



Community Advisory Group Meeting Notes October 3, 2013

The first meeting of the Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the 7th Street Bridge Project was held from 10:30 a.m. to 12:10 p.m., October 3, 2013, in the Basement Training Room at 1010 10th Street, Modesto.

CAG Members Present

The following members of the CAG were present: Chris Riley (for Brian Gini), Collins Electrical Company, Inc.; Nancy Young, Executive Director, Downtown Improvement District; Cecil Russell, CEO/Executive Director, Modesto Chamber of Commerce; Jennifer Mullen, Executive Director, Modesto Convention & Visitors Bureau; Karen Pascarella, BSU Sup., The Alliance; Seth Newman, Vice President, Wille Electric Supply, Inc.; Bill Hudelson, CFG/Govt. Affairs, Stanislaus Food Products; Loren Holt, Acting Director, Tuolumne River Regional Park Commission; Ron Richter, Commander, VFW Post 3199; Mike Foren, W. H. Breshears, Inc.; and Daniel Machado, Ps1 Landscape Architecture.

Staff Members Present

Staff members for the Project Development Team and Stanislaus County were Matt Machado, Director, Stanislaus County Public Works; David Leaman, Senior Civil Engineer/Project Manager, Stanislaus County Public Works; Hans Strangaard, Project Manager; CH2M HILL; Matt Franck, Environmental Lead, CH2M HILL; Chris Sorreals, Structures Lead, CH2M HILL; Jennifer Elwood, Bridge Engineer, CH2M HILL; John Grad, Traffic Engineer, Fehr & Peers; Brent Lemon, Bridge Engineer, Quincy Engineering; Judith Buethe, Public Outreach Manager, Buethe Communications; and Miranda Winters, Deputy Public Outreach Manager, Buethe Communications.

Each person present was provided with a meeting agenda; a copy of the jumbo postcard invitation to the Public Scoping Meeting to be held on Monday, October 14, 2013; and a copy of the "Roles and Responsibilities for Community Advisory Group" members.

The meeting began with self-introductions. Judith Buethe thanked members of the group for their willingness to join the CAG, reviewed the reasons for forming the group and scheduling the meeting, and encouraged further participation. The project web site is www.7thStreetBridge.ORG.

David Leamon also thanked members of the group and mentioned that this is the third community effort to repair the bridge, the last being in the late 90s. Fifteen percent of the bridge is located in Stanislaus County, which is the lead agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) work that is underway. The County and the City of Modesto are splitting the cost of the project. Caltrans is the lead agency for the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). The bridge was built in 1917, is nearly 100 years old, and is a steel truss bridge surrounded by concrete. The County is eager to have as much public input as possible on the project.

Hans Strandgaard thanked the CAG for their participation and noted that this was the first of several meetings planned to get public input. He noted that the design team will count on the CAG to help guide

the project as a part of the environmental outreach process. He introduced Chris Serroels to make a PowerPoint presentation, which introduced bridge terminology; mentioned that the bridge was originally designed to accommodate trucks weighing up to 24,000 pounds but has been weight restricted since 1937; reviewed the bridge's history; and reviewed existing deteriorating conditions. To repair those deficiencies, the bridge may need to be closed for a number of years.

John Gard reviewed traffic counts at present (15,900 vehicles per day) and counts that are likely to result if projected growth is realized (31,000 vehicles per day in 2040). John's presentation also included traffic simulation models that showed existing and future conditions with and without the project.

Hans presented the funding sources for the bridge rehabilitation or replacement and discussed participation limits.

Matt Franck reviewed CEQA and NEPA requirements and commented that members of the Project Development Team have reviewed first steps with Caltrans to secure agreement on which technical studies are important or not important to for this project site. Conditions to be studied include, but are not limited to, historic aspects; fisheries and biological aspects; community impacts, e.g., social and economic; air quality, pollution noise, etc.

Hans also reviewed the project schedule as follows:

- Review potential alternatives, which is being done now
- Environmental studies, anticipated to be complete in 2014
- Development of a Project Report, in late 2014
- Selection of a bridge type, in 2015
- Final design, 2015-2016,
- Right-of-way acquisition, if any, in 2016
- Construction of the preferred alternative in 2017-2019

Hans reiterated that rehabilitation of the bridge is still an alternative being considered at this point.

Hans mentioned the importance of determining how this project fits or does not fit with other plans for the area. The design team will be developing a project report next year that will include a preferred alternative. What should be taken into consideration in developing a preferred alternative? Cost? Time? If additional lanes are added, where can they be placed? Hans noted that the railroad typically does not give up property easily and may require any additional width to be placed downstream, which might have slightly different impacts and could require additional right-of-way takes. A two-year construction schedule is anticipated at this point in time. Impacts to property owners and businesses must also be considered. Also, construction in the water cannot take place at certain times of the year because of environmental restrictions.

Hans reviewed plans for the October 14 Public Scoping Meeting to be held at the King-Kennedy Memorial Center. A similar presentation will be made at that meeting, after which attendees will break into groups at four stations--bridge, environmental, roadway, and traffic—to ask questions of the design team.

Bill Hudelson, Stanislaus Food Products, asked for a traffic scenario if a bridge collapse were to occur. Also, what would happen if a break in sewer trunk lines under the bridge were to happen during construction, leaving about 10,000 angry residents and cannery workers? He felt that more attention needed to be paid to the pedestrian uses of the bridge if the bridge were closed, since the detour would be

very long for them, The bridge is important to the cannery industry in Modesto. General improvements in connectivity are needed—farm to market.

Karen Pascarella, The Alliance, pointed out that pedestrians need access and that the project would create jobs.

Loren Holt, Tuolumne River Regional Park Commission, noted that the direction seems to favor a four-lane bridge at this time. He asked about connectivity from the bridge to city streets, especially from four lanes on the bridge to the existing two-lane city streets. How will the construction fit with other intersections in the area—B and 9th Streets, for instance? How will those intersections be impacted with or without the project and with expanded growth, even if the improvements suggested are constructed? The area could reach standstill status the whole way. Loren said that it is important to consider how the entire area could be affected.

Dave Leamon acknowledged the need for other connectivity projects—a need that is being studied—and the limits of funding at this point. John Gard said that many improvements could be made to the intersections, including adding turning lanes and retiming and reworking the signals which would help improve tie-ins to the intersections.

Loren restated the importance of showing how this bridge construction will fit in with a larger picture. He also asked that the term “bugs and bunnies” not be used and could be found offensive to members of environmental groups. It is also important at this point to avoid saying that no major fisheries are in the river. The Tuolumne River Trust will be examining the possibility of greater riparian habitat under this bridge project.

The Gateway Park RFP for design, which will be released this fall, extends from 9th Street to SR-99. Land grading and riparian work near the 7th Street Bridge will be among the elements in the RFP. (More information is available from the County or City of Modesto.)

Loren noted that members of the Tuolumne River Trust will be at the public meeting.

Ron Richter mentioned that the VFW Post offices are on West Hatch and that Carpenter carries traffic heading toward Patterson. More traffic congestion may be created near Crow’s Landing, especially during construction. Ron also commented that the presentation was well done. The VFW Post’s interest in the project includes the annual Memorial Day services held at the bridge.

Cecil Russell asked why the VFW services are held on the 7th Street Bridge. Ron responded that the services have taken place there since about 1937 and involve closing the bridge for about 20 minutes. He also expressed some concern for the older businesses in the area that could be impacted. He noted that the bridge “needs a lot of help” and that the Post members can offer some suggestions—for instance, moving the lions elsewhere, perhaps to the Post.

Daniel Machado reiterated that the team must drop the “bugs and bunnies” term. He also appreciated the presentation and said that he felt laypersons would understand it. He noted a future park is planned which will require some connectivity to the past with end users. A Caltrans bridge would be quick and efficient; but the new park expects many visitors and would prefer some mental/social connectivity to history. Perhaps the team can find ways even with a new bridge to refer back to the period of time when the “Lion Bridge” was built and to connect with Modesto’s past. One idea would be plaques commemorating this bridge. Restoring the downtown arch was very important to area residents. Giving something back to Seventh Street would be important and would help build community.

Cecil pointed out that private money was used to restore the downtown arch. He stated that a newer structure would be better than a remediation. Components of the new bridge could perhaps incorporate the past, e.g., the lions. The Chamber of Commerce has a land use committee that is actively pursuing the self-help sales tax measure. He noted that since this project has not been on the Chamber's radar, it would be good for a presentation to be made at a 7:30 a.m. breakfast meetings of the Chamber's Land Use and Preservation Committee composed of about 35 people. He stated that in his experience public meetings like the one planned for October 14, usually get disappointing attendance. Cecil also expressed concern with moving traffic near the bridge and that this needs to be on everyone's radar. Where does the traffic go if the bridge must be closed down during rehabilitation? Alternate routes must be considered, and the public will need to be well informed.

Mike Foren said that he sees the traffic issue every day, because his workplace at W. H. Breshears is adjacent to the bridge. The bridge needs four lanes, but the engineers and planners must take the adjoining intersections into consideration. Each end of the bridge is a disaster right now. If the bridge is closed, the traffic must go somewhere. Effects on truck traffic at local businesses will need to be considered, and truckers will need to be well informed during the project.

Nancy Young stated that the presentation was understandable and did a good job of describing current conditions. Notifying the businesses is most important in developing a plan, as well as addressing the need for improving the intersections near the bridge. She may also want a presentation made to her board—the Downtown Improvement District. She mentioned that the presentation could do a better job of describing what the project benefits would be to the public and businesses.

Chris Riley complimented the presentation and asked if the bridge could stay open while a new bridge is built? How far downstream would a new bridge be built? The intersections at either end must be addressed.

Dave mentioned that river debris used to be filtered by the former railroad trestle until about 1997. That trestle no longer exists, which may negatively affect the amount of debris that collects on the 7th Street Bridge during flood conditions. Perhaps elements of the present bridge—e.g., the lions—could be placed elsewhere.

Chris asked how far downstream a new bridge would likely be built and asked if the intersections on each side could be included in the project. Hans mentioned the funding limitations.

David acknowledged the value of keeping the history of the bridge alive.

Jennifer suggested that the presentation place more emphasis on the benefits of the project to the community would be helpful. She does have some concern about the history and the importance of retaining that. What would happen if the bridge was not there?

Dave suggested that the group may want to consider how to retain or preserve pieces of the bridge, such as the lions.

Ron suggested that the lions could be placed at the VFW post.

Dave mentioned that the disposition of the lions must be a community decision.

Seth Newman said that the presentation did a good job of describing the necessity of dealing with the bridge. He is personally concerned with right-of-way issues if a four-lane bridge is built, because his company's property is right next door. He referred to the projected Level of Service D and asked what

happens if the intersections cannot be improved. He appreciated the comments about the historical aspects of the bridge, especially because his business (a family business) has been at its site for 40 years.

Dave responded that the alternatives being developed will be affected by right-of-way issues, like those of W. H. Breshears and Wille Electric Supply, Inc. The team will need to know what the companies can live with.

Cecil asked if StanCOG will play a role in developing the preferred alternative. Dave noted that a StanCOG staff member serves on the Project Development Team that is working with the design team.

Judith closed the meeting with a brief description of the public outreach plan—development of the CAG; public meetings noticed by newspaper ads (both English and Spanish), news releases, jumbo invitation postcards; community calendars, presentations to groups, etc. She invited members of the CAG to offer suggestions on how the outreach program could be enhanced and asked for additional people and organizations to be included in the mailing list, which is currently at nearly 400.

A specific meeting date for the next CAG meeting was not set but is expected to take place in about three months. Matt Franck noted that the scoping period closes on October 30 and that public comments regarding the community's concerns as they relate to the environmental process need to be received by then.