



Washtenaw County Road Commission Receives "GO-AHEAD" from FHWA on WILBUR ROAD BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

The Washtenaw County Road Commission received authorization from the Federal Highway Administration to proceed with further project development on the Wilbur Road Bridge Replacement Project in Bridgewater Township.

The Road Commission recently received an official notification from the **U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)**, advising that their final review of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and supporting documentation had been completed for the replacement of the Wilbur Road Bridge over the Raisin River, located in Section 20 of Bridgewater Township. *(Wilbur Road, which is one of Washtenaw County's local gravel roads, is an east-west road connecting to Clinton Road, a primary paved road in the center-west part of Bridgewater Township.)*

The existing bridge, which was erected in 1954, has been designated as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places by the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). However, the required **Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)** review by the FHWA has determined that this bridge replacement would not have any significant impacts on the human or natural environment, and that there is no practicable alternative to the proposed project. The FONSI review was based on the Environmental Assessment prepared by Scott Civil Engineering Company, an expert bridge consultant hired by the Road Commission in July 2000, and which was independently evaluated by the FHWA. The EA took into account several bridge

replacement alternatives, as well as reviewing the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the project. The adoption of the FONSI and certification by the FHWA formally acknowledges that the Road Commission has met the public comment/hearing requirements and authorizes the agency to proceed with

oversee the historical documentation and marketing plan for the existing 102-foot long single-span, double "Bailey" truss bridge, which has been posted at the minimum weight restriction of 3 tons since *continued...*



(Above) *The existing Wilbur Road Bridge carries a weight restriction of 3 tons - the minimal weight restriction allowed.*



The wooden timber deck is showing telltale signs of 50+ years of wear.



The River Raisin that flows from the southeast to the north is viewed beneath the heavy metal trusses of the Wilbur Road Bridge.

further project development. Upon receipt of the FONSI from the FHWA, the Road Commission's consultant, Scott Civil Engineering Company, has been authorized by the Road Commission to proceed with the final design of the bridge and to prepare plans for the upcoming Type, Size, and Location (TS&L) submittal to MDOT. The consultant will also

2000.

Marketing of the truss bridge for sale will be accomplished by placing advertisements in various state and local newspapers, journals, and by notifying such organizations as local parks, recreation departments and golf courses. The purchaser would be required to rehabilitate and maintain the bridge in accordance with the recommended procedures in the *National Park Services-1990 "Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings."* The State/Federal Critical Bridge Program (CBP) funds, made available through the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), could only be applied toward the removal of the structure; it would be the purchaser's responsibility to transport the bridge to its new location and to rehabilitate it. On the chance that more than one party expresses an interest in acquiring the bridge, each offer would be reviewed by Road Commission engineers, to identify a preferred purchaser and to verify their ability to conform to the requirements of the rehabilitation and maintenance. The 52-year old Wilbur Road Bridge will be advertised for 60 days, after which an offer will be selected by the Road Commission. If, after a total of 90 days, the Road Commission has not received an offer, the agency will impose its authority to dispose of bridge.



View of the Wilbur Road Bridge, facing west.

The Wilbur Road Bridge of the future...

Final design plans for the new bridge have not yet been formalized. However, the bridge width was agreed upon by the Road Commission and Bridgewater Township in February of 2005, in a Memorandum of Understanding that calls for a clear bridge width of 26-feet (i.e., the dimension inside of the bridge barrier rails).



Southwest view of the River Raisin.

"Currently, the new bridge plans are in the preliminary design stage," explained *Kelly Jones, P.E.*, Design Engineer with the Road Commission and Project Manager on this replacement project.

"Several design elements are being worked out at this time, which must be mutually agreed upon by the Road Commission staff and Bridgewater Township officials, before final approval is received by the Board of County Road Commissioners and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). We anticipate the design process will be completed by December 2005. If the project proceeds on schedule, the construction of the new bridge would begin in the late summer or early fall of 2006."

The entire costs for the removal of the old bridge and the new bridge construction are unknown at this time. However, the CBP funds will cover 95% of all participating construction costs. The design and engineering costs would be the responsibility of the Washtenaw County Road Commission.



View of the steel trusses, facing east.

THE HISTORY OF THE WILBUR ROAD BRIDGE

The original *Wilbur Road truss bridge* collapsed due to overload in August of 1953. Removal of the original structure was completed by December of that year and the current "Bailey Bridge" replacement was erected some time in 1954.

In 1983, a bridge inspection revealed serious structural deterioration of the steel stringers and timber deck, which resulted in its closure on November 8, 1983. In February 1984, the Road Commission and Bridgewater Township officials jointly agreed to seek engineering proposals for the design of a new bridge. However, in recognizing the need to conduct repairs to the existing bridge in lieu of permanent closure while waiting for funding approval from the state, the Road Commission conducted extensive repairs to the bridge after which a bridge consultant, G.J. McLravy, was hired to re-inspect the bridge. The expensive repairs to the bridge yielded a new bridge weight restriction of 9 tons, at which it remained until 1997, when a biennial inspection required another reduction to 5 tons. By 1999, the bridge was again closed due to a complete section loss (holes) in 14 of the 23 floor beams. At this time, Scott Civil Engineering was hired by the Road Commission to conduct further inspections and to make repair recommendations. It was determined by the consultant that the repairs to the bridge would be extensive and costly, and included the complete removal and replacement of the timber deck, the steel stringers and the floor beams. However, the extensive repairs would have only produced a 7-ton weight

restriction, so the Township and Road Commission submitted an emergency application to the MDOT for funding in October 1999. The emergency application was rejected by the Critical Bridge review committee because the bridge had been deteriorating over a period of time, and its closure did not constitute emergency funding.

However, by April of 2000, the Road Commission received notice from MDOT that the Wilbur Road Bridge was selected for Critical Bridge funding for FY 2000-2001. In June 2000, the Road Commission began the process of hiring a consultant to conduct the required environmental assessment and engineering design services. Meanwhile, short-term repairs were made to the bridge and was reopened at a 3-ton weight restriction.

A number of delays have occurred since 2000, in part due to some local opposition to the new bridge and requests for rehabilitation of the existing bridge. As a result, in August 2004 the Road Commission was required to submit an application to MDOT to extend the funding to retain the CBP grant, which would cover 95% of the replacement costs. This grant funding extension was granted through March 2005. In March of this year, the Road Commission submitted a second request to extend the CBP funding, which was also granted by MDOT. This second extension is subject to expire in October 2005 if no further progress is demonstrated on this bridge replacement project.



The existing Wilbur Road Bridge was erected in 1954. It is slated for replacement in 2006.