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The one-lane bridge on Meridian Road in Penn Township takes motorists over Connoquenessing Creek. The bridge is due to be replaced by 2028. William Pitts/Butler Eagle

PENN TWP — The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation showed off preliminary plans Tuesday night, August 5, for replacement of the bridge on Meridian Road.

Plans call for the current bridge, a one-lane span that carries motorists over Connoquenessing Creek, to be replaced with a wider, two-lane bridge.

The project is tentatively scheduled to go out to bid to contractors in the Fall 2027 and begin construction in Spring 2028.

Construction costs are estimated to be about \$5 million.

According to Amanda Olbeter, Senior Project Manager for PennDOT District 10, the bridge plans are still in the preliminary design phase, but no drastic changes should be expected from what was displayed on Tuesday night.

“As we go through final design, we do tweak things and work on things a little bit more, so things may change somewhat,” Olbeter said. “But it’s not going to be any drastic change or anything.”

The current Meridian Road bridge was completed in 1970, is 95 feet long and consists of only one lane. This means when two drivers approach the bridge at the same time from opposite directions, one driver has to stop to allow the other to cross.

“We were also alerted that there’s also trucks coming around the curve and getting stuck coming across the bridge and shutting everything down,” said John McGraw of engineering firm Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson.

According to PennDOT’s bridge database, the bridge is in a “poor” overall condition, with the condition of the deck being given a “poor” rating of 4 out of 10.

Those aren’t the only problems with the bridge, according to McGraw.

“The sight distance coming off of Renfrew Road and looking toward the bridge is really bad, as I’m sure a lot of you know,” McGraw said. “It’s really hard to pull out there and see toward the bridge.”

The proposed replacement bridge will be two lanes wide, with the width of the span increased from 15 feet to 33.5 feet.

According to McGraw, once construction does get underway, it shouldn’t take longer than one construction season, which usually lasts from mid Spring to late Fall. During the construction, the adjacent Renfrew Road would be closed for a short period of time for paving.

“We expect that to take on the order of four to five months to build the new structure,” McGraw said. “Once we get that done, we’ll shift all the traffic off of the old bridge onto the new bridge. We will have to close Renfrew Road for a short time. We expect that to be less than two weeks.”

During the public meeting, a few questions were asked about how the new bridge would respond to the possibility of rising waters in Connoquenessing Creek. The engineering firm representatives stated the new bridge would include inlets and storm drains to catch water before it could reach the structure.

## PennDOT shows off plans for updated Meridian Road Bridge

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"We have done very detailed hydraulic analysis on this," McGraw said. "We've gone through many iterations of how high to build the bridge, how deep to build the bridge, how wide to build the bridge and where to build the bridge."

Penn Township resident Jonathan Gavin said the new bridge couldn't come soon enough. "I have traveled across the old bridge, and it definitely would be nice to have a newer, wider bridge," Gavin said. "Pulling out of (Renfrew) Road, you can't see, and when you're coming across the bridge, you can't see (the other driver) either."

The new bridge will be constructed alongside the current one, which will require a road realignment to tie both sides of Meridian Road to the new bridge. One property owner will be displaced to make room for the construction, according to Olbeter.

"We have already communicated with them and had some talks with them," Olbeter said. "We cannot acquire the right of way yet.

We have to get into final design and that's when we come up with our right of way plan and that's when we're supposed to start the process. But we're talking to them ahead of time so they have a heads-up."

An average of 5,815 vehicles cross the current bridge per day, according to PennDOT statistics. The engineering firm predicts, with the new bridge in place, this will grow to 6,685 by 2047.

Once construction of the new bridge is complete, the old bridge will be demolished.