

CORVALLIS CIVIC CLUB

P.O. Box 321
Corvallis, MT 59828

October 16, 2023

Bob Vosen
District 1 Administrator
Montana Department of Transportation
PO Box 7039
Missoula, MT 59807-7039

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Ravalli County Commissioners

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Dear Mr. Vosen:

On October 5, on behalf of the Corvallis Civic Club, I was able to sit in electronically on an update provided to the Ravalli County Commissioners regarding MDT projects in Ravalli County. Part of that update addressed the replacement of the bridge over the Bitterroot River at Woodside, now listed as FY 2027 Project #10328 on MDT's 2023-2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) plan.

The safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles on this bridge has been a focus of the Corvallis Civic Club and residents of our community, as well as the larger Bitterroot Valley, since at least 2013. That was the year the Corvallis Civic Club worked with the Ravalli County Commission to prepare a successful application to the Transportation Alternatives (TA) competitive grant program for the construction of a pedestrian bridge across the Bitterroot River at Woodside on S-373. The goal was to link the two legs of an existing pedestrian/bikepath along S-373 and eliminate the one remaining gap in the non-motorized system linking Corvallis to Hamilton and Victor and northward to Missoula. Ravalli County received notification in January 2014 of its successful TA application for this project, which was the top-ranked project statewide that year.

It has now been 10 years since the TA award. There has been no construction and the hazards at the Woodside Bridge have only increased. In addition to the safety and accessibility issues for pedestrians and bicyclists, the narrow lanes of the 1954 bridge are increasingly inadequate to handle vehicle traffic, which includes school buses, horse trailers, large trucks, farm equipment and more and more cars each year in the growing Corvallis area. This is a situation which needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

When we worked on the original 2013 TA application, we were told by the Montana Department of Transportation that a total replacement of the bridge was likely at least

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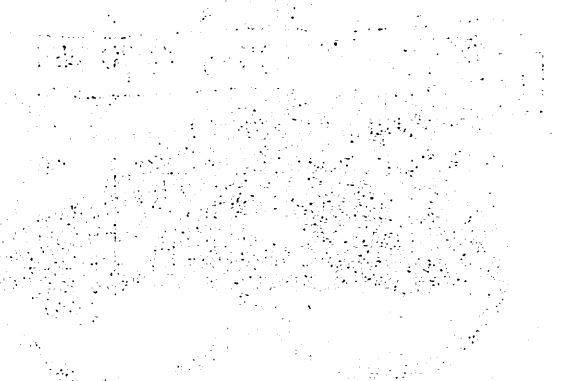
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30 years out. As a result, we proposed what appeared to be the only possible solution to the immediate non-motorized safety issues, namely a separate span. Since then, it has become clear this would create scour issues for the existing bridge and that constructing a modern bridge with a pedestrian/bicycle lane is the best option for all users.

The Corvallis Civic Club completely concurs with that assessment and supports the replacement of the existing bridge. What we can't support is an indefinite delay in addressing the hazards posed by the existing situation. Residents of Corvallis and surrounding communities need to be able to safely cross the Bitterroot River at Woodside, whether they are in a vehicle, on a bicycle, or on foot. We urge you to prioritize the replacement of the Woodside Bridge for the safety of all concerned.

Sincerely,



Tonia Bloom
Secretary

Cc: Transportation Commissioner Kody Swartz
Project Analysis Manager Paul Johnson
Ravalli County Commission
Ravalli County Legislators

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