Improving the Higgins Bridge For the Community

Presented by the Missoula Institute for Sustainable Transportation (MIST), to the Public Works committee of City Council, 3/26/14
Current Bridge Does Not Meet Community Needs
Two people cannot walk side by side—one person has to walk slightly in front or behind
Bike lanes are dangerous on the Higgins Bridge—would you want to ride a bike between the railing and a bus or truck?
A person on a bike has to stay away from the curb but also worry about being hit by vehicle mirrors.
Notice the gap in the railings that are not friendly to children or pets.
MISSOULA LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE– 2012
“The public demonstrated strong support for multi-modal improvements during both the 2008 Envision Missoula workshops and the 2012 Connections workshops.”

487 RECOMMENDED
Higgins/Broadway Reconfiguration Study: To study feasibility of different treatments to improve access and safety for all modes, including conversion to three lanes. STPU and local funds $50,000.00

*The Long Range Plan calls for change on the bridge*
Missoula Active Transportation Plan– 2011  
An amendment to the 2005 Missoula County Growth Policy

#69– Higgins Avenue Bridge Improvements–
Protected bikeways, enhanced connections to Caras Park, widened walkway, and Historic Street Lights.

#129– Bike and pedestrian facilities on Higgins–
Improve Higgins Street to include safe, continuous and accessible bike/ped facilities from Brooks to Broadway.

*The Active Transportation Plan also calls for change on Higgins Ave
Pedestrians
To ensure that downtown Missoula thrives, improvements to the pedestrian environment must be of highest transportation priority.

Bicycles
Increased ridership should be fostered by providing a connected system that is safe for riders of all ages and skill levels.

Higgins Avenue
Initiate a public process for design and review of alternatives for Higgins Avenue as a four-lane or a three-lane street between Brooks and Railroad streets

*The Downtown Master Plan strongly supports walking and biking and calls for change on Higgins Avenue*
Existing Higgins Bridge

Existing Bridge: Three–Lane with Protected Bikeway

*The ‘existing bridge’ figures are not correct: the bike lane is 5’6” and the outside travel lane is about 9’6” and not 11’.*
*One vision of what the Higgins Bridge could look like in the future. We suggest increasing the space for people on bikes a couple of feet, as compared to this rendering. There is plenty of room for an increase*
A bridge with two lanes for cars (instead of four) would work well for drivers as long as turn lanes are kept at the intersections on each end of the bridge. One left turn lane (a), one thru lane (b) and one right turn lane (c) would work well.*
*The traffic volumes on Higgins show that a 4-lanes is too much for Higgins and that a 3-lane road (one lane in each direction with a center turn lane) would suffice. The bridge can be a ‘pure’ 2-lane as the turn lane would not be needed*
Widen sidewalk to edge of bike lane
Keep this lane for motorized vehicles
Convert this travel lane to a buffered bike lane

These cars would ‘compress’ into one lane, which would make for smooth, calm traffic. The single lane would feed into a left turn lane, a thru lane and a right turn lane at the Front/ Higgins intersection.

With minor adjustments, the Higgins Bridge can become transformed to a community center piece.
Conclusion, from MIST:

Start a local study now, to complement MDT study. Thank you.

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*The current bridge study being undertaken by MDT did not look at a 2-lane or 3-lane Higgins – a flaw in our opinion. To fix this flaw, The City of Missoula can initiate a local study and/or project, as outlined in the 2012 Long Range Transportation Plan.*