

RUSTIC ROADS COMMISSION FREDERICK COUNTY, MARYLAND

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



November xx, 2024

TO: Jason Stitt and Tracy Diggs, Division of Public Works
FR: Susan Hanson, Chair, Frederick County Rustic Roads Commission
RE: Comments on Bridge No. F-1501 for submission to the State Highway Administration

At the Rustic Roads Commission (RRC) meeting on October 9, 2024, Tracy Diggs and Commissioner Barbara Wyatt discussed the RRC's desire to comment early in the design process about the design of the bridge to replace the existing bridge over Little Hunting Creek on Hessong Bridge Rd (Structure No. F-1501). The RRC believes the SHA should be aware of the RRC's concerns well before the eventual public comment period, which Tracy Diggs originally stated would be the opportunity for the RRC to submit comments. After some discussion, Mr. Diggs agreed that the RRC could submit comments in an easily understood format for submission to SHA by the Division of Public Works. This memo constitutes the RRC's comments about the bridge replacement. Please let me know if the RRC also should submit its comments to SHA independent of DPW and, if so, to whom I should address the comments.

Rustic Roads Commission Comments on the Design of Bridge No. F-1501

- 1. Proximity to Candidate Roads.** Bridge No. F-1501 on Hessong Bridge Rd, crossing Little Hunting Creek, is immediately south of the intersection of three road segments that are considered Candidate Roads. Such Candidate Roads meet the objective criteria for Rustic Road designation but have not yet been designated. The section of Hessong Bridge Rd leading north and Blacks Mill Rd, leading west, exemplify the qualities embodied by the county's Rustic Roads. The section of Hessong Bridge Rd leading south from this intersection has a speed limit and other qualities that preclude its designation as a Rustic Road; however, this segment of the road is used by many slow speed travelers to reach Blacks Mill Rd and northern Hessong Bridge Rd. Together with Kelly's Store Rd to the north, they make a safe loop for cyclists and others. Placing a bridge that accommodates higher speeds at this location would impact the many travelers on the nearby rural and rustic roads.
- 2. Design Qualities are Inconsistent with Rustic Roads.** The replacement bridge, as proposed, is of a scale and design that is inconsistent with the values and objectives set forth in *A Rustic Roads Program for Frederick County*. The document states that bridge replacements for Rustic Roads must be of a design and material that preserve or

enhance the historic appearance of the road. The scale and materials should be similar to those of the previously existing bridge.¹

It is our understanding that the proposed replacement bridge will be significantly wider, 32 feet, including shoulders; the road will be straightened; and a speed increase to 45 mph is proposed for the south approach to the bridge. A vehicle heading north on Hessong Bridge Rd and crossing the bridge at that speed, close to the important intersection of two Candidate Roads, would impact on the enjoyment and safety of Rustic Road travelers. The candidacy of Blacks Mill Rd and northern Hessong Bridge Rd could be jeopardized for inclusion in the Rustic Roads Program.

3. **Significance.** Hessong Bridge Rd is one of the roads most frequently used by cyclists in Frederick County. In a six-mile segment, it makes connections to Blacks Mill Rd and many other low-speed, low volume rural and rustic roads, making it a cornerstone of Frederick County's cycling network. Please see Attachment 1 to understand the dense network of roads that appeal to cyclists and other low-speed travelers in this vicinity.
4. **Safety.** The change in dimensions and speed limit would have a negative effect on the safety of all users. Recent studies have shown that lane widening increases vehicle speed, increases traffic volume, increases construction costs, and reduces safety.² The Rustic Roads Commission is aware of only two vehicle accidents in the vicinity of the existing bridge. Because both accidents only resulted in property damage, it is likely that the lack of injuries is related to the low design speed of the existing bridge.
5. **Lack of Necessity.** Existing higher speed roads parallel Hessong Bridge Rd on both sides: US 15 and Old Frederick Rd/MD 550 serve the same destinations, Thurmont to the north and Frederick to the south. The low-speed roads in the vicinity of Hessong Bridge Rd are nestled between these major north-south routes. With other options for higher speed travel, the necessity of accommodating higher speeds through the bridge design on the Hessong Bridge Road bridge should only be considered if other routes are

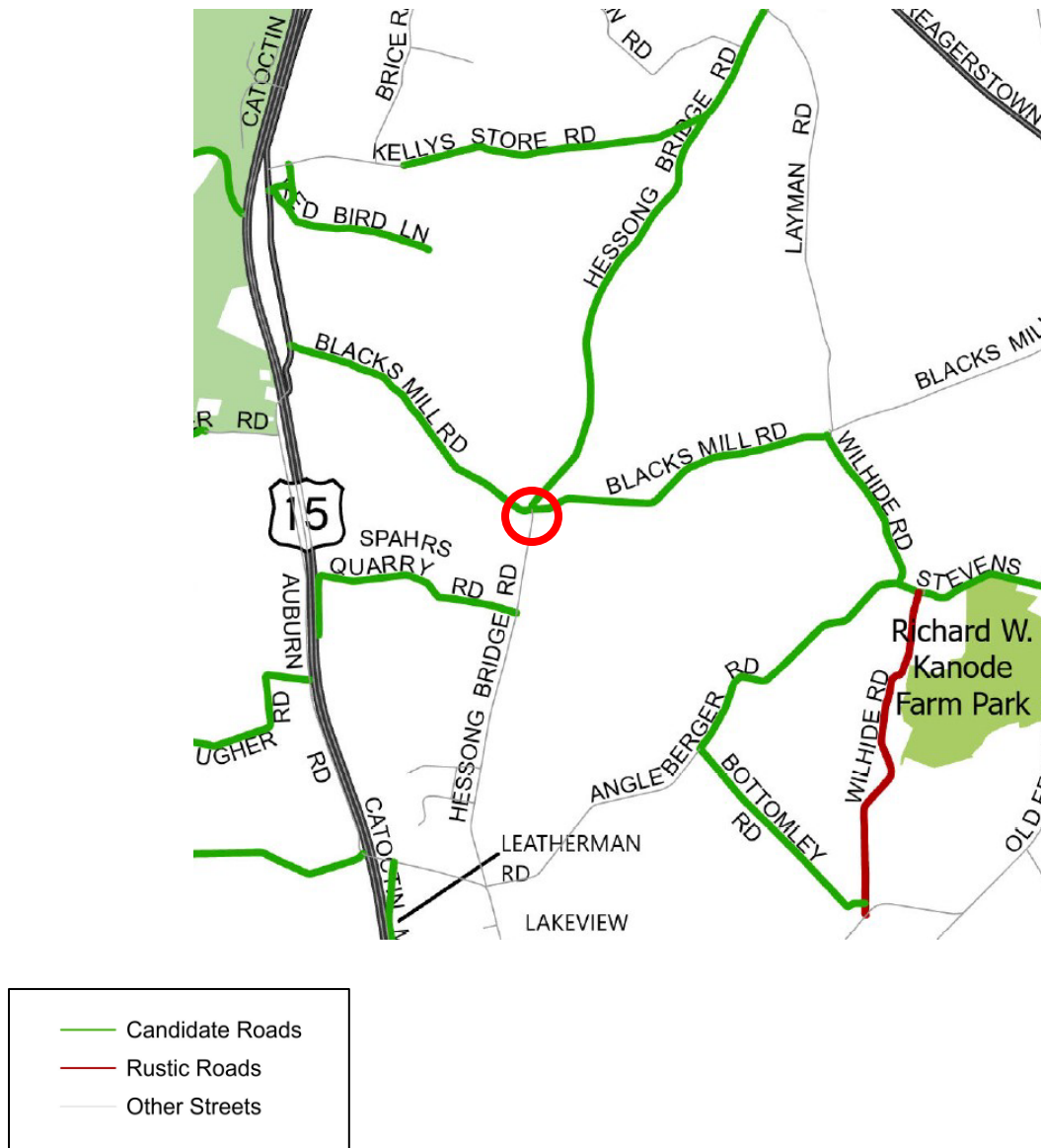
¹ *A Rustic Roads Program for Frederick County, Maryland.* (Frederick County Scenic and Rustic Roads Advisory Committee, September 2022, p. 24). Available online at:

https://frederickcountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/340729/Rural-Scenic-Roads-Report_reduced?bidId=

² 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.

inadequate. Such data regarding US 15, Old Frederick Rd, and MD 550 has not been presented.

6. **Recommendation.** The Commission supports a bridge design that is narrow and continues to keep vehicle speeds lower through design rather than posted limits. While currently a single lane bridge, a narrow, two-lane replacement bridge without shoulders may be suitable. Such a bridge would continue to offer vulnerable road users' safety, while increasing utility to the agricultural community in that area. It could be designed to resonate with the county's smaller bridges and blend with the natural environment of the site with stone, concrete, brick, wood, or steel components.



Attachment 1. Frederick County, showing Designated and Candidate Rustic Roads in the vicinity of Hessong Bridge Rd. This section of Frederick County has a dense network of Designated and Candidate Rustic Rds. Located south of Thurmont and north of the City of Frederick, among bicyclists and other slow-speed travelers, these roads are among the most heavily travelled of Frederick County's Rustic Roads.

