



## RUSTIC ROADS COMMISSION FREDERICK COUNTY, MARYLAND

30 North Market Street, Third Floor   Frederick, Maryland 21701   (301) 600-1149



June 27, 2024

### **Letter on the Hessong Bridge Rd. Bridge Replacement Project from the Project Review Subcommittee**

The Division of Public Works (DPW) is performing a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project to replace the bridge on Hessong Bridge Rd. over Little Hunting Creek. The existing bridge is a one-lane Acrow panel bridge, which are designed to be temporary crossing structures. DPW is looking to replace the bridge with a two-lane structure.

Hessong Bridge Rd., north of the bridge, and Blacks Mill Rd., the crossing street after the bridge, are both candidate roads. Candidate roads are tar-and-chip roads with a speed limit of 35 miles or less, less than 1000 trips per day, and are not inside community growth areas or rural major subdivisions. Based on these criteria, both are considered roads to be potentially included into the Rustic Roads Program.

The project has many variables that DPW is considering when designing this project including input from the Maryland Department of the Environment, related to the impacts to Little Hunting Creek, Maryland Historic Trust, for the nearby archaeological site that contains a school, chapel, and cemetery, as well as the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corp of Engineers.

The initial design phase was unable to completely satisfy the comments from the state and local agencies to move into the construction phase. Since DPW is looking at alternative designs for this crossing, the Project Review Subcommittee met with the Project Manager of this CIP project. They discussed the status of the design phase and the subcommittee's concerns of the initial design's potential negative impacts on Hessong Bridge and Blacks Mill Roads' eligibility to be included into the Rustic Roads Program in the future. They also considered different actions that could mitigate those potential negative impacts.

This letter is fashioned to be the Rustic Roads Commission's comments for the project while the new drawings are being created so that the Commission's concerns can be considered.



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July 10, 2024

Tracy Diggs  
Chief, Office of Transportation Engineering  
355 Montevue Ln.  
Suite 200  
Frederick, MD 21702

Dear Tracy Diggs,

In our continuing work to preserve Frederick County's Rustic Roads for the benefit of all users, the Rustic Roads Commission has become aware of a bridge project that involves two candidate roads; Hessong Bridge Road and Blacks Mill Road. The Commission feels this is an opportunity for a replacement bridge to be designed with the values and objectives set forth in the recommendations of *A Rustic Roads Program for Frederick County Maryland*.

Given this bridge replacement's design phase began prior to the establishment of the Rustic Roads Commission, and at a time when the impacts to all users were potentially not considered, the Commission requests that this letter be retroactively treated as part of the study phase, and to be considered when moving forward into the design phase.

Referencing page 24 of the report, under Bridge Replacement: "*Bridge replacement must be of a design and material which preserves or enhances the historic appearance of the road. Bridges must be replaced at a scale and with materials similar to those of the previously existing structure.*" It is our understanding that the initially designed replacement bridge would have been significantly wider, 32 feet including shoulders, the road would be straightened, and the design speed would increase for the south approach to the bridge. This change would have negatively affected the safety of all users, particularly non-automobile users. Recent studies have shown that lane widening increases vehicle speeds, induces increased traffic volume, increases construction costs, and reduces safety.<sup>1</sup>

Hessong Bridge Road is one of the roads most frequently used by cyclists in Frederick County. It is a critical north-south corridor from US15 to MD550 for the County's cycling network and is featured on many cycling routes and events. In this six-mile segment it makes connections to not just Blacks Mill Road, but many other low-speed, low-volume

<sup>1</sup> Shima Hamidi, PhD, *A National Investigation on the Impacts of Lane Width on Traffic Safety: Narrowing Travel Lanes as an Opportunity to Promote Biking and Pedestrian Facilities Within the Existing Roadway Infrastructure*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, November 2023, pages 4, 17.



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rural roads, including Lakeview Road, Stull Road, Utica Road, Lewistown Road, Powell Road, Fish Hatchery Road, Angleberger Road, Kellys Store Road, Blue Mountain Road, and Layman Road. This road is an important cornerstone of Frederick County's cycling network. While wide shoulders on the bridge would seemingly provide safety to cyclist, any safety benefits afforded by that space would be undone by increasing speed and traffic. Existing nearby higher speed roads parallel Hessong Bridge Road on both sides: US15 and Old Frederick Road - serving the same destinations to automobile users.

The Commission agrees that the current bridge has safety concerns and was never intended to be a permanent bridge. However, it is in the best interests of the residents, users, and taxpayers of the County to ensure that a suitable design moves forward. The design should not be excessively wide to keep design speeds at their current level. This bridge also has the opportunity to become a visible gateway feature from Utica into the Catoctin Furnace area through stamped concrete, pronounced corner pillar, or other architectural details.

There are good examples in Frederick County of shoulder-less, two lane bridges on collector roads, such as the LeGore Bridge over the Monocacy River. While LeGore Bridge's structure differs in overall scale from the Hessong Bridge project, the road design on the bridge is more in keeping with the values and objectives of the Rustic Roads Program than the potential 32-foot-wide bridge.

The Rustic Roads Commission respectfully requests that the future design of the Hessong Bridge Road bridge replacement be sensitive to the Rustic Roads setting north of the project and consider the suggestions outlined in this letter. The Project Review Subcommittee of the Commission is open to meet with the Project Manager for the bridge replacement if they have any further questions.

Our intention is not to cause delay but rather to explore the possibility of finding a more appropriate and suitable solution that better serves the criteria set forth in *A Rustic Roads Program for Frederick County Maryland*, the users of these roads, and the residents and taxpayers of Frederick County.

Respectfully,

Susan Hanson, Chair  
Frederick County Rustic Roads Commission



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### *A Rustic Roads Program for Frederick County Maryland*

#### Page 24: Road Maintenance and Reconstruction Guidelines: Reconstruction of Rustic Roads:

iv) Bridge Replacement: Bridge replacement must be of a design and material which preserves or enhances the historic appearance of the road. Bridges must be replaced at a scale and with materials similar to those of the previously existing structure. If a different design is required for environmental, economic, or safety reasons, new bridges must be of a design and material that complement or enhance the rustic appearance of the roadway. Correction of substandard approach road geometries must be made in character with existing unmodified portions of the roadway. All new bridges must adhere to weight bearing capacity and safety requirements. Consultation with the HPC or County historic preservation planner must precede improvements to bridges that are designated County landmarks, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, or evaluated as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.



Image 1: LeGore Bridge road surface