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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mackinac Bridge Authority outlines efforts to keep the 2017 Annual Bridge Walk secure and convenient

July 13, 2017 -- The Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) today outlined improvements it will make to ensure the safety and convenience of participants in the 2017 Annual Bridge Walk, as well as efforts to keep the public informed about the bridge's closure during the 60th anniversary event.

Plans were presented during the MBA's regular board meeting this morning at the Mackinac Island City Hall. The meeting was broadcast live on the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) LiveStream channel, and is available to view here:

<https://livestream.com/MDOT/MBAmeeing071317/videos/159750399>.

"The steps we're taking are all aimed at maintaining the safety and convenience of our participants, and alleviating unnecessary delays for other travelers as much as possible," said MBA Executive Secretary Bob Sweeney. "We're working closely with Michigan State Police (MSP), MDOT, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and other agencies to achieve that."

MBA and MDOT staff reviewed plans to date for the walk, which includes closing the bridge to most vehicle traffic during the walk, from 6:30 a.m. to noon. Unlike in prior years, only buses used to transport walkers from Mackinaw City to St. Ignace and emergency services vehicles will be allowed on the bridge during the event. MSP will vet drivers of all buses transporting walkers, and provide additional security throughout the event.

Currently, the MBA anticipates a net cost of more than \$250,000 for the event, with a

significant portion of that cost in security and busing for participants. With increases to both, the budget could possibly double.

Recognizing the potential for traffic backups, primarily on US-2 and I-75 leading toward the bridge, MBA staff plan to secure additional portable toilets to place at intervals along those routes for motorists. They also are developing plans for refreshment stations, and plan to have two MBA mechanics patrol the routes to assist with any breakdowns.

MDOT staff reviewed communications plans to alert motorists to the closure well in advance to allow them to modify travel plans the day of the walk. Those include:

- News releases reminding drivers of the bridge closure
- Website notifications on www.michigan.gov/mdot, www.michigan.gov/drive, and www.mackinacbridge.org.
- Postings on MDOT's Facebook and Twitter social media feeds
- Posters to display at rest areas, Welcome Centers, and state parks statewide
- Flyers for distribution at the MBA toll booths
- E-mail updates to 20,000 MacPass commuter card holders, and Labor Day weekend Michigan State Park reservation holders
- Updates on MDOT's dynamic message sign (DMS) system
- Updates to tourism agencies in Michigan and the Great Lakes region

"These are significant changes to this beloved event, and we recognize that many people are concerned about what those changes will mean," Sweeney said. "That's why we're working so hard to minimize inconvenience and get the word out broadly so people have an opportunity to plan."

The Authority made the decision during a special board meeting May 16, citing safety and security recommendations by MSP and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Every year, between 30,000 and 60,000 people from several states and countries come to the Mackinac Bridge for the Annual Bridge Walk, which has taken place since 1958, the year after the bridge opened to traffic. Roughly 9,000 vehicles cross the bridge during the event hours, with many of them shuttling participants across the bridge either before or after the walk.

As before, the two eastern lanes of the bridge will be closed to vehicle traffic before the walk starts. The western two lanes will be open to the authorized buses transporting walkers between Mackinaw City and St. Ignace, as well as emergency vehicles.

The event will begin at 6:40 a.m. with the start of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness Jog, followed by a greeting from Gov. Rick Snyder at 6:55 a.m. Walkers will begin across

the bridge at 7 a.m.

No walkers will be permitted to begin the walk after 10 a.m., as it takes roughly one-and-a-half hours to complete the crossing. Buses will begin picking up any remaining walkers on the bridge at 11:30 a.m. to ensure the bridge is clear and can reopen to traffic promptly at noon.

Official buses will again shuttle participants between Mackinaw City and St. Ignace for the start of the walk, and then back to St. Ignace if needed, starting at 4:30 a.m. The MBA is working to secure additional buses to make sure all participants can get to the starting area prior to 10 a.m.

Northbound I-75 traffic will be stopped at Exit 337 on the south end of the bridge; southbound US-2 and I-75 traffic will be stopped at Exit 344 on the north side.

The MBA intends to continue to alert motorists of this change through media releases, postings on the MBA website (www.mackinacbridge.org), messages on MDOT's DMS system, the Mi Drive travel information website (www.michigan.gov/drive), and notifications to customers at the bridge. The MBA will work with MSP to help inform the public and direct traffic the day of the event.

Recorded video of today's meeting is available for download from MDOT's FTP site at ftp://ftpmidot.state.mi.us/MDOT_Mapping_Media_Services/Videos/MBA_Meeting_071317/.

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