

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

WORK SESSION MEETING DATE: September 7, 2021

AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Aspen Village Bridge Connection to Rio Grande Trail

STAFF RESPONSIBLE: Gary Tennenbaum and Jessie Young

ISSUE STATEMENT: The 2015 Rio Grande Trail Management Plan identified a management action to improve regional trail connections to the Rio Grande Trail including addressing the missing link to Aspen Village subdivision. Following the direction from this plan, staff engaged SGM engineers to evaluate the feasibility and costs of potential bridge alignments across the Roaring Fork River connecting the Hwy. 82 underpass to the trail. The goal of this connection is to enhance the safety of this important connection where currently users must navigate the narrow, high-traffic Gerbaz Way with significant blind corners and grade changes to access the trail.

BACKGROUND:

The [Rio Grande Management Plan](#), adopted in 2015, identified a number of missing links between population centers throughout the valley and the Rio Grande Trail. Among these missing links is the connection to the Aspen Village neighborhood. A CDOT trail provides multi-use, separated trail access along the west side of Hwy. 82 to a highway underpass; however, on the east side of the highway, the path ends on Gerbaz Way leaving users to navigate the roadway down to the bridge across the river and back up to the Rio Grande Trail. Gerbaz Way is a narrow road without shoulders, a couple blind corners, and significant grade change creating safety concerns for residents accessing the Rio Grande Trail on foot or bike.

There are approximately 150 homes within the Aspen Village subdivision with additional potential users coming from Old Snowmass via Watson Divide. Staff received numerous requests to address this missing link during the public outreach for the Rio Grande Node Plan in 2019 and residents took it upon themselves to collect input from their neighbors to demonstrate the need and support for this project in the fall of 2020 (included as an attachment). After speaking with residents on both sides of the potential bridge project (including Aspen Village, Woody Creek, Phillips, and Lower River Road neighborhoods) they reported that “Overwhelmingly, the response was positive. There is a strong desire to see a direct bridge across the Roaring Fork River from each side. The trails on each side of the river are approximately at the same level. Removing the trek down to the water and back up to the other side’s trail is seen as an important aspect of the connection.”

Staff contracted SGM in 2020 to evaluate the options to connect the underpass path to the Rio Grande Trail. SGM evaluated three types of bridge designs and four alignment alternatives as well as the potential for an expanded shoulder along Gerbaz Way. The complete report describes the constructability, aesthetics, feasibility, maintenance needs and costs of each of the structures and alignments. Site visits with the engineers and the information provided in the alternatives analysis has led staff to recommend proceeding with the pre-fab, steel truss bridge and alignment

#2. This bridge would be the most affordable, easiest to construct, and matches others on our system. Additionally, because there is no interaction with the roadway (as in alignments #3 and #4) it is the safer option and is less visible from the highway. Based on these factors, staff recommends if this project is pursued, that we proceed with the design and construction of the pre-fab, steel truss bridge and alignment #2.

A similar project was completed in 2018 connecting the Lazy Glen neighborhood to the Rio Grande Trail across the Roaring Fork River. The Lazy Glen Bridge linked about 131 homes to the Rio Grande for similar construction costs totaling approximately \$725,000 for the same type of steel truss bridge and a connecting trail.

To put this budget request in context of other large trail priorities, the following are future potential projects and estimated costs:

Brush Creek Park and Ride to Aspen Airport Business Center – This feasibility of this project is currently being pursued and staff will present options to the Elected Officials Transportation Committee (EOTC) and OSTB in March 2022. This is a partnership with City of Aspen and the EOTC, and costs have not been determined, but in a 2014 feasibility study, costs were between \$8-15 million. We would look to partner on costs and seek grant funding.

Carbondale to Crested Butte Trail – The first phase from Redstone to McClure Pass is being evaluated by the Forest Service and if approved, we would then seek funding to complete this section. Costs will range from \$1.4-2 million. There are no other phases being considered right now. If the BOCC and OSTB decide to move forward with future phases, the cost estimates in the Carbondale to Crested Butte Plan are \$5.5-16 million, but this would be phased over the next 20 years.

Road safety improvements – Castle Creek Road to the Music School was the first section of road for which the Open Space program assisted Road and Bridge with improvements for safety. Other county roads that see significant bike traffic and would be prioritized for improvements with which OST can assist are the rest of Castle Creek Road, Maroon Creek Road, McLain Flats Road, Capitol Creek Road and Snowmass Creek Road. The costs have not been calculated, but this would be in partnership with Road and Bridge, and grant funding would be explored.

A current fund balance will be presented at the meeting.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

The following “Core Focus Areas & Success Factors” are related to this item:

Flourishing Natural & Built Environment – Success Factors

1. Conserved natural resources and environment
2. Responsibly maintain and enhance county assets
3. Ease of mobility via safe and efficient transportation systems
4. Well-planned and livable built environment

KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Evaluating the need for this project based on the existing conditions, community support and project costs.

Input regarding staff's recommended alignment #2 and the Prefabricated Steel Truss alternative.

BUDGETARY IMPACT: \$700,000

RECOMMENDED BOCC / OSTB ACTION: Provide staff with direction on whether to include this project in the 2022 work plan and budget for anticipated construction in spring/summer of 2022.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Aspen Village Pedestrian Bridge Alternatives Report (June 2021) – prepared by SGM Engineering
- Public Comments collected in December 2020
- YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBL37kJ50NU>