



RUSTIC ROADS ADVISORY COMMITTEE



June 16, 2020

Mr. Barry N. Fuss, PE
Chief, Bridge Design
Transportation Engineering Division
Montgomery County Department of Transportation
100 Edison Park Drive, 4th Floor
Gaithersburg, MD 20878

Re: Schaeffer Road bridge M0137 over the Little Seneca Creek (rustic)

Dear Mr. Fuss:

Our committee has received and discussed the March 18, 2020 letter that MDOT/SHA sent to your office regarding the above referenced one-lane bridge (see attached copy) as well as an email forwarded by our staff coordinator Darcy Buckley on April 16, 2020 which advised us about this letter and the MCDOT project to replace this one-lane bridge with a two-lane bridge. We had no advance communication from MCDOT about this project. In the letter, MDOT/SHA was responding to MCDOT's request for state and federal funding for the replacement of the bridge with another one-lane bridge.

That letter notes that the bridge is 16'-0" clear width with an average daily traffic (ADT) of 434 counted in February 2020. It also notes that the roadway approaches are 20' wide. Based on the ADT and 20' approach roadways, MDOT/SHA's letter indicates that they will not fund a bridge with an ADT of over 400 unless the new bridge has at least a 22' clear roadway width.

The Committee has voted to support renovation rather than replacement of this one-lane bridge for the following reasons.

This small, attractive bridge was constructed in 1925, is 39 feet long and has a clear roadway width of 16 feet. An inventory form written by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) describes this bridge thus:

The structure consists of a reinforced concrete deck on steel beams supported by masonry abutments which have been encased in concrete. The bridge railing consists of concrete balusters supporting two pipe rails and a guardrail beam.

That report finds the bridge to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register for Historic Places.

The County Council designated Schaeffer Road as a rustic road in 1996. At that time, they designated this bridge as a Significant Feature of the road. Under County Code, Significant Features "must be preserved when the road is maintained or improved." In 1996, the road width was the same as the bridge, 16 feet wide. On July 2, 2019, our members received repaving and widening complaints about Schaeffer Road, so the 20-foot bridge approaches are an error that should be corrected. Your department did not consult with the committee on the repaving or widening construction project.

We have the following comments about this bridge proposal:

1. We support the county council's 1996 decision to designate this bridge as a Significant Feature. We recommend that this bridge be rehabilitated and ask to work with your project manager on this project.

As noted above, this bridge is a Significant Feature of rustic Schaeffer Road. Your office recently completed an outstanding rehabilitation project on the Montevideo Road bridge over the Dry Seneca Creek, which is also designated as a significant feature of the road and is National Register eligible. That project was cost effective and completed more quickly than many others which was especially important to area farmers and their customers.

We would like to have a "socially distanced" site visit to look at the bridge together with you and the project manager. Darcy Buckley, our staff coordinator, has confirmed this for Friday, June 19, at noon.

2. We ask that this project not go forward as a replacement, and that we work together to reach an agreement for rehabilitation before any further work continues.

We have the following general comments about rustic road bridges:

3. We would like to gain a better understanding of the federal funding formulas and guidance that result in your division's proposals to widen bridges on rustic roads.

On page 33 of your most recent Bridge Inventory Summary (November 2018), there is a graphic that shows four categories and 24 subcategories of items that go into the Bridge Sufficiency Ratings upon which MDOT bases their funding decisions. The report states that SHA has a program that calculates these. We ask that you or a colleague provide us with and then walk us through examples with the inputs you provide, the factors used by SHA, results, the resulting Bridge Sufficiency Ratings and how this affects funding decisions. Please provide those for current and past projects:

Bridge No.	Road Name	Crossing
M0045	Barnesville Rd	Little Monocacy River
M0108	Brighton Dam Rd	Hawlings River
M0155	Cattail Rd	Dry Seneca Creek
M0013	Glen Rd	Kilgour Branch
M0015	Glen Rd	Piney Branch
M0148	Glen Rd	Sandy Branch
M0030	Montevideo Rd*	Dry Seneca Creek
M0043	Mouth of Monocacy Rd	Little Monocacy River
M0135	Mouth of Monocacy Rd**	CSX
M0198	Pennyfield Lock Rd**	Muddy Branch tributary
M0137	Schaeffer Rd	Little Seneca Creek
M0046	West Harris Rd	Little Monocacy
M0138	White Ground Rd**	Bucklodge Branch

Bridge No.	Road Name	Crossing
M0186	Whites Ferry Rd	Broad Run
M0121	Zion Rd***	Hawlings River

*Please show calculations prior to and after bridge rehabilitation

**Rating Calculations prior to replacement

***Rating Calculations prior to and after deck damage occurred and was repaired

4. In February, during the Capital Improvement Program budget discussions, the Council T&E Committee received a memo regarding changes to the past federal funding guidance. We would like to be briefed on these changes and how bridges on rustic roads might be impacted. Until about 2015, rustic roads bridges were not proposed for federal funding.
5. During those same discussions, extra federal funding was being offered by the state, and a very large group of bridge projects were being proposed. We would like to learn about that funding and to what projects it can be applied. If budgetary changes have been made or are anticipated due to COVID-19 and shifting budgets at all levels, we would like to review those updates.
6. The Montevideo Road and Schaeffer Road bridges are not unique in being Significant Features that must be preserved under County Code. We support the rehabilitation of one-lane bridges on rustic roads. For those that are Significant Features, rehabilitation is expected. As seen with the Montevideo Road bridge, the project was done in a timely and cost-effective manner. We applaud this effort and look forward to more like it.

For items 4, 5 and 6, please gather the information and submit it to our staff coordinator by July 15, 2020. We will review it, send questions back (if necessary), and invite you or your colleagues to join us for our August meeting for a discussion.

We have the following general comments about collaboration:

7. Previously, we have formally requested that your office coordinate with our committee on bridge projects at the beginning of the process. We should be working with you on them before your CIP submission to the County Executive and release to the County Council and public. We are very disappointed that this is still not being done.

We are making that request again. Coordination should begin when a bridge project comes under very preliminary consideration by your division.

We have been developing working relationships with other divisions within your department, and we wish to do the same with yours. This involves working together closely and regularly. In part this will involve your assistance in educating our members during these early discussions and collaborations.

8. The Montgomery County Rustic Roads Program is recognized by the state as an outstanding heritage tourism resource; the roads are specifically identified in the Montgomery County Heritage Area Management Plan. The Maryland Heritage Areas FY2018 economic impact report found that heritage resources generated \$19.8m in state and local taxes and created 3,146 jobs.

Rustic roads are vital to our rural economy. Early coordination with the Heritage Tourism Alliance of Montgomery County (Heritage Montgomery) is key. We support that coordination being done in conjunction with ours.

Our residents and visitors appreciate our rustic roads. Our Agricultural Reserve and these unique roads are a credit to those who created these programs, and we are all fortunate to be stewards of them today. The roads and landscapes reflect our County's culture, history and unique character. Rustic roads and their bridges are critical contributors to heritage and agricultural tourism.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues, to meeting this week for a "socially distanced" site visit on Schaeffer Road, and to reviewing the information (#s 4, 5 and 6) in July. Please contact us through our staff coordinator, Darcy Buckley, at 240-777-7166 or Darcy.Buckley@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. Tworkowski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "R" and "T".

Robert J. Tworkowski, Chair
Rustic Roads Advisory Committee

Committee Members: Todd Greenstone, Laura Van Etten, Dan Seamans, Robert Wilbur, Kamran Sadeghi, Lonnie Luther, Leslie Saville (M-NCPPC)

cc: Sarah Rogers, Heritage Montgomery
Stephen Aldrich, M-NCPPC
Dale Tibbitts
Greg Hwang, MCDOT

Attachment: March 18, 2020 MDOT/SHA letter regarding Schaeffer Road Bridge

March 18, 2020

Subject: Replacement of Schaeffer Road Bridge No.
M-0137 over Little Seneca Creek

Mr. Barry N. Fuss, P.E.
Chief, Bridge Design
Transportation Engineering Division
Montgomery County Department of Transportation
100 Edison Park Drive, 4th Floor
Gaithersburg MD 20878

Dear Mr. Fuss:

You staff recently submitted information to us regarding the above captioned Montgomery County Bridge and asked for feedback on an acceptable bridge width. The County's intent is to replace the existing one lane bridge with another one lane bridge. We have reviewed the information relative to design exceptions, eligibility for federal funding, etc. We have the following comments.

This is a narrow bridge, 16'-0" clear width, with an average daily traffic (ADT) of 434 counted in February 2020. It is posted for 50,000/64,000 lbs and has a poor superstructure and substructure. The approach roadway is 20' wide with no shoulder. The bridge was built in 1925. The road is a county-designated "Rustic Road."

Ordinarily, we do not approve a one lane bridge and have only made exceptions when the ADT is less than 400 and there is no existing accident history at the site. This is based on guidance from AASHTO Guidelines for Very Low Volume Local Roads, less than 400 ADT, which states "Where an existing bridge needs replacement for structural reasons, but there is no evidence of a site-specific safety problem, the replacement bridge can be constructed with the same width as the existing bridge." What is concerning at this site is that traffic counts taken in the summer of 2,011 had an ADT of 2,964. Clearly, this roadway has higher traffic volumes in the summer months likely associated with the nearby bike trail and parking facility. We understand that new traffic counts will be taken this summer to confirm if this is the case.

MDOT SHA would support a two-lane replacement bridge. For this type of roadway, with ADT over 2000, AASHTO's A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets recommends two 10' lanes and 6' shoulders for a clear roadway width of 32'. Because of the roadway's rustic classification by the County and the approach roadways are 20' wide. MDOT SHA would be willing to support a design exception for a two-lane bridge with a 22' clear roadway width provided the County has no plans in the future to widen the approach roadway.

If you have any questions, please contact Jeff Robert at 410-545-8327, or email, jrobert@sha.state.md.us.

Very truly yours,



Maurice Agostino, Deputy Director
Office of Structures