also be capable of accommodating trucks, which are currently prohibited.

Significant changes have been made since the last meeting, relative to Zeff Road access. The alternatives no longer provide access to Zeff Road and the previous connections that had been shown passing through Sunrise Village Mobile Home Park have been eliminated.

Q. Is the mobile home neighborhood in a flood plain?

Yes. The last flood occurred in 1997, and the homes were partially submerged.

Q. Why is it still there?

It has been there for 90 years and is likely grandfathered.

Q. How many units in the park?

About 70 spots are in the park. Approximately half of the spaces are occupied.

(SIC: Sunrise Village has 136 spaces:

- 40 privately owned spaces are empty.
- 33 privately owned spaces are occupied.
- 10 privately owned spaces are in the process of becoming owned.
- 23 park-owned spaces are empty.
- 17 park-owned spaces are occupied.
- There are 25 small cottages, two of which are empty, in the park.)

Q. There are no thoughts of moving the park since it is in a floodplain and has been previously flooded (1997)?

The mobile home park is likely grandfathered in. That does not prohibit impacts to the park. However, the project is trying to minimize impacts on the park and still meet the project purpose.

Alternative 1 – Downstream Bridge

Alternative 1 has been eliminated from consideration. Information from this CAG group was given to the technical team members who accepted those comments and eventually eliminated Alternative 1 from further development in the environmental document. It offered simplified construction, but has greater right-of-way impacts than other alternatives and wasn't the least-cost alternative.

Alternatives 2A and 2B—Existing Alignment

Alternative 2A is proposed as a precast bridge with a signature tied-arch span over the low flow river area. Alternative 2B, which has the same project footprint, is proposed as an all pre-cast girder bridge. During construction, 7th Street would be closed to permit bridge replacement construction and traffic would be detoured. This alternative requires consideration of how to maintain pedestrian access during construction. The team is considering a temporary pedestrian bridge during construction or increased transit service such as "Dial-a-Bus". Also being considered is the regional park's future pedestrian trail from Tuolumne Boulevard to the river which could be incorporated into the any temporary pedestrian access during construction of the new bridge. The park is also planning a new access road from Tuolumne Boulevard into the park as shown in purple on the exhibits. This road will have to pass beneath the new bridge. The access road is likely to be constructed after the bridge since the road is not yet funded. However, the next phase of grading will happen soon and does include some of the path work and trails for the park. Nathan said the grading work is expected to be completed in 2016 and that Loren Holt,

Director of the Parks Commission, is the one to talk to about coordinating any park layouts with the new bridge layout.

Responding to issues involving mobile home park residents, David Leamon commented on the value and importance of the mobile homes to the owners/residents and also the importance of the Lion Market there to serve those without cars. The project is trying to retain the properties of the three businesses in and next to the mobile home park and develop context-sensitive solutions for the neighborhood.

Hans said that Alternatives 2A and 2B will require closure of the bridge for approximately a two-year construction period.

The temporary pedestrian bridge likely cannot remain as a permanent crossing of the river, because it will be too low for the high water flows. Pedestrian access will be available on the new 7th Street Bridge and must meet ADA requirements. Making the temporary bridge a permanent structure would be very expensive since it would have to be raised up to the same level as the new vehicle bridges and would also have to be the full width of the floodplain.

Q. Is there budget for a temporary ADA design?

The temporary route will have to be ADA-compliant. Encroachment issues still need be addressed. The cost of providing pedestrian transit from the neighborhood to the downtown is estimated at \$300,000 - \$500,000. and this will be weighed against the cost of the temporary pedestrian bridge.

Q. Why does the temporary pedestrian route have to go across 7th Street and then come back across it again (Green Arrows on Slide 20)?

The grades were not working out to go directly through Sunrise Village Mobile Park and we wanted to stay on public property. Since 7th Street road would be closed during construction, no special signal would be required for pedestrians using the route.

Q. Not an overpass over 7th Street?

No. Pedestrians would travel over the closed 7th Street opposite the park and then under 7th Street in the same opening as Zeff Road traffic will use when the new bridge is being built

Q. What are all those north end switchbacks for?

Those are required to provide ADA-compliant slopes. Nathan pointed out that significant grading by the park is planned in the area where we are showing the switchbacks so the switchback might not be needed. Hans asked whether the Park has obtained concurrence from CVFPB for doing grade changes within the floodplain. Nathan thought that they had and that since a “channel” from the river was actually being added in the park, there was no reduction in the cross sectional area occurring that might change the flood conditions. Hans noted that the Park’s construction plans need to be coordinated with the future bridge plans so that conflicts are resolved.

Q. Is there any information as to where and how many pedestrians are going downtown? The 9th Street Bridge is not that far and could be used.

Hans commented that during construction, pedestrians would incur a very long detour to go downtown and back using the 9th Street Bridge. David noted the difficulties people in electric chairs and scooters already have in using the 7th Street Bridge. They already try to share the lanes with cars since the existing sidewalks are not usable. That is another reason 10-foot wide sidewalks are being proposed for the new bridges. A significant demand has been documented for pedestrian access.

Chris Serroels provided further explanation of Alternative 2A, which is proposed to include precast girders over the flood plain and a tied-arch over the river. The long span tied arch would be novel to the State and region. Chris noted this option would have no columns in the river which could have some advantages. Environmental issues must be addressed for any structure supports in the water. Matt commented that Fish & Wildlife is likely to approve of this alternative. With regard to implementing a more expensive bridge option, David commented that cost issues must still be worked out in terms of who is paying for what.

Chris said that Alternatives 2A and 2B have the same alignment, but 2B replaces the arches with three spans of pre-cast girders. 2B is the cheapest of all alternatives.

Alternative 3 – Existing Alignment with Staged Construction

This alternative uses a route continuity concept, with a more traditional four-way configuration to maintain direct traffic flows onto and from Crows Landing Road.

Bike and pedestrian pathways are considered on both sides of all alternatives except for the bridge rehab option in Alternative 4.

The team is working with Caltrans on allowable bridge widths from a funding perspective.

North Side Intersection, Alternatives 2A, 2B and 3 and 4:

Effects on the Wille Electric building have been minimized, but some modifications to the roof overhang will be required for all the proposed alternatives. The design team will work with the Wille Electric managers on solutions. The team is recommending a concrete barrier and crash attenuation device on the northwest corner of the building to protect it from traffic impacts due to the closer roadway. The team is also striving to maximize the width of the pedestrian sidewalk on 7th Street. Brent will verify the width of the sidewalk near the Wille Electric building.

Hans mentioned that 10' sidewalks are currently proposed for the 7th Street project.

Brent said that the parking at Wille Electric must be reconfigured as well as the entrance off of 7th Street. The team will work with Wille Electric management to determine what is best for their operations. The cul de sac area on the north side of the building, created from the proposed closure of Sierra Drive, may offer some options for additional parking.

Bridge Alternative 3 is a box girder style bridge, which would be built in two stages. This will allow the bridge to remain open during construction and is a medium-cost alternative.

Hans said that this alternative would also require approximately two seasons of construction. He reviewed the approximate construction durations of all the alternatives as follows:

Alternative 2A: 2.5 years
Alternative 2B: 1.75 years
Alternative 3: 2.5 years
Alternative 4: 3 years

Responding to a question on cost, Hans said that Alternative 2B is the most cost-effective alternative.

Q. Does the public have any say in the design?

David responded affirmatively. A meeting on bridge aesthetics will be held in the fall. Aesthetics also makes a big difference to FHWA. The bridge will be part of our Modesto story. We do not want to build a “tombstone” bridge just like the one built in 1916; we want a bridge that says something about us as a community in 2020.

Matt added that public input will help shape the story that FHWA hears.

Alternative 4 – Rehabilitate Existing Bridge

This alternative has roadway approaches to the bridge identical to Alternative 3. The big difference is that two lanes of northbound traffic will be provided by rehabilitating the existing bridge. Due to structural constraints, the sidewalks on the northbound (existing) bridge will be eliminated to make room for shoulders and a bike lane. All pedestrians will be on the new parallel southbound bridge. Even with the elimination of the sidewalks on the existing bridge, a design exception will be needed for substandard lane and shoulder widths. It was noted that due to the higher elevations of the existing railroad bridge and the proposed new parallel two-lane bridge, views of the old retrofitted bridge from the park and from adjacent crossings like the Highway 99 or 9th Street crossings would be very limited.

Staging is similar for Alternatives 3 and 4, although Alternative 4 would be expected to be a bit more congested and complex due to the elevation differences between the northbound and southbound lanes.

Alternative 4 is a higher-cost alternative even with the parallel bridge using the lower-cost pre-cast girders. David Leamon also commented that the possibility exists that once construction has begun, the existing bridge may prove to be impossible to rehabilitate, since it may have more internal damage than is currently known. Caltrans has agreed with the County that spending additional funds to try to better determine the material properties and condition of the old bridge is not a wise expenditure at this time (approximately \$300,000). Hans reiterated that a rehabilitation of the old bridge is more costly than all except the arch alternative and has the potential to become the most expensive as additional problems are uncovered during construction.

Q. At what point do you decide whether or not to continue considering Alternative 4?

David said that the Project Development Team (PDT) may decide to eliminate Alternative 4 or the design team may take the issue to the Board of Supervisors to decide if it should be dropped.

Q. Can some of the elements from the present bridge be used elsewhere?

David responded affirmatively and provided an example of using sections of the rail in City/County parks as benches. Another example is the willingness of a couple of community groups to accept the lions.

Traffic Study Review

Brent reviewed the traffic study which shows that a four-lane facility is definitely needed. A two-lane only facility would result in severe traffic issues in the future. A sensitivity analysis shows that dual left-turn lanes are needed for the northbound lanes turning to Tuolumne Boulevard. The sensitivity analysis considered one vs. two lanes, and only two turn lanes provided an acceptable level of service. Hans pointed out that currently all alternatives provide two left-turn lanes on Tuolumne Boulevard; and even though one turning lane would provide more clearance to the Wille Electric building, the intersection does not perform acceptably. There is a huge benefit to providing two left-turn lanes compared to only one turn lane. Additionally, there are system-wide benefits that only a four-lane project can provide.

Environmental Study Review

Matt reported that the team is in the midst of the technical studies required for the environmental document, and he can provide more details separately for those interested. Two environmental documents are being prepared: For CEQA, (1) the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared for Stanislaus County. The EIR is expected to be ready for distribution at the beginning of 2015 for a 45-day review which also addresses the preferred alternative and (2) the Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI). Caltrans will compile the technical studies into a FONSI. A year from now, all processes should be completed. The flood plain analysis is almost complete, as are the studies of historical processes and other affected properties. There are no historical buildings. Only the bridge is historic.

Caltrans is concerned statewide with the potential for hazardous materials at construction sites, so the team is doing an initial site assessment to search for these types of things. Biology studies are also underway, and the CAG members can expect to see people on the site gathering information.

Other Bridge Study Information

Chris Serroels noted that the team had performed preliminary seismic studies on the new bridge alternatives to help refine the bridge costs.

The bridge-only cost estimates, not including the roadway approaches, are Alt 2A-\$54 million, Alt 2B-\$23.3 million, Alt-3 \$32.3 million and Alt 4-\$33.3 million. Approximately \$14 million can be added for approach roadways to come up with the total project costs which range from \$37 million to \$68 million. The possibility of Alternative 4 costs going up is likely.

Other Discussion

Hans pointed out that previous experience has shown that carrying too many alternatives is costly and confusing to the public. On this project, three alternatives (and perhaps a fourth) are being carried forward. The County and the City would love to have the arch alternative selected, as it would provide a substantial community attraction and benefit.

Responding to Hans' question, Larry Robinson said that Wille can probably live with these alternatives but does not think Alternative 4 is viable. He would like more discussion on two turning lanes vs. a single turning lane. The team will design an exhibit to demonstrate the turning lane alternatives/

Q. Can Wille Electric get a copy of the alternative layouts?

Hans and Judith noted the presentation would be posted on the project website.

David noted that the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) approval would be needed for a four-lane bridge. Caltrans feels it will need buyoff from FHWA for anything more than a two-lane bridge. All of our alternatives show four-lane bridges. A decision will probably be made in early September.

David explained the construction cost funding as local costs of 11.5% of the project, split 50/50 between City of Modesto and Stanislaus County. 88.5% of the total cost will be federally funded. If the community wants something more iconic, the County and City contribution to the project will increase. Dave believes that the project has a good case to replace an iconic bridge with something nice.

Hans mentioned that parking spots along 7th Street north of the bridge may be lost in the future if the City is forced to restripe 7th Street to four lanes.

Q. Can we look at the Sierra area layout some more? Wille has a receiving door at the end of its building that needs to maintain access.

Brent will look at this area again and go over needs, access points, and shipment receiving areas, etc.. with Wille Electric.

Q. Will a left turn onto 7th Street be allowed from the Wille Electric lot?

Brent said, "No", only a right turn into the lot off of 7th Street. David responded that discussion over parking and entrances will be part of the right-of-way phase conducted later.

Hans asked if Wille Electric had any concerns with closing 7th Street for Alternatives 2A and 2B for up to two years. Rob responded affirmatively. David said that detours may be required. Hans assured that access for trucks to all businesses will be provided at all times even when 7th Street is closed at the bridge.

The team will work to determine staging of traffic during construction. Some periodic short-term closures may be required when the paving and new curbs or sidewalks are placed. A majority of the time, there will be access to all businesses and homes.

Dave asked if the businesses would be OK with the two-year closure of 7th Street and that it is important for the team to hear back from the community. Perhaps during the bridge aesthetics community meeting, the potential closures could also be discussed.

Dave asked Judith about getting articles into the Modesto Bee and Vida en el Valle to discuss the possible closure of 7th Street during construction—perhaps including geometric alternatives for the community to consider and comment on. Matt cautioned that any changes to the alternatives now could mean Caltrans delays and require more tweaking of the studies. David said that from a right-of-way perspective, Alternative 2 makes the most sense.

The next Community Advisory Group meeting will be a preview to the Bridge Aesthetics meeting.

Action Items:

- ☐ Judith will send an email to the CAG members on the four-lane vs. two-lane decision by Caltrans/FHWA, once the decision is made.