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OPTIONS FOR 2018 ANNUAL BRIDGE WALK TO BE CONSIDERED AT TWO PUBLIC MEETINGS THIS WEEK

October 23, 2017 -- The Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) has posted summaries of several proposed changes to the Annual Bridge Walk it will consider during two meetings in Mackinaw City Wednesday and Thursday. Options include changing the direction and flow of the walk, as well as different dates for the 2018 event.

"The 2017 walk was successful in keeping walkers safe and avoiding extensive traffic backups while the bridge was closed, but many people were not able to participate," said MBA Executive Secretary Bob Sweeney. "We've heard many comments and suggestions from people throughout Michigan on how to improve the walk, and we've incorporated several of those in these proposed options."

The options proposed by MBA staff are posted on the Authority's website at www.mackinacbridge.org/mba-staff-proposals-2018-annual-bridge-walk/. They include:

Starting the walk from both St. Ignace and Mackinaw City (no buses)

In this option, walkers would begin from both the St. Ignace and Mackinaw City ends of the bridge in one outside lane to the halfway point, then crossing the center lanes of the bridge and heading back to their starting point in the other outside lane. Those who wish to, and if they begin the walk early enough, would have the option to continue across the entire bridge. Those who do walk the full length of the bridge will need to walk back across the bridge – for a 10-mile hike round trip – or make their own transportation arrangements to get back to the side they started from after
the bridge reopens to public traffic. In this option, no buses will transport participants across the bridge; the center two lanes will remain open to emergency vehicles.

Start the walk in Mackinaw City and end in St. Ignace (with bus service)

The Annual Bridge Walk alternated directions every other year until 1965, when it was permanently changed to start in St. Ignace and end in Mackinaw City. Under this option, the direction would flip, starting in Mackinaw City and ending in St. Ignace. As approximately 80 percent of walk participants arrive from the south side, more participants could begin the walk immediately after their arrival in Mackinaw City. As long as people board a bus by 9:30 a.m. at Bridge View Park in St. Ignace, or arrive at the starting line by 10 a.m., they should be able to walk the bridge.

Start the walk in St. Ignace (with bus service and a new bus loading area)

In this option, the bridge walk would start in St. Ignace and end in Mackinaw City as in the past, but with a different bus loading area in Mackinaw City to maximize bus transportation efficiency. At the current bus loading area, the State Dock, only eight buses can be loaded at a time. A new loading area, such as the Mackinaw City School parking lot, would provide room to load 12 buses at a time. With 175 buses (50 more than in 2017) and no breakdowns or delays in traffic, this system could transport about 24,000 participants to the starting line in time to complete the walk.

All the proposed options presume the bridge will be closed to public traffic during the walk, from 6:30 a.m. to noon, as it was this year. MBA staff have also suggested the board consider other days for the bridge walk other than the traditional Labor Day, including the Saturday or Sunday of Labor Day weekend, Memorial Day weekend, or another weekend in the spring or early summer.

A public meeting to discuss the bridge walk is scheduled for 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 25, at the Mackinaw City Recreation Complex. The MBA board is scheduled to meet at 9 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 26, also at the Mackinaw City Recreation Complex. Both meetings will be available to view on the Michigan Department of Transportation's LiveStream channel at https://livestream.com/MDOT/2018BridgeWalkPublicMeeting and https://livestream.com/MDOT/MBAMeeting102617.

Comments on the bridge walk can be submitted to the MBA at www.mackinacbridge.org/about-the-bridge/contact-us/.

2017 Annual Bridge Walk recap
The MBA decided to close the bridge to traffic from 6:30 a.m. to noon during the 2017 walk, based on security and safety recommendations from the Michigan State Police (MSP) and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. MSP had additional troopers in the Straits area providing traffic control, inspections of the shuttle bus fleet, and patrols on both ends of the bridge.

Even with more buses and a quicker turnaround time, many people were not able to board shuttle buses in time to participate in this year's walk. An estimated 25,000 people were able to walk the bridge, but the MBA is aware that some people who arrived in Mackinaw City intending to walk were not able to board buses in time for them to participate.

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