



23616; US-2 Priest River Bridge: Stakeholder Open House Summary

Public Open House – November 6, 2025

On November 6, 2025, the Idaho Transportation Department, alongside HDR and Big Sky Public Relations, hosted a public open house in Priest River from 4 to 6 p.m. to continue gathering community perspectives on the planned replacement of the US-2 bridge. There were 33 attendees and the team received 15 comment forms. Building on earlier one-on-one stakeholder meetings held throughout 2025, this event provided residents, commuters, business owners, river users, recreation groups, and the general public with the opportunity to review the design alternatives, ask questions, and share insights rooted in their daily experience with the bridge and the surrounding roadway.

What emerged was a consistent and thoughtful set of themes. Priest River residents understand the importance of replacing the aging structure. They support the project's long-term benefits yet were clear to communicate the need to manage construction carefully, improve safety, and preserve the way the community moves, both on land and on water.

A Shared Priority: Keep the Community Moving

Much like earlier conversations with emergency responders and commercial operators, the open house reaffirmed that the most pressing community concern is maintaining traffic flow during construction. Many attendees described the bridge as a daily lifeline, noting that detours to Dufort Road or Spirit Lake are not practical for people who commute to Sandpoint or rely on US-2 for work, school, or medical appointments. As one resident put it plainly, "Please make sure traffic flows in both directions without delays. Some of us work in Sandpoint."

Participants consistently emphasized that extended lane closures or detours would have ripple effects across the region, whether by increasing commute times, complicating school transportation, or slowing the movement of goods. While community members were willing to tolerate some short-term inconvenience, they urged ITD to pursue the alternative that keeps the project efficient and minimizes daily disruption.

This priority heavily influenced how attendees viewed the design options. Many favored Alternative 3 because of its shorter construction duration and reduced overall impact on traffic, while others supported Alternative 1 for its longer-term roadway alignment benefits in potentially "flattening" the horizontal curve to the east of the bridge. Even among those who expressed no strong preference, the message was the same: choose the approach that keeps US-2 functional and predictable throughout construction.



A Universal Community Value: Safety

Safety emerged as one of the strongest themes at the open house, not just for drivers but also for pedestrians, cyclists, and families accessing the river or traveling across town.

Many residents said the current bridge feels narrow, making it uncomfortable for people walking or biking. Several attendees noted the increasing number of pedestrians and cyclists in Priest River and suggested that a wider bridge with a separated walkway or multi-use path would offer meaningful long-term benefits. People referenced Sandpoint's trail network as an inspirational example and encouraged ITD to pursue similar improvements where possible.

Safety concerns also extended beyond the bridge itself. Multiple participants identified two particularly challenging locations: the eastbound curve approaching the bridge, and turning movements into and out of the popular Mudhole recreation site. Many believe that a dedicated right turn lane into the Mudhole is necessary to reduce rear-end crashes, especially during the busy summer months. Others expressed interest in improving sight distance, roadway geometry, and the addition of an improved left turn pocket and the need to add a right turn lane at the East Side Road intersection; locals described the current East Side Road intersection as "dangerous" and "stressful" for daily drivers.

Even those who did not specify a preferred design alternative made clear that reducing crash risk and improving long-term safety should be core goals of the project.

Connecting People: Trails, Bicycles, and Walkability

While the community's immediate focus remains on traffic and safety, many attendees were equally enthusiastic about opportunities to enhance non-motorized connectivity. Residents who walk or bike across the bridge shared that the current experience is uncomfortable and, at times, unsafe. They asked ITD to consider wider shoulders, a separated walkway, or a multi-use path as part of the new structure.

Several participants emphasized that a more walkable and bike-friendly bridge would support recreation, outdoor culture, and local quality of life. Others associated improved pedestrian access with economic benefits, noting that visitors increasingly look for trail connections and safe options for exploring small towns on foot or by bike.

A River That Anchors Community Life

For many Priest River residents, and for organizations like the Pend Oreille Rowing and Paddling Association (PORPA), the River is central to recreation, community identity, and seasonal events. This came through clearly at the open house. Attendees asked thoughtful questions about construction timing, boating access, barge operations, and potential in-water work.



PORPA, which hosts non-motorized boat races on the first weekend of August, expressed a strong preference that construction activities do not interfere with this annual event. Other attendees echoed the importance of maintaining navigability through the channel and ensuring that temporary structures do not create unexpected hazards for boaters, paddlers, and rowing groups.

Although the community understands that some in-water work is unavoidable, they asked ITD to continue coordinating with local recreation groups and to schedule activities in ways that minimize conflict with key events and peak-season use.

Considering the Alternatives: Efficiency vs. Alignment

While both bridge alternatives received support, preference trends emerged during the open house. Many attendees favored Alternative 3, citing its shorter construction time, fewer property impacts, and ability to keep the bridge largely in its current alignment. These participants widely believed that quicker construction would reduce daily disruption and result in a smoother experience for commuters and the local workforce.

Those who preferred Alternative 1 often highlighted the value of improved roadway alignment at the curve east of the bridge or expressed comfort with building an entirely new structure rather than installing a temporary vehicular bridge. Some noted that Alternative 1 may solve long-term roadway issues more effectively, even if the construction footprint is slightly larger.

A small number of participants did not express a preference, instead stating that either option would be acceptable if ITD prioritizes safety, traffic continuity, and clear communication.

Infrastructure and Future Needs

Beyond the bridge itself, residents expressed interest in how the project might address broader roadway needs. Several attendees urged ITD to include turn lanes, particularly at the Mudhole and East Side Road, to better manage congestion and reduce the risk of collisions.

Others asked that the project consider long-term growth, pointing to increased traffic volumes, evolving land use, and the community's rising popularity as a place to live, work, and recreate. One participant even wondered whether the bridge deck could incorporate heating elements to improve winter safety and reduce maintenance demands, an example of the forward-thinking mindset many brought to the event.

Communication: Clear, Reliable, and Early

Finally, and consistent with earlier engagement, attendees emphasized the importance of ongoing communication. Residents want timely, accurate updates about lane shifts, construction phases, and any impacts to river access. Many people prefer email updates, while others rely on postcards or social media.



The underlying priority was clear: the community understands the scale and complexity of a project like this, and they appreciate being kept informed. Predictable, proactive communication will help residents, businesses, and recreation groups adjust their routines and stay engaged throughout the process.

Conclusion

The November 6 open house reaffirmed the strong local interest in the US-2 Priest River Bridge Replacement and the community's desire to partner with ITD throughout design and construction. Residents recognize the importance of replacing the aging structure and generally support the direction of the project. At the same time, they ask that the final design maintain traffic flow, improve safety for all users, address long-standing roadway concerns, and protect the unique recreational and environmental character of the Priest River.

What stood out most was the thoughtful, constructive nature of the feedback. People are invested, engaged, and eager to see a bridge that serves the Priest River community well for generations to come.