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Two-Mile-Long Boardman River Bridge-and-Road Project
to Cost \$280–\$320 Million

FOIA request reveals project cost is triple what's been publicly disclosed.

Project web page: <https://www.groundworkcenter.org/stop-hartman-hammond-bridge/>

Traverse City, MI—The price to build the proposed Hartman-Hammond bridge-and-road project through the Boardman River Valley south of Traverse City has skyrocketed to as much as \$320 million. If built, it likely would be the most expensive county-owned bridge in the entire nation.

The cost estimate, revealed through a Groundwork Freedom of Information Act request, is triple what the Grand Traverse County Road Commission has publicly stated. The



estimate does not include the cost to acquire right-of-way, including homes and businesses that would be acquired and destroyed for the project.

Road Commission Manager Brad Kluczynski in [interviews just one year ago](#) when his board of directors voted unanimously to build the 1.9-mile road project and its 2,200-foot-long bridge. The previously undisclosed \$320 million estimate appears in a [formal document](#) the commission submitted in March 2023 to the Michigan Department of Transportation, which Groundwork Center received through a FOIA request.

“When was the Grand Traverse County Road Commission’s manager going to tell the public that the cost of the bridge project tripled in just nine months from July 2022 to March of this year?” asked Kelly Thayer, a project consultant working for Groundwork. “Even the board of road commissioners seemed unaware of the out-of-control costs before Groundwork started asking questions while researching the issue.”

The cost increase is the latest frustrating chapter in the bridge saga. Voters and state and federal regulators have rejected the bridge multiple times [since the late 1980s](#), yet the road commission continues to resurrect the project without worthy justification.

Making the project far more expensive for locals, MDOT will not fund it, the lead project consultant said in a [June commission meeting](#), because Hartman-Hammond would be a local project, and no longer the centerpiece of a [once-planned state highway bypass](#),

In a public meeting, a board member estimated that federal funds might cover half the cost and suggested a \$50-million local tax millage could cover the shortfall, but that was when the project was being publicly presented at \$100 million. The soaring \$280–\$320 million expense will mean the cost to the local public will soar as well.

The road commission’s obsession with building the bridge defies its [2019 study](#), which found that “constructing a new corridor [i.e., the bridge and road] will provide traffic relief for a limited piece of the roadway network and does not provide relief for other corridors in the region that are experiencing congestion.” *Reducing congestion was the study’s explicit goal.* “Benefits similar to adding another crossing of the Boardman River can be achieved with a ‘mix of fixes’ applied throughout the network,” the study said. The fixes could be completed faster than the bridge, alleviate traffic congestion for more people, and save millions of taxpayer dollars.

The 2019 study cost \$400,000 and recommended improving the congested and dangerously designed South Airport Road and the Beitner-Keystone corridor. The commission, however, rejected the study’s leading “mix of fixes” solution and instead spent an additional \$2 million to [study the bridge](#) and voted unanimously in 2022 to build it.



The road commission has hemorrhaged \$4.5 million since 2019 on bridge studies to justify its need. The spending nearly matches the total amount county voters approved in 2020 for local road repair over 4 years. The election drew [organized opposition](#) that alleged the road commission was wasting money on bridge studies instead of investing in road maintenance.

“At this point, the Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners should take charge of the issue and direct the road commissioners, whom they appoint, to stop the wasteful spending on a Boardman River bridge that should never be built when you consider the astronomical cost and environmental damage and the lack of congestion relief for the region,” said John Nelson, a board member of the Northern Michigan Environmental Council and former Grand Traverse County road commissioner who served from 2011 to 2016.

A giant bridge over the river and a four-lane road carved through beautiful hilly countryside of forest, field and wetlands would desecrate the [Boardman River Valley](#), which has recently undergone the [largest dam removal project in Michigan history](#) and largest-ever wetlands restoration in the Great Lakes region. The Boardman is a [Michigan Natural River and Blue Ribbon trout stream](#) and is prized for [outdoor recreation](#).

Now the road commission wants to degrade the valley with an outrageously expensive, 100-foot-wide bridge carrying four lanes of noisy, polluting traffic. The impact would scar the landscape and spread sprawl. The bridge also would violate a [goal of the commission’s study](#), which says, “The alternatives and actions should conserve the natural environment and enhance positive benefits for adjoining properties, neighborhoods, parks and businesses.”

The residents of the region and the river deserve better—better for the environment we cherish, better for the lifestyle we value, and far better for the stewardship of our families’ tax dollars.

About Groundwork: Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities creates sustainable solutions in local food, climate and clean energy, and livable, walkable towns. We were founded in 1995 under the name Michigan Land Use Institute. Learn more at [groundworkcenter.org](#).

About NMEAC: The Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council (NMEAC) is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to preserving our natural environment through citizen action and education. Founded in 1980 we are the oldest grassroots environmental organization in the Grand Traverse region. NMEAC often defends our environment with our Legacy Fund. Learn about our organization and issues at [nmeac.org](#).