

February 13th, 2019

Preferred Alternative Press Release

Blue Hill, Falls Bridge #5038

WIN 17712.00

Over the past twenty months the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and a local Bridge Advisory Committee have reviewed alternatives for the renewal of the Route 175 crossing over the Salt Pond in Blue Hill. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the MaineDOT, FHWA, and the eleven-member Bridge Advisory Committee established a purpose and need statement for the project and identified and investigated rehabilitation of the existing Falls Bridge, replacement of the bridge on its current alignment, and construction of a new bridge at an alternate location over the Salt Pond. In addition, the team explored various construction and maintenance of traffic methods, identified site safety needs for commuters and pedestrian traffic, and discussed the potential impacts to archaeological, historical, and environmental resources.

After a thorough investigation of options, including rehabilitation of the existing Falls Bridge, the preferred alternative is to replace the existing Falls Bridge superstructure with an enhanced girder bridge superstructure. The existing stacked stone substructure will remain and will be rehabilitated to include new cast-in-place bridge seats and new roadway approach knee walls to assist in raising the bridge and road profile to accommodate sea level rise and improve traveling conditions. To limit site impacts, a temporary bridge will not be used to maintain traffic through the project site, rather, accelerated bridge construction methods will be used along with a short-term road closure of up to sixty days with traffic detoured around the project site on State Routes 172 & 175 during bridge removal and replacement.

During the process to identify the preferred alternative, the Department weighed heavily upon impacts to historical, archaeological, and natural resources within the project limits, as well as issues identified in the Purpose and Need statement such as commuter and pedestrian safety during and after construction, impacts to commuting traffic and local businesses, and construction cost and service life cost.

The rehabilitation alternative was not selected because it has substantially higher construction and service life costs than the replacement alternative and only provides a 50-year life expectancy compared to a 100-year life expectancy for replacement. The rehabilitation option would require a temporary bridge for maintenance of traffic to avoid economic and safety impacts to the public, emergency services, and businesses. The construction of a temporary bridge would require additional impacts to adjacent properties and archaeological resources. In addition, a rehabilitated Falls Bridge would not

improve upon important safety issues such as the narrow bridge width or address sight line and safety issues created by the existing bridge's arches, lateral bracing, and hangers.

A new bridge on an alternate alignment over the Salt Pond was not preferred because it has the greatest construction cost with extensive amounts of clearing and environmental impacts necessary to construct a 520' long bridge and 3,800' of new State road. In addition to the State's cost, the long-term maintenance of the existing Falls Bridge, along with a causeway cross culvert and 1.1 miles of Falls Bridge Road, would become the financial responsibility of the Town of Blue Hill.

In preferring to construct a new enhanced girder bridge over a new tied arch bridge, the enhanced girder bridge provided the safest structure for commuter and pedestrian use by removing the arch, lateral bracing and hangers, provided the lowest construction cost and construction risk, and provided the lowest cost for long-term inspection and maintenance.

Finer details, including aesthetic enhancements, pedestrian & parking accommodations, construction schedule and cost, maintenance of traffic, and minimization of impacts, will be incorporated into the final design which will continue through 2020. Members of the Bridge Advisory Committee and the public are encouraged to continue advising the Department through the final design process.

MaineDOT's preferred alternative will continue to be reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A final selected alternative will result from agency consultation and efforts to mitigate impacts to archaeological, historical, and natural resources.

4. Replacement Alternatives

Superstructure Options Evaluated

Precast Concrete Girders

1. Prefabricated standard girder shape with aesthetic fascia panel

Tied Arch

2. Tied arch with steel arch rib and concrete tie-girder

