

**NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
HIGHWAY PROJECT INFORMATION**

NDOT PROJECT:

NH-30-5(131) Columbus South Bridges; C.N. 31983

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) is currently soliciting public input on proposed improvements to the Columbus Loup River Bridges in Platte County.

Identified as ***Columbus South Bridges***, the proposed project would improve the U.S. Highway 30 (US-30)/U.S. Highway 81 (US-81) crossing of the Loup River at the southern edge of Columbus in Platte County. This project would replace the southbound Columbus Loup River Bridge (S030 37773L), repair the deck of the northbound bridge (S030 37773R), and replace the southbound part of the Pawnee Park Drive underpass (S030 37787). The new southbound bridge would be built on the same alignment as the existing southbound bridge and would include a shared use path along the west side of the bridge, connecting to the Pawnee Park Trail on the north side of the river and a future trail to be built along US-30/US-81 south of the river. Roadway lighting would be replaced, portions of the existing roadway pavement and driveways would be replaced, and utilities close to the existing road would be relocated.

The purpose of this project is to facilitate the safe movement of people and goods along US-30/US-81 through Columbus while improving mobility, connectivity, and accessibility across the Loup River. Improvements are needed to maintain the condition and reliability of the river crossing and improve performance. The need for this project is based on the condition of the existing bridges.

The proposed project would require the acquisition of additional property rights, which could include new right-of-way (ROW), control of access (CA), permanent easements (PE), and/or temporary easements (TE). If your property is impacted by this project, you will be contacted by a representative. Access to adjacent properties would be maintained during construction but may be limited at times due to phasing requirements.

The project would impact wetland, forest, and riverine habitats, and require that a temporary detour be developed to maintain use of the Pawnee Park Trail during construction. The project would not displace any residences or businesses, and access to adjacent properties would be maintained throughout construction. The river would remain open under the bridges during construction to support recreational uses, although short term access closures would be required for certain construction activities. Since the Columbus Loup River Bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), its replacement results in an adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Columbus Loup River Bridge (a historic resource), Pawnee Park (a public park), and the Pawnee Park Trail (a public trail) are protected under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act (DOT Act).

Construction could begin as early as fall of 2024 with completion anticipated by fall 2027. This project would be constructed under traffic with lane closures controlled by appropriate traffic control devices and practices; however, a temporary detour would be needed for the portion of the Pawnee Park Trail that travels along the north bank of the river under the two bridges. The replacement of the Pawnee

Park Drive underpass structure would be phased to allow for use of Pawnee Park Drive as a pedestrian trail detour while the portion of the trail along the levee is temporarily closed. Vehicular access between the west and east sections of Pawnee Park would be maintained with a local signed detour. The detour route for Pawnee Park Drive would utilize 26th Avenue and 8th Street. Traffic on US-30/US-81 would not be detoured.

NDOT will work with the City of Columbus to design and install a re-creation of one of the trusses from the historic Columbus Loup River Bridge within Pawnee Park as mitigation under Section 106. Following coordination with consulting parties, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between NDOT, the City, and the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) stipulating the required mitigation has been drafted and is under review. The mitigation installation would be constructed with new materials, not parts of the old bridge, and would include an interpretive display incorporating photos, maps, and information on the history of the Columbus Loup River Bridge.

Section 4(f) of the DOT Act stipulates that the use of land from: publicly owned parks or recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historical sites cannot be authorized unless there is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative to the use of the land and the action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from such use; or the use of the property will have a *de minimis* (minor) impact. NDOT has planned the Columbus South Bridges Project to not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that qualify Pawnee Park and the Pawnee Park Trail for protection under Section 4(f). No permanent right-of-way will be acquired from Pawnee Park. Temporary easements across parklands would provide access to the project site during construction. These areas would be restored once the project is completed. Temporary detours of Pawnee Park Drive and Pawnee Park Trail would be used during construction to maintain public access. Access to the public fishing and kayak access east of the northbound bridge would be maintained as well as use of the river through the crossing during construction. NDOT has determined that the Columbus South Bridges Project would have a *de minimis* effect on Pawnee Park and the Pawnee Park Trail under Section 4(f). NDOT will also be coordinating with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission under Section 6(f) of the DOT Act because federal Land and Water Conservation Funds were used by the City to acquire and develop Pawnee Park. The FHWA's Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for Projects that Necessitate the Use of Historic Bridges is being applied to the replacement of the historic Columbus Loup River Bridge.

The public is encouraged to make suggestions or express concerns regarding the proposed Section 106 mitigation, the *de minimis* use of parkland, and the temporary detours of the trail as 4(f) resources. Comments will be collected through October 6, 2023. Written comments or requests should be submitted to: Lucas Nelsen, Public Involvement Specialist, Nebraska Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 94759, Lincoln, NE 68509-4759; lucas.nelsen@nebraska.gov; voice telephone 402-479-3890; fax 402-479-3989.

Information regarding the proposed project will be made available on the NDOT website at ndot.info/31983. For those without internet access, information may be obtained through the contact above or at NDOT Headquarters: 1500 Nebraska Parkway, Lincoln, NE, 68502. For further information, contact Kevin Domogalla, NDOT District 3 Engineer, 402-370-3470, kevin.domogalla@nebraska.gov.