

Missoula County Media Release

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Missoula County to Request MDT Take Over Management of South Avenue Bridge Project

Missoula County will request that the Montana Department of Transportation take over management of the South Avenue Bridge project once state and federal agencies have approved the required environmental documents.

Public Works staff will present [a letter](#) to commissioners making the request during their administrative public meeting at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 14, in the Sophie Moiese Room of the Courthouse Annex.

If MDT agrees to manage it, Missoula County will still play a major role in development of the project, and members of the public will have many opportunities to comment as it progresses. The letter also requests that MDT retain HDR so the same engineering firm the county partnered with can complete the design phase of the project.

The bridge, which will cross the Bitterroot River southwest of Missoula to connect South Avenue and River Pines Road, will be paid for with federal and state gas tax funds through MDT's Off-System Bridge program. MDT typically manages projects in the Off-System Bridge program, with input from local governments.

"Missoula County and MDT have had a great partnership in developing this project so far, and regardless of the outcome of this request, that strong partnership will continue," said Public Works Director Shane Stack. "If MDT agrees to manage the remainder of the project, they will be able to use their proven processes to effectively and efficiently complete it."

MDT is currently reviewing the [categorical exclusion and the accompanying environmental documentation](#). Once MDT approves those documents, staff will forward them to the Federal Highway Administration for review and approval. Once FHWA signs the categorical exclusion, the engineering firm will start finalizing the design for the South Avenue Bridge. Missoula County will hand off the project to MDT at this point, if MDT agrees to manage it.

Then the project will proceed as follows:

- When the design is approximately 60 to 70 percent complete, MDT and Missoula County will begin planning utility relocations and right-of-way acquisition. A formal agency plan review will also be completed before utilities are relocated or any necessary right-of-way is purchased.
- When the design is approximately 90 percent complete, the agencies will complete a plan review and make any final necessary changes to the plans.

- The design phase, which will include opportunities for public comment, is expected to be complete by August 2020.
- The project will go out for bid, followed by construction.

The commissioners do not need to vote on whether to move forward with the South Avenue Bridge. Unless MDT or FHWA determines a heightened level of environmental review is warranted, the project is on track for construction to start in 2024. The bridge, estimated to cost up to \$15.4 million, will divert traffic away from the Maclay Bridge that currently connects River Pines Road to North Avenue.

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