

Council Memo

Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: July 20, 2026

Re: MKT Trail Bridge #9 Replacement Project

Impacted Ward: Multiple Wards

Executive Summary

Public hearing for the replacement of bridge #9 on the MKT Trail. The total project cost is \$640,000, which includes \$575,000 in Park Sales Tax funds and a \$65,000 donation from the Richard T. Eyler Trust. The Parks and Recreation Department has worked with McClure Engineering over the past 12 months to complete the engineered plans for the bridge replacement. The project will be bid through the City's Purchasing Department, and contract labor will be used to complete the replacement of the bridge. The project is scheduled to begin December 2026 with an anticipated completion date of March 2027. The replacement of the bridge will require the closure of the MKT Trail at the bridge location during the duration of the construction project.

Discussion

The MKT Trail is a 10-foot wide crushed limestone trail that serves as a multi-use trail for bikers, walkers, joggers, nature enthusiasts, and non-motorized commuters. The trail is constructed on the former railbed of the MKT Railroad and is recognized as one of the first ten Rails to Trails Projects in the United States. The trail begins in downtown Columbia at Flat Branch Park and connects to the State of Missouri's Katy Trail State Park at the west end of the trail. The total distance from the start of the MKT Trail to the Katy Trail is 8.9 miles.

The Parks and Recreation Department is requesting approval of legislation authorizing the replacement of bridge #9 on the MKT Trail.

In 2013, the Parks and Recreation Department hired Cook, Flatt and Strobel Engineers (CFS Engineers) to complete a study of the first 13 bridges that are part of the MKT Trail. The study provided a summary of conditions for each bridge, recommendations related to weight limits for the bridges, and cost estimates for future replacement. Based upon the information reported by the engineers, park staff included a MKT Trail Bridge Replacement Project as an identified capital improvement in the *2013 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan* to address the needed bridge replacements as part of future Park Sales Tax ballot issues.

Bridge #9 is recommended for replacement due to the overall condition and age of the bridge. The bridge is original to the MKT Railroad and is estimated to be over 120 years old. It has had continued damage to the wooden support system due to contact by floating logs

and debris during heavy rains and flooding events. As part of the recommendation from CFS Engineers, the bridge is currently restricted to vehicles less than 10,000 pounds to prevent further damage to the bridge structure. The restrictions to the bridge are problematic due to the need to access different sections of the MKT Trail with emergency vehicles and for trail maintenance by park staff.

Park staff held a public input meeting at the Gentry Building, 1 South 7th Street, on Thursday, April 30, 2026 to discuss the proposed bridge replacement project with citizens. The project was posted on BeHeardComo from April 15, 2026 to May 19, 2026 to collect additional online comments. Park staff also discussed the bridge replacement project at multiple Bike & Pedestrian Commission meetings. On May 21, 2026, park staff held a public hearing to discuss the MKT Trail Bridge #9 Replacement Project and trail closure at the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. After discussion of the project, the Commissioners voted to recommend the bridge replacement project. After considering all initial comments and the P&R Commission recommendation, staff believes that the MKT Bridge #9 replacement project should move forward for City Council authorization for construction.

The scope of the bridge replacement project will include the complete removal of the existing bridge and footings. Contract labor will install new end walls, and a free span bridge will be set across the creek at the existing bridge location. The free span bridge will greatly reduce annual maintenance and potential damage to the bridge. Staff will no longer have to complete cleanup of log jams at the bridge location or make repairs to the support structure due to the design of the new bridge. The contractor will also be responsible for the installation of concrete approaches into each side of the bridge, safety railing off the end walls and any necessary trail resurfacing after the bridge installation.

The placement of the bridge will require the use of a crane. The range of area needed for the crane work to install the 105-foot free span bridge will require the removal of trees at the site. Park forestry staff estimates that 8 to 10 trees with a 6" dbh (diameter at breast height) or greater will need to be removed from the project site for the bridge replacement. Park forestry staff will coordinate necessary tree removals with the contractor to oversee and minimize the number and size of the trees removed as part of the project. Forestry staff will be responsible for the replanting of these areas after the installation of the new bridge.

Due to the location of the bridge, there will not be a designated detour at the site of the bridge for pedestrians and cyclists. Park staff met with McClure Engineering staff multiple times to review potential options for a detour at the site. The topography of the area and necessary work area is not conducive for a safe temporary trail across the creek. This will require this area of the MKT Trail to be closed for the duration of the project. The contractor will be responsible for placing trail closure signage on each side of the bridge and will maintain the signage and construction site access during the duration of the project.

In anticipation of the project construction and trail closure in December 2026, Parks and Recreation staff will create a communication plan to alert trail users about the trail closure and construction timeline. At least two months in advance of the project start date, signage will be placed at each MKT Trailhead and will be posted at the existing bridge #9. Two weeks before the start of the project, staff will issue a press release and social media notification to make citizens aware of the bridge removal and trail closure. Staff will provide monthly updates to the Bike & Pedestrian Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission before and during the construction project. Staff will post construction and trail closure notification flyers in each of our local bike shops and make notifications to Facebook groups that actively utilize the MKT Trail. Staff will also provide additional information about other multiuse trails in the community for recreational trail users and connector trails in the area of bridge #9. There are multiple connectors adjacent this area, including the MU Recreation Trail, Forum Connector and White Oak Connector.

The MKT Trail Bridge #9 Replacement Project is included in the City's Capital Improvement Program budget, and the total cost for the project is \$640,000. The project is funded with \$575,000 in Park Sales Tax funding and a \$65,000 donation from the Richard T. Eyler Trust. A total of \$340,000 has been appropriated to the project and the remaining \$300,000 will be appropriated as part of the FY2027 budget. The MKT Trail Bridge Replacement Project will be bid through the City's Purchasing Department, and the replacement of the bridges will be completed using contract labor. Parks and Recreation forestry staff will assist with necessary tree removal before the project and site restoration upon completion of the project. Weather permitting, construction of the improvements is anticipated to begin in December 2026, and staff anticipates the trail improvements will be completed by March 2027.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: The total project cost is \$640,000, which includes \$575,000 in Park Sales Tax funds and a \$65,000 donation from the Richard T. Eyler Trust.

Long-Term Impact: Staff anticipates a small savings related to the required staff time for the removal of log jams under the bridge. The new concrete deck on the bridge will also eliminate wood plank maintenance that is currently needed at the existing bridge.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Reliable and Sustainable Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Inclusive and Equitable Community, Tertiary Impact: Safe Community

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Mobility, Connectivity, and Accessibility, Tertiary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities

Legislative History

Date	Action
1/6/2025	R4-25: Authorizing an agreement with McClure Engineering Co. for design and engineering services related to Bridge #9 and Bridge #10 on the MKT Trail. R4-25

Suggested Council Action

Following the public hearing, approve the legislation authorizing the replacement of bridge #9 on the MKT Trail.