US 51 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

Welcome to the April 2022 Update of the US 51 Bridge Replacement Project

Your continued support and interest in the project are appreciated.

Major Milestone Achieved

Completion of US 51 Bridge Environmental Document

For the past nine years, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) have worked diligently to identify solutions for addressing the aging US 51 Bridge. Known regionally as the Cairo Bridge, it is the longest bridge in Kentucky. The bridge, which opened in 1938, is located at the westernmost crossing on the Ohio River, where it connects Kentucky and Illinois and because of its condition, requires replacement in the future.

The project's first phase was completed via a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study in 2018. The study established the purpose and need for the project, evaluated a range of alternatives, and included public involvement and agency coordination. In 2019, the project moved into the next phase, preliminary engineering and environmental analysis. With the signing of the environmental document, KYTC Categorical Exclusion Level 3 (CE-3) in March 2022, another significant milestone in the decision-making process is completed. The environmental document is posted to the project website and available for download. Hard (paper) copies are available for viewing in the project documentation repositories at the Ballard-Carlisle County Public Library in Wickliffe, KY and the Cairo Public Library in Cario, IL.

The completion of the extensive study process satisfies the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The documentation ensures that KYTC and IDOT meet and comply with all necessary federal, state, and local regulatory processes. The document reflects approval of the Preferred Alternative, which is the preferred alignment and associated improvements by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), KYTC, and IDOT. The preferred alternative is deemed compliant with federal law.

The project study area includes the location of the existing bridge and how it currently fits into the regional roadway network, and the immediate vicinity, where various project alternatives were conceptualized and evaluated. Environmental Justice populations in the Cairo project area required additional outreach and consideration, resulting in a Community Advisory Group/Environmental Justice (CAG/EJ) formation. The CAG/EJ will remain active as the project moves into the next development phase.

Environmental Justice Population

"Environmental Justice Population" means a neighborhood whose annual median household income is equal to or less than 65 percent of the statewide median or whose population is made up 25 percent Minority, Foreign Born, or Lacking English Language Proficiency.

The technical analysis considered the impacts and opportunities of the project relative to the dynamic river environment, including the extensive floodplain and associated agricultural lands and wildlife habitat. River navigation and mooring, flood control, wetland and stream impacts, and threatened and endangered species evaluations were conducted and considered. No direct or indirect impacts on waterfowl hunting or fishing are expected.

Planners considered socio-economic impacts, traffic, and property impacts, including ingress and egress, during the environmental analysis. Environmental commitments to be carried forward into and through design, permitting, and construction are also identified. All pertinent environmental coordination and analysis are provided in the approved environmental document. There is more work to be done in the coming years as the project develops.

The US 51 Bridge itself is a historic resource. It is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHC) and is subject to coordination under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Extensive engineering analysis determined that rehabilitation of the existing bridge was not feasible. The existing bridge will be removed after a new bridge is constructed and open to traffic. Removing the existing historic bridge is an adverse effect that requires coordination with consulting parties to determine appropriate mitigation measures. These mitigation measures are identified in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the project approved in December 2021. Such measures include marketing the bridge or components for re-use, historic recordation and documentation of the bridge, and provisional funding for future rehabilitation of a historic bridge within Kentucky. These commitments are also part of the environmental document.

Historic Recordation

"Documentation of historic resources, which we also refer to as "recordation," is performed under uniform standards and includes three main components—drawings, history, and photography—which work together to create a comprehensive understanding of the historic resource."

-Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Major Milestone Achieved

Continued

Coordination with state and federal resources agencies is an essential part of the process, and additional evaluations will be required before permitting and construction.

"We are very excited to reach this major milestone on the project with the completion of the CE-3 Document and appreciate the efforts of the agencies, stakeholders and public in getting us to this point in the project. The CE-3 approval allows us to move forward with the preferred option, a replacement of the bridge 980 feet upstream, including new roadway connections on both sides of the river and a roundabout on the Cairo side which will serve as a gateway into the city,"

-said Chris Kuntz, Project Manager for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

Preferred Alternative

Facts about the Preferred Alternative:

- It will be a two-lane bridge, with 8-foot shoulders to potentially accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians
- The bridge length will be approximately 1.94 miles long and will be located upstream from the existing bridge.
- The Cairo approach will include a roundabout (see sidebar on roundabouts).
- It will minimize impacts on community facilities, parks, protected lands, and the floodplain.
- No residential, business, or community resource displacements or relocations are anticipated.

Why Use a Roundabout?

1. **Safety -** They are considered safer, reducing crashes up to 75%
2. **Low Maintenance** -They are less expensive to maintain.
3. **Reduced Delay** - By yielding at the entry rather than stopping, delay is reduced.
4. **Environmental** - They reduce fuel consumption and air pollution.

Additional details, including a graphic of the Preferred Alternative and the Public Involvement history, are available here: https://us51bridge.com/

The Existing Bridge Now and Through Construction

Our Next Steps

The project is moving into the next phase, final engineering design. The preferred alternative will continue to develop as the Bridge Type Study, additional roadway engineering, hydraulic analysis, bridge design, and seismic evaluations are completed. Environmental commitments and permit requirements will continue to evolve as project impacts are further evaluated and project commitments are addressed, as appropriate. Agency coordination activities and some land acquisitions will begin in summer/fall of 2022.

Bridge Type Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the preferred alternative for:

- Cost
- Constructibility
- Impacts of Construction
- Impacts to Traffic and Navigation

Maintenance and repair projects will continue on the existing bridge. The construction of a new bridge is dependent on getting appropriate federal and state funding but could begin in 2026-2027. The construction process is expected to take three to five years to complete.

Public Outreach and Engagement

"We encourage everyone to visit our website and sign up for our announcements. We have updated the website to now include the approved environmental documents and a schedule of steps to come. The environmental documents will also be made available at the local libraries."

-says Aaron Stover, Vice President and Great Lakes Bridge Lead for Michael Baker International, the project consultant.

A public information session is planned to share potential bridge types that the team has narrowed down for the main river crossing bridge and for the roadway designs in Illinois and Kentucky. This meeting will be held in late summer/early fall of 2022.

Project newsletters will continue to provide project milestones, schedules, and funding updates at intervals.

If you are interested in learning more about the project, please contact us @:

US51bridge@mbakerintl.com or 1.800.922.7591.

Please help us by sharing this information and update with your family, friends, and interested members of the public. Also, we are sharing this update via our social media outreach:

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