

# *Update on the Gulling Street Bridge Project*

The City of Portola is committed to addressing the critical infrastructure needs of our community, and we're making significant progress on the Gulling Street Bridge project. Here's where we stand and what's ahead.

## First and Foremost

### **Is the bridge at risk of collapse?**

No. The bridge is not at risk of collapse.

The structural engineers determined possible failure modes for this bridge structure and their analyses indicate that the bridge would not suddenly and catastrophically collapse.

## Background

In March 2023, the City of Portola declared a local emergency following severe winter storms, aligning with the State of California's disaster declaration (DR-4699-CA). Later that year, a December inspection by Caltrans revealed unexpected damage (undermining) to Pier 3 of the Gulling Street Bridge. This condition is different than the previously reported scouring at this location.

Recognizing the urgency, the city engaged MGE Engineering to assess the situation and provide immediate technical expertise. In January 2024, a thorough field inspection was conducted, and safety measures including load limits were implemented accordingly. Public safety remains our top priority as we work toward a long-term solution.

## Progress in 2024-2025: Steps Toward a Resolution

### 1. **Analyzing the Bridge's Condition**

By March 2024, MGE Engineering completed a detailed analysis of the bridge, including site observations, structural modeling, and technical recommendations. These findings laid the foundation for a comprehensive Plan of Action (POA).

### 2. **Developing and Implementing a Plan of Action (POA)**

In consultation with MGE Engineering, the City finalized and launched a POA designed to address the bridge's condition effectively and efficiently. This plan ensures the bridge is monitored until repairs are completed.

### 3. **Securing FEMA Public Assistance Funding**

Since February 2024, the city has worked diligently with FEMA to secure funding tied to the California disaster declaration (DR-4699-CA).

- In April 2024, we completed the initial project development phase with FEMA.
- Throughout 2024, City Council members and Engineering consultants met with Congressman Kiley to brief him and his staff on the public safety issues affecting his constituency, to request Federal funding, and to have his staff contact FEMA to accelerate the grant approval process.
- In December 2024, FEMA requested additional information from the city. We provided the requested environmental and historic preservation documentation ahead of FEMA's deadline.
- On January 6, 2025, the city met with CalOES to discuss the project and how CalOES would advocate to FEMA on behalf of the city to get this application approved.
- On January 9, 2025, the city sent a letter to the CalOES Public Assistance Manager to explain the critical nature of the situation at the bridge and ask for assistance in accelerating the FEMA application.
- The same letter was forwarded to Congressman Kiley's office so that they are aware of the application status and our correspondence with CalOES. In addition, the city requested from Congressman Kiley's office a letter of support and assistance using resources from their office to expedite the funding and environmental process for both emergency and permanent repairs.



## Next Steps: Staying the Course

- **Ongoing Continuous Monitoring:** The purpose of the continuous monitoring equipment is to continuously monitor the bridge for settlement and deflections. The instruments on the bridge can measure settlement and deflections in the bridge structure to one-thousandths of an inch. The instrumentation will continuously monitor the structure for any movement and threshold alarms will alert the City so that actions can be taken as deemed necessary.
- **Securing FEMA public assistance funding:** The city remains in constant communication with FEMA, Cal OES, and Congressman Kiley's Office in our ongoing efforts to secure the necessary funds for repairs.
- **Post FEMA public assistance funding:** When the FEMA grant is approved, this will provide funding to the city to purchase materials and to place erosion protection at the bridge to protect the material under the Pier 3 bridge support. The riprap material will be a permanent erosion protection at the pier.

Once approved, the city is required to get emergency permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Regional Water Quality Control Board. Due to the declared disaster, the permit time from the USACE is generally one month or less compared to a 9-to-18-month process for standard project implementation. The city has already spoken to the USACE in September 2024 to make them aware of the project and to determine what the appropriate permit would be for this type disaster repair project so that the process is fast tracked once all the pieces are in place.

- **Structure Rehabilitation Funding:** The city is examining all viable routes for structure rehabilitation funding. The city is developing a Highway Bridge Program Application to fund structure rehabilitation of the bridge. The city has been engaged with Caltrans and Plumas County Transportation Commission since late summer 2024 to coordinate the application process and determine funding solutions for the rehabilitation.
- **Transparent Updates:** We will continue to keep the public informed through updates on the City's website as new details become available.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why is the city pursuing FEMA public assistance funding for the repairs?**

The city is being fiscally prudent and is working with CalOES and FEMA to use public assistance funds that were made available due to the disaster declarations made by the City and the State. The disaster declaration allows the city to recover and use funding for repairs.

### **How does the FEMA public assistance funding process help aside from financial benefits?**

This FEMA process helps by accelerating the environmental approval process since work is conducted under the disaster declaration.

### **What is the purpose of the continuous monitoring equipment installed on the bridge?**

The purpose of the continuous monitoring equipment installed is to continuously monitor the bridge for settlement and deflections. The instruments on the bridge can measure settlement and deflections in the bridge structure to one-thousandths of an inch. The instrumentation will continuously monitor the structure for any movement and threshold alarms will alert the city so that actions can be taken as deemed necessary.

### **When will data from the continuous monitoring system become available?**

The Engineering team is currently evaluating the data trendlines with consideration to normal traffic flow, temperature fluctuations, and additional datapoints. Once the trendline data is analyzed, the Engineering team will work with the city to establish tilt thresholds. Upon completion of these processes, the city will evaluate how to best make the highly technical data available.

## A Message of Gratitude

We sincerely thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate this complex process. The Gulling Street Bridge project involves coordination across multiple agencies, and we're doing everything within our power to move forward efficiently.

Stay tuned for updates and thank you for your continued support.