

Ferry to operate in Madison during temporary closing of bridge on U.S. 421

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 09 December 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 09 December 2009 10:02

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) released details on the proposed ferry service that would operate during the temporary closure of the US 421 bridge connecting Milton, Ky., and Madison.

The free ferry service would take vehicles and pedestrians from the Milton boat ramp at Ferry St. to the former boat launching ramp at Ferry St. near the City of Madison campground. The estimated \$5.6 million cost of ferry service is based on 7-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day service, except when weather or river conditions make operations unsafe. "Two ferries would run most of the day, and one ferry would operate at night and on weekends," said Kevin Hetrick, INDOT project manager. "If necessary, we could add a second ferry for big weekend events." In addition to cars, the ferries could accommodate small trucks.

Plans are being developed to manage parking and traffic in both staging areas. Enhancements would be made to both launch sites by adding restroom facilities, sidewalks and resurfacing. The \$5.6 million cost of providing the public with free ferry service is just one of the project's mitigation efforts. "Without the addition of the ferry service, the economic impact to the region would be far worse. This is a substantial investment by both states to offset the closure of a bridge that needs replacing," added Hetrick.

Two ferries, operating simultaneously, would hold up to 24 cars each. Each crossing would take about 12 minutes, including loading and unloading. During peak hours, the ferries could carry 240 cars per hour. A total of about 4,800 vehicles could be accommodated per day, meeting approximately 40 percent of the current 11,000 vehicle-per-day traffic demand. Remaining drivers may choose to take an alternate route, such as Markland Dam. Others may choose not to make the trip or travel to another location.

"We expect the system to balance itself out over the first few weeks of operation," said Gary Valentine, KYTC project manager. "By then, each driver will figure out their best personal option for getting across the river."

Ridesharing is one option being considered to minimize wait times. Vehicles with high occupancy may be given priority boarding. "We're also looking into adding signs in the staging areas that would let drivers know how long their wait would be from that point in the queue," added Valentine.

Since the ferries wouldn't be used until early 2011, there is still time for public input on ferry operations. The public is invited to take part in a poll at MiltonMadisonBridge.com. The online survey asks how long motorists would be willing to wait to ride the ferry once the bridge closes.

Following several requests from the public, the project also researched the possibility of a floating bridge as an alternative to ferry service. The use of a floating bridge was found to be cost prohibitive at an estimated \$900 million, more than six times the \$131 million cost of superstructure replacement.

Other obstacles included the width of the Ohio River and the accommodation of barge traffic.

In late January, KYTC and INDOT will find out if the states have been awarded \$95 million in federal stimulus funding toward the estimated \$131 million cost of the proposed superstructure replacement. The states will split evenly the remaining cost. Superstructure replacement involves removal of the current bridge's steel superstructure and construction of a new span atop the existing piers. It would require closing the bridge in early 2011 for about a year.