

VTrans Quechee Gorge Bridge Rehabilitation Project

Public Information Meeting Hartford Town Hall, White River Junction April 8, 2019

A meeting to review design criteria and options for design elements of Quechee Gorge Bridge Rehabilitation Project was held on Monday, April 8, in Hartford Town Hall in White River Junction. Jill Barrett introduced the night's meeting agenda and team members. Representatives from the team included VTrans Project Manager JB McCarthy, VTrans engineer Matt Langham, engineer Amy Spera and Joe Gill of Gill Engineering, public outreach consultants Jill Barrett and Shawna Kitzman of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc (FHI), and Cindy Cook of Adamant Accord.

Project Overview

JB McCarthy began the meeting with an overview of the project. He reviewed bridge history, existing conditions, and project need.

Goals of the project include preventative bridge maintenance, improving/widening sidewalks, and increasing pedestrian and vehicular safety. The project installation of permanent safety barrier.

JB McCarthy reviewed the project schedule, highlighting the current phase of preliminary design. The night's meeting initiates a month-long comment public comment period regarding bridge elements. Next steps include preparation of engineering specifications, initiation of less-visible engineering tasks, and planning tasks.

Mr. McCarthy explained VTrans' process of evaluating safety barrier fence vs. netting. Multiple considerations led VTrans to opt for the safety barrier fence, including cost, maintenance, and emergency response considerations.

Mr. McCarthy consulted Kyle Obenauer, a Historic Preservation Specialist with Vermont Agency of Transportation, to evaluate the netting option from a historical perspective. Mr. Obenauer confirmed that the State's Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) prefers a safety barrier fence.

Proposed Work & Design Criteria

Amy Spera reviewed the extensive maintenance that will take place. Elements include joint and bearing replacements, new waterproofing membrane, new pavement, cleaning, painting, stabilizing the shale slope, to enhance and protect bridge elements.

Safety upgrades include an improved curbside safety railing and increasing the sidewalk widths from 4'2" to at least 5', although the team is hoping to design a 6' sidewalk. The pedestrian safety barrier will be installed, determined with public input, as well as sidewalk extensions on both sides of the bridge. Sidewalk extensions will connect the bridge sidewalk to the parking area on the west side as well as to the crosswalk at the Quechee Gorge Visitor's Center on the east side. Improved sidewalks were requested at the November 2018 public meeting and have been added to project scope.

Construction is planned for two seasons. Lane widths will be narrowed to allow two-directional travel during construction. At times alternating one-lane traffic may be necessary. One sidewalk will always remain open.

Safety barrier considerations include an upper barrier of 9' tall. This height will accommodate VTrans' Servi-Lift equipment required for inspection and maintenance. A handrail is required at 42". Horizontal and vertical components will be incorporated. Lower barrier design will limit ability for climbing and require that a sphere with no greater than 4" diameter. Some removable panels are needed to accommodate emergency recovery.

Public Feedback on Five Design Elements

Safety Fence - Color: Ms. Spera introduced the design elements that team is seeking input on, while advancing through the [presentation](#). Jill Barrett asked for input on the color. While some attendees prefer green, Ms. Robin Adair-Logan, committee member of Hartford's Historic Preservation Commission, suggested that green is not historic. She commented that black mimics cast iron. JB McCarthy indicated the various shades of green paint are available and noted that VTrans also uses brown paint to complement unpainted bridges. When people were asked to indicate their color preference, 12 voted for green and 4 voted for black. Ms. Barrett noted that a darker green is preferred, to match the bridge truss. She promoted the public [online survey](#), which is active for a month. Senator Alison Clarkson suggested sharing the survey with local media for a broader reach. The team confirmed

Safety Fence – Upper Section: Ms. Spera reviewed the upper barrier treatments – straight, angled, and curved. The audience weighed in on which is easier to climb. One person suggested a "little extra something" to prohibit climbing, such as small spikes or pointed edges at the top of the barrier. One suggested that curved is the most "organic" solution, compatible with Upper Valley views. There was no vocal support for a straight or angled barrier. Curved had significant support, garnering 14 votes. Police Chief Phillip Kasten confirmed that the curved temporary fence had successfully deterred at least one suicide attempt.

Safety Fence – Lower Section: When reviewing the lower barrier treatment, Senator Clarkson suggested a design that mimics the historic truss. One audience member, who expressed support for the circle design, asked if a person could fit a foot in them. Ms. Spera noted that if you could get a foot in the circle, you could get a foot on the vertical handrail. A member of the public suggested that the handrail be round, rather than flat. Ms. Barrett summarized the desire for research and evaluation of historic bridge design treatment of lower barriers. JB McCarthy noted that an arch design is possible.

Safety Fence – Offset for Downward Views: Ms. Spera then reviewed the potential for an offset upper barrier to preserve downward views into the gorge. A member of the public suggested that a person could stick their head through the 8" upper barrier vertical to look down into the gorge below. People generally stated it would cost more and has a busier aesthetic. There was no expressed support.

Vehicle Barrier Height: Ms. Spera introduced the final design consideration, the height of the vehicular barrier at the sidewalk curb. The railing would be permanent and is crash-tested. The transition from the railing to the curb at the end of bridge is a design consideration, to meet crash-test standards; they try to not modify. One member of the public suggested that The Police Chief noted that many of the crash incidents in this area are pedestrian-related.

A spirited conversation ensued about the height of the vehicle barrier. Town Selectman Alan Johnson noted that neither the 24" or 34" are tall enough to meet safety needs. In response to a question whether the speed limit could be dropped, Ms. Spera suggested that the team could investigate traffic

calming measures, such as beacons. Police Chief Kasten suggested that a recessed sidewalk would provide another safety measure, using the elevated curb a barrier, associated with the 24" design. He also noted that the longer the barrier is, the greater the visual cue to drivers to slow down. The lower barrier received 9 votes; higher curb received 4 votes.

A community member asked if VTrans had evaluated snow removal. JB McCarthy mentioned that VTrans is looking into hiring a regular snow removal contractor.

A community member asked if silane, the material VTrans plans to apply to concrete as a sealant, has been tested for ecologic safety. JB McCarthy explained that VTrans uses silane regularly, and Cindy Cook iterated the Agency must meet federal safety standards. Kip Miller asked if the survey on bridge design elements could be made available to the traveling public at the Visitors Center. The team agreed.

JB McCarthy offered to hold another meeting once design team has further explored design options for the lower barrier. The audience expressed interest.

Jill Barrett and JB McCarthy thanked all for coming, mentioning the survey and announcement for a future meeting this spring.