Fifth Street Bridge Frequently Asked Questions

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. **Why does the Fifth Street Bridge need to be rehabilitated?**
   Originally constructed in 1960, the Fifth Street Bridge is an important piece of infrastructure spanning the Courtenay River. Although the bridge has had regular maintenance over the past decades, as with any major asset, periodic major maintenance and repairs will be required throughout its lifespan. Previous initiatives over previous decades have included repainting; however these layers have built up, including lead paint, and rust underneath these layers needs to be removed.

2. **What role does the bridge play in Courtenay?**
   The Fifth Street Bridge is an important transportation connection in the Comox Valley, connecting key networks to downtown and beyond. The entire region depends on the Fifth Street Bridge as a primary route across the Courtenay River.

3. **When was the last investment in the bridge made?**
   Bridge inspections and maintenance are conducted regularly to assess bridge condition. The last major rehabilitation work was completed in 2012. It included seismic upgrades through the replacement of deck expansion joints and the application of a corrosion-resistant coating to the underside of the bridge. The project also replaced areas of damaged concrete along with bridge deck maintenance and sealing.

BENEFITS OF REHABILITATION

4. **How will the bridge be improved?**
   The rehabilitation project includes bridge deck replacement, structural steel repairs to the deck beams, new hand rails, removal of the lead paint and rust, recoating of the steel structure, and new road markings. The new bridge coating will protect the bridge from rust and corrosion as well as improve its appearance.

5. **How does this project compare to other recent bridge projects?**
   No two bridges are exactly the same and as a result the scope and budget of each bridge rehabilitation or replacement can vary significantly based on a variety of factors including age, where it is located, how it was built, amenities, width and span, and geotechnical conditions. Bridge engineering is a highly specialized area of study. Our project team will continue to explore comparable projects in other communities to inform planning for the Fifth Street Bridge.
6. **How will these repairs affect the bridge's lifespan?**

As part of a proactive asset management program, regular ongoing inspections of the bridge identify routine maintenance, monitor overall condition, and identify any deterioration.

It is estimated that it will be 20 or more years before additional bridge refurbishment is required. This is a conservative estimate, and does not mean that the bridge will have reached the end of its intended lifespan in 20 years.

7. **Can't the bridge just be repainted?**

The corrosion within the steel requires that the coating be completely removed and replaced. Typical of bridges built during this period, lead paint was originally used to coat the steel. To recoat the bridge, the lead paint must be carefully removed to reveal bare metal before being recoated. The removal of the lead paint requires that the bridge be “wrapped”, including scaffolding, to prevent the lead paint and other contaminants from entering the environment. It is essential to remove lead paint properly. This process is time consuming, noisy, and has many safety considerations to avoid negative impacts to the environment and human health.

**PROJECT DESIGN**

8. **Have you considered adding another vehicle lane to the Fifth Street Bridge?**

Increasing the vehicle capacity of the Fifth Street Bridge was considered as part of the Transportation Master Plan process, through detailed traffic models by traffic engineering consultants. Widening the bridge was ultimately not recommended because it was determined that bridge traffic would encounter traffic flow issues, or bottlenecks, on the roads on either end of the bridge, and any improvements would be minimal and would not justify the substantial additional cost. Even if traffic consultants had recommended widening, there would have been significant structural upgrades required, and after preliminary consideration, it is uncertain if the current structure would support an additional lane and motorized vehicles.

9. **What is the current status of the design?**

As of May 15, 2020, the project is continuing to advance. A Traffic Management Plan is being developed for review with stakeholders. Both the detailed design and tender package are on schedule to be ready in early fall 2020. Construction is still scheduled for spring of 2021.

10. **What is happening with the Sixth Street multi-use pedestrian bike bridge concept?**

On June 24, 2019, Council directed staff to prepare a report with options exploring a Sixth Street multi-use pedestrian bike bridge.

On February 3, 2020, Council affirmed their support of the Sixth Street multi-use pedestrian-bike bridge project and designated it as a Council priority project. Staff will now review options to execute a detailed options analysis in 2020.

More information about the proposed Sixth Street multi-use pedestrian bike bridge will be provided as planning progresses.
11. How has the need for improved river crossings for pedestrians and cyclists been identified?

Several community plans reference the need to improve connectivity across the Courtenay River for multi-modal transportation:

**Downtown Courtenay Playbook: A Partnership Action Plan**

The Downtown Courtenay Playbook was developed through significant consultation and collaboration with the community, including downtown businesses and other stakeholders. The playbook recommends improving connectivity to, along, and across the river, as one of the five strategic planning goals developed as a result of this plan. The Downtown Courtenay Playbook was adopted by Council in 2016. Learn more: www.courtenay.ca/downtown

**City of Courtenay Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan, adopted in September 2019, notes the challenge of current river crossings for pedestrians, and identifies both Fifth and Sixth Streets as potential locations for new or improved connectivity. Learn more: www.courtenay.ca/parksrecplan

**Connecting Courtenay: Cycling Network Plan and Draft Transportation Master Plan**

The Cycling Network Plan adopted by Council in February 2019 notes the current lack of comfortable river crossings for cyclists, and identifies both Fifth and Sixth Streets as options that have been explored. The Transportation Master Plan adopted in September 2019 also highlights the opportunity for new and improved river crossings at these locations for pedestrians and cyclists. Learn more: www.courtenay.ca/connectingcourtenay

**COST AND BUDGET**

12. How is the project being funded?

The City of Courtenay has received $1.96 million in grant funding from the New Build Canada – Small Communities Fund. The remainder of the project costs will be funded by the City of Courtenay.

After factoring in grant contributions and infrastructure reserves, the City will need to borrow funds to rehabilitate the bridge. The borrowing process is now underway with the first three readings of the bylaw on Monday April 20th,

13. Would it be more cost-effective to build a brand new bridge?

Rehabilitation options for the Fifth Street Bridge cost much less than a full replacement. Engineers specializing in bridge construction and rehabilitation estimate replacement costs to be $25 million - $30 million, taking into account the current market and construction cost escalation experienced on Vancouver Island over the last several years. Engineers have determined the Fifth Street Bridge has not reached the end of its useful life, and it would be premature to consider replacing it at this time. Rehabilitation is required, and it is one of the City's core responsibilities to maintain the integrity of our infrastructure assets for the benefit of our community.
14. Are there incentives that can be built into the contract to encourage the contractor to complete the work faster?

We are committed to exploring ways we can complete the work as quickly and effectively as possible. Contract incentives or penalties are sometimes considered on infrastructure projects. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with these, depending on the project. A broad range of options will be explored relating to procurement and the project team will provide additional information on these in the future.

15. How much will the bridge rehabilitation cost?

The current estimate for bridge recoating and deck repairs is estimated at $6.3 million.

16. Why have the costs increased since the earlier estimates were developed?

Since the initial estimates were developed in 2015 the construction market on Vancouver Island has boomed, and the bridge condition has continued to deteriorate. The new estimates reflect the market escalation that has occurred and the increased costs associated with the additional repair required. Costs will continue to increase the longer rehabilitation is delayed and the bridge condition continues to deteriorate over time.

17. What would be the anticipated costs for an average taxpayer?

At current tax rates, borrowing $3.4 million for bridge rehabilitation would be equivalent to an estimated 1% total tax increase.

The impact to an average residential property valued at $435,600 (based on 2019 assessments and tax rates,) is estimated at approximately $13 per year.

The impact to an average commercial property* valued at $819,332 (based on 2019 assessments and commercial multiplier of 3.35,) is estimated at approximately $82 per year.

* Please note: Commercial Class 6 encompasses a wide range of businesses and assessment valuations.

Council has directed staff to obtain elector approval for a loan authorization bylaw for the Fifth Street Bridge Rehabilitation Project through the Alternate Approval Process. Total borrowing costs are estimated at $3.4 million, with additional funding through $1.96 million in federal and provincial grants, and the remainder from reserve funds.

18. What measures are being taken to reduce construction time and costs?

Bridges serve an important role in our communities and require thoughtful consideration when it comes to repair and investment. The City is committed to identifying all possible ways to expedite the timeline while ensuring public safety and minimizing costs.

While every effort is being made to mitigate negative impacts wherever possible, some impacts will be unavoidable during construction. The rehabilitation of the bridge is not a decision that is made lightly; it considers the bridge’s potential service lifespan, the impact on taxpayers, the need to maintain public safety and protect the environment, and various guidelines from regulatory agencies regarding engineering standards, public safety and environment.
19. **What is the status of the borrowing bylaw?**

With the first three readings of the bylaw on Monday April 20, 2020, the borrowing process is now underway. The Inspector of Municipalities provided statutory approval on May 5, 2020 allowing this bylaw to proceed to electoral approval when necessary.

Electoral approval, in the form of an Alternative Approval Process, is scheduled to advance this summer. Council will have an opportunity to establish the number of electors and deadline prior to commencing this process.

**TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT**

20. **Will the bridge remain open to vehicle traffic?**

Maintaining access for all modes of transportation is an important consideration as options are explored in coming months. While traffic will need to be reduced to one lane and brief intermittent periods of full closure may be required at times, the project team and the consultants have recommended the increased cost associated with partial bridge access throughout construction, rather than a full closure.

The current project budget estimates include additional costs of $700,000 to keep the bridge open to one lane of traffic during construction. Although the project budget would be $700,000 less if the bridge were fully closed, the City of Courtenay recognizes that a full closure of the bridge would result in significant impacts the community.

A traffic management study will be completed to determine the most efficient and safe options for the travelling public.

21. **Is it possible to complete the work while keeping both lanes of traffic open?**

Unfortunately, no. The Fifth Street Bridge is coated in lead paint that must be removed to address the corrosion within the steel. To protect the surrounding environment, the bridge will need to be wrapped for significant lengths of time during the project. Metal scaffolding around the bridge will be covered to prevent lead paint and other contaminants from entering the Courtenay River and surrounding area.

The scaffolding will narrow the vehicle travelling lanes, reducing the available lane width and height.

There are additional considerations such as noise, lighting and impacts on neighbouring properties and the surrounding environment that also must be considered when developing the construction schedule and approach.

22. **Will pedestrian and cycling access be maintained during construction?**

Maintaining safe access for all modes of transportation is an important consideration for the project team. As bridge design details are finalized, options for safe pedestrian and cycling access will be considered. This is a key priority for the project delivery team.

23. **Will large vehicles and buses be able to use the bridge during construction?**

To replace the bridge coating, the bridge will need to be wrapped. There will be significant implications for emergency vehicles, large trucks and buses.
A detailed traffic management plan is being developed in consultation with various stakeholders. BC Transit, Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI), and the School District are aware of this project, and extensive consultation and engagement with these and other stakeholders will be continue.

**24. Will there be improvements or adjustments to alternate routes during construction, such as traffic signal optimization?**

Where adjustments can be made to reduce congestion and facilitate traffic flow on alternate routes, they will be considered. The traffic management plan will determine the most efficient and safe options for the travelling public. Discussions with MoTI are also ongoing to ensure our traffic systems are optimized to work together during construction. The project team has extensive experience in bridge project delivery, and these considerations will be integrated into the workplan.

**25. Can we work with BC Transit to have shuttle service?**

We continue to engage with BC Transit, MoTI, and SD71 to discuss potential alternatives for multi-passenger vehicles or other options. These details will be determined as part of the traffic management plan.

**26. What is the status of the Traffic Management Plan?**

A draft Traffic Management Plan (TMP) is currently being developed by the City’s consulting engineers and staff with the goal of providing a draft plan for review by key stakeholders this summer. The intent is to consensus-build with stakeholders to help mitigate the potential impacts of the project while ensuring the City receives the best value for construction.

The City appreciates the concerns of the business community, particularly in the downtown core, over the impacts of bridge maintenance. These concerns have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic which has dealt an unprecedented blow to many businesses who have been forced to close or limit services, with no clear end in sight. At the same time this necessary maintenance on the Fifth Street Bridge must be completed to protect this essential infrastructure which plays an important part in the community’s traffic network. The project team is keenly aware of these concerns and will make every effort to maintain the highest possible level of traffic flow while protecting workers and the public.

**27. How will the City coordinate with MoTI to ensure the Highway 19A Bypass and the Fifth Street Bridge project aren’t completed at the same time?**

The City is in close contact with all external stakeholders including MoTI. The City continues to have regular meetings with all external stakeholders regarding project timing.

**28. Would the City consider throwing their efforts behind the Sixth Street pedestrian bridge to build that first and divert pedestrian traffic during construction on the Fifth Street Bridge?**

The $1.96 million in grant funding already secured for the Fifth Street Bridge project is set to expire in March 2022. Due to the complexities of the Sixth Street Bridge project, including securing funding, and obtaining all necessary permits, it would not be possible to complete this project first while still meeting the funding deadline for the Fifth Street Bridge.
CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE

29. When will construction begin?
   The project is expected to begin in spring of 2021. Winter work creates additional costs, delays, and construction challenges for multiple reasons. A detailed work schedule will be developed as planning proceeds. Prior to commencing any work, extensive communications will ensure the public knows what to expect during construction.

30. What is the construction schedule?
   The project is progressing as per the below schedule. While the ongoing COVID pandemic has delayed some items by a few months, overall the project is still on track to meet the original schedule for procurement and construction. This is a draft schedule and is subject to change.

   ![Construction Schedule Table]

31. Will work occur during the day or night?
   The City and its consultants are currently exploring various construction approaches to determine scheduling options that minimize impacts and costs.

   The City of Courtenay is making every effort to maintain one-way traffic during construction. While a full bridge closure would shorten the project timeline, Courtenay Council recognized that this would have significant consequences for the community. The current project budget estimates include additional costs of $700,000 to keep the bridge open to one lane of traffic during construction.

32. Can the work be scheduled to minimize impacts to summer and holiday shopping seasons?
   We will work to minimize impacts to the community where possible; however, not all impacts can be eliminated. The time and cost associated with the wrapping of the bridge make it very difficult to schedule the required construction without inconvenience.

33. Can the construction period be completed during the winter months, over two consecutive years?
   The costs of mobilizing crews and equipment are significant and the costs associated with a two-part construction season would greatly increase the project costs and limit contractor availability. Winter construction presents additional challenges to the construction process. This work should be scheduled during the warmer, drier months.
34. How long will the bridge work take?

Active construction is expected to take approximately six months. The timing and length of the work will be informed by seasonal weather, regulatory requirements, and minimizing impacts to the public.

35. When was the decision to rehabilitate the Fifth Street Bridge made? What happens next?

On Monday, June 24, 2019, City Council directed staff to proceed with next steps towards rehabilitating the bridge, as well as widened cantilevered pathways to improve cycling and pedestrian access.

On February 3, 2020, following review of advanced design for construction staging and scheduling, options for pedestrian and cyclist connectivity, and stakeholder and public engagement, City Council directed staff to remove the cantilever option from the bridge design, and direct resources for improving connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists across the Courtenay River through a dedicated Sixth Street pedestrian and cyclist bridge.

ENVIRONMENT

36. How will the work protect the waterway below?

The bridge is coated in lead paint. As a result, there are significant environmental and safety requirements to ensure the paint is properly collected and disposed of. The bridge will need to be wrapped to prevent contamination of the surrounding area.

ECONOMIC IMPACT AND JOB CREATION

37. Will you use local suppliers to repair the bridge?

As bridge repairs of this scale are highly specialized, the project management team will undertake a detailed and competitive public procurement process to ensure qualified contractors and suppliers. Major construction projects typically call on local suppliers for at least some portions of the work.

Conversations are already underway with the project delivery team to consider local resources, First Nations involvement, and social procurement.

38. Who will complete the work?

The construction contract will be awarded through a competitive public procurement process, likely in the fall of 2020.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

39. How can I learn more?

Proactive communications will be an essential part of this project to ensure timely information is conveyed to the travelling public, business community, and residents living in, or travelling through, the area.

Stay informed on the project webpage www.courtenay.ca/fifthstreetbridge