

Via Email Only

December 22, 2023

The Honorable Frank Hornstein,
Chair
House Transportation Finance & Policy Committee
563 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

The Honorable Scott Dibble,
Chair
Senate Transportation Committee
3107 Minnesota Senate Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

The Honorable Erin Koegel
Chair
House Sustainable Infrastructure Policy Committee
445 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

The Honorable John Petersburg,
Republican Lead
House Transportation Finance & Policy Committee
217 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

The Honorable John Jasinski,
Ranking Minority Member
Senate Transportation Finance & Policy Committee
2227 Minnesota Senate Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

The Honorable Mary Franson
Republican Lead
House Sustainable Infrastructure Policy Committee
303 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Re: Blatnik Bridge Project Design-Build Notice

Dear Legislators:

[Minnesota Statutes 161.3412, subdivision 3\(b\)](#) requires the Commissioner of Transportation to notify the chairs of the Senate and House of Representatives committees with jurisdiction over transportation policy and transportation finance each time the commissioner decides to use the design-build method for procurement and explain why the method was chosen.

MnDOT has decided to use the design-build (DB) delivery method to reconstruct the Blatnik Bridge and its approach roadways. The Interstate 535 Blatnik Bridge connects Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin and is the second largest bridge in Minnesota. The existing bridge is in poor condition, has high crash rates, and limits freight mobility due to weight limitations. This reconstruction project is being developed to update the structure to current standards, add bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and improve traffic operations. The project is tentatively scheduled to begin construction in 2027, although one or more smaller traditional projects may be executed prior to that time in order to prepare the site for construction and keep the process on schedule. MnDOT and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) will cost share in this project and are jointly seeking federal funding grants to match current state funds allocated to the project.

MnDOT hosted a series of workshops to determine the most appropriate delivery method for a project of this size and complexity. These workshops included WisDOT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). These workshops evaluated the risks and opportunities of various contracting methods. MnDOT also sought the input of our industry partners from the Associated General Contractors (AGC) and professional engineering consulting firms.

Design-build was selected as the preferred contracting method for several reasons. First, there is risk in designing and constructing the main span of the bridge over an active shipping channel. Construction of a complex main span over this channel requires close coordination between the designer and construction contractor. Design-build brings these teams together more effectively than the other procurement options. MnDOT used design-build successfully on other major river crossings with similar risks. These projects include the TH 61 Hastings Bridge Replacement, I-35W over the Minnesota River, and I-35W over the Mississippi River.

Second, design-build typically results in lower cost growth after the start of construction, fewer construction claims, and less delays. Design-build provides the opportunity for the contractor and designer to collaborate early to reduce construction timelines. The contractor and designer will be able to collaborate on construction staging and bridge elements to reduce impacts. The risk of claims and delays are typically minimized because the single contract allows the contractor to review and direct the design to meet their unique construction methodology.

Design-build also allows contractors and consultants to submit proposals that include price and their unique technical approach. Design-build allows more innovation by letting teams propose different methods to design and construct the project that meets the project requirements and community goals. These innovations typically result in improved quality, reduced construction time, and/or lower overall costs.

For the reasons above, and if MnDOT receives a grant enabling us to contract the entire project at once, MnDOT has made the decision to use the design-build delivery method to deliver the Blatnik Bridge reconstruction project. If such a grant is not received this decision will be revisited.

Please feel free to call the following contacts if you have questions about the project or the Design-Build program, respectively:

Blatnik Bridge Project Manager: [Pat Huston](#), 218-348-9902
Design-Build Program Manager: [Peter Davich](#), 651-283-6698

Sincerely,



Jean Wallace, P.E.
Deputy Commissioner / Chief Engineer

Ecc: Rep. Liz Olson
Rep. Alicia "Liish" Kozlowski
Sen. Jennifer McEwen