



Friends of the Mississippi River

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Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area

October 1, 2009

Steve Kordosky
US 61 Hastings Bridge Project Manager
MnDOT Metro District
1500 W Country Road B2
Roseville, MN 55113

Dear Mr. Kordosky,

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a local non-profit organization that works to protect and enhance the scenic, natural and cultural assets of the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. We have 1,400 active members and 3,200 volunteers who care deeply about the river's unique resources.

On June 16th, 2009, FMR commented on the Environmental Assessment for the Hastings Bridge project. We suggested you pursue a tied arch bridge, because such a bridge is most reminiscent of the current and former bridge structures at the site, which relates visually to the historic districts around downtown Hastings and the larger MNRRA corridor.

We opposed the cable stay bridge alternative then, citing concerns that the massing of the bridge is incompatible with the surrounding landscape, and citing potential impacts on the many birds that use the river as a key migratory corridor.

The renderings in the Scoping Study showed a bridge that rose 160 feet above the bridge deck, and we were not fully comfortable with that height. In the intervening time, it has become clear the cable stay alternative may need to be significantly taller in order to make it cost competitive with the tied arch bridge alternative. Such a bridge would be taller than is appropriate in the context of this National Park landscape.

We would ask that the Design Visual Quality Manual be written to limit height to somewhere between 160 and 200 feet. We believe any heights over 160 to 200 feet above bridge deck level are unnecessary and excessive, given the other options available. If that makes a cable stay bridge financially uncompetitive, then that must be accepted as the appropriate result, given the site's context.

This bridge is not just another structure being built in a city. Context is very important. It is being built in the context of a National Park. The tallest part of the bridge will be in the middle of the river valley. It is being built among bluff landforms that will be dwarfed by any bridge rising 200 feet. Furthermore, it will be built in the context of a historic downtown of

mostly two and three story buildings that rarely rise more than 30 feet off the ground. We understand that it is very likely that the bridge will be visible for many miles upstream and down and from both the Mississippi and St. Croix River valleys.

In recent years, MnDOT has made use of context sensitive design in various applications around the state. The redesign of US 61 along the North Shore was an early example of such efforts. Like US 61 along the North Shore, the area surrounding this portion of US 61 has similarly high scenic values, and deserves more careful context-sensitive design treatment.

As we've watched the height of the cable stay bridge grow in potential height, we must restate our strong objections to the cable stay bridge in general, and to sorts of heights that may well be necessary to make a cable stay bridge cost-competitive with a tied arch bridge. We ask you to adjust your Design Visual Quality Manual accordingly to impose an upper limit of between 160 and 200 feet.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact River Advocate Bob Spaulding at 651-292-0613 or bspaulding@fmr.org with any further questions.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Whitney L. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and a long, sweeping underline.

Whitney L. Clark
Executive Director