

Maclay Bridge: In tough times, leave it as is

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"Salvation Army inundated with kettle job applicants" screams the Missoulian headline (Nov. 13). The job lasts seven weeks but helps families get through the holidays in these rough economic times.

Smurfit-Stone is shuttered. Macy's is empty. Jobs lost. Houses foreclosed. Missoula is hurting.

How are our Missoula County commissioners faring? The three commissioners - Jean Curtiss, Bill Carey and Michele Landquist - along with Public Works Director Greg Robertson, are surreptitiously plotting a multi-million-dollar Maclay Bridge replacement. When Commissioner Curtiss is asked for information, she claims, "Please be aware the process is currently in Montana Department of Transportation hands." Yet, MDT claims the county has nominated the replacement a county priority project. In other words, the decision to proceed is the county's call.

No public hearing. No input from area residents. However, the county was finally outed when permission from residents was needed to set aerial photomarkers.

The one-lane historic bridge was significantly rehabbed in 2003. Tonnage load was elevated from 6 to 14 tons. To replace the bridge is not an isolated project. In addition to being the gateway to our treasured Blue Mountain Recreation Area enjoyed by the entire community, the narrow, winding roads, River Pines, Big Flat and Blue Mountain would require significant work to accommodate increased, heavy traffic. The feds may pay 80 percent, state 20 percent of the bridge construction but who pays for the approaches, the infrastructure improvements and condemnation costs? You do, with special improvement district taxes.

We have all seen this movie before. Out-of-state experts are hired, most of whom don't know Big Flat from Big Foot. Lots of pricey studies.

We cannot afford this reckless spending. A new bridge is not wanted, not needed. It is time the commissioners leveled with us. Step up to the plate and inform the public, your employers.

Helen Orendain, Missoula

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