

Meeting Summary
Stakeholder Meeting #1 - June 26, 2018
4:30pm to 6:00pm

Attendees:

Tomas Maher, Chair, New Castle Selectmen
William Stewart, New Castle Selectmen
Carl Roediger, Deputy Chief, Portsmouth Fire Department
Ken McDonald, Safe Path
Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission
Victoria Chase, Project Manager, NHDOT
Rebecca Martin, Senior Environmental Manager, NHDOT
Jennifer Zorn, Public Outreach Coordination, McFarland Johnson
Brian Colburn, Project Engineer, McFarland Johnson

Meeting Summary

After each person introduced themselves, Victoria Chase provided a summary of the purpose of the meeting. She informed the stakeholder committee that the Department was relying upon them to provide experience and expertise as it related to the Route 1B Causeway, also known as New Castle Causeway. The committee would serve an important advisory role to the project and would be asked about the frequency of storm events that have necessitated closure of the causeway, interruptions of access to/from New Castle and other concerns and input relating to this matter.

She additionally provided an overview of the project which consists of a feasibility study. This study is in the Department's 10-Year Plan, but no other component of the project, such as a possible modification to the causeway, was included. The purpose of the study is to investigate the need for and feasibility of making potential modifications to the 1,300 foot causeway, providing access from Goat island to New Castle Island. The Department has been tasked with identifying and evaluating possible alternatives to mitigate or avoid impacts to the causeway resulting from projected sea level rise. Various alternatives would be considered in this feasibility study.

Jennifer Zorn further explained that various alternatives were anticipated to be reviewed as part of this study and include the following:

- Do nothing or no build alternative
- Raise the causeway
- Raise the causeway, but add bicycle and/or pedestrian accommodations
- Raise causeway and evaluate how the rest of Route 1B acts as a system during storm events
- Replace the causeway with a bridge

These alternatives and the major considerations of each, including a preliminary cost estimate, would be prepared and presented as a matrix in the report. In addition, other details would include a summary of anticipated impacts to the environment, wildlife, historic resources and similar.

Jennifer Zorn then facilitated a discussion among the stakeholders generally following a series of topics including: emergency service needs of New Castle; general needs and requirements of New Castle; needs of New Castle's major employer (Wentworth by the Sea Marriot Hotel and Spa); maintenance issues or long-term needs of New Castle; projected timing of potential sea level rise; and consideration of the bicycle and pedestrian accommodation.

The following information was provided by the stakeholders during the facilitated discussion.

- The causeway closed during the early March 2018 Nor'easter during one high tide event. The closure time was a few hours long, until the tide receded. No records of other formal closures are known.
- During water inundation events, the water level over the causeway does not get too deep for truck passage. Large fire trucks are restricted to using the causeway because the Wentworth Bridge has a weight limit that precludes their passage.
- The vehicle weight limit of the Wentworth Bridge is 15 tons and most vehicles should be able to travel over the bridge.
- The official evacuation route from New Castle includes both directions, over the causeway and the over the Wentworth Bridge.
- A photo of the causeway was shown by William Stewart. The photo was taken during a storm event January 2018. Bill agreed to provide Victoria the photo via email.
- It is estimated that the causeway has been inundated during 2 storm events in 2018 (January and March). The inundation period was a short duration and the causeway remained passable to all vehicles, with the exception of the one high tide closure that occurred on March 2, 2018.
- School buses entering/exiting New Castle include: Rye Junior High, Portsmouth High School and the Berwick Academy.
- There is a low area on Route 1B near the Wentworth Golf Course/Rye beach access parking lot. When storm events inundate the causeway, water from the bay side goes over road at this low spot.
- There is a 2nd low spot on Route 1B near a tidal creek close to Pit Lane. There is a culvert under 1B connecting Rothwell Marsh to the Upper Lavenger Marsh. The culvert was not found during a recent site visit. It is believed to have been filled for a long time.

- New Castle currently has limited stormwater storage options. Many concerns were expressed relative to stormwater management and siltation occurring in the surrounding waters.
- The Wentworth Hotel is operated separately from the Country Club. Robert Diodati is manager of the Country Club (containing the golf course).
- Heavy trucks that need to access the Wentworth Hotel or other locations, use the causeway. Employees in cars use the Wentworth Bridge.
- According to NHDOT's District 6 office, there has been no need to address any storm damage on the causeway from recent storm events. Seaweed and gravel deposits are usually plowed off the travel lanes.
- The utility poles located on the north side of the causeway will be considered in the alternatives. As part of the feasibility study, the utility company will be contacted for input. The question was raised about the possible placement of the utility underground. This action is typically expensive and maintenance concerns are prevalent when utilities are placed underground.
- A water line is located on the bay floor, next to the southside of the causeway.
- New Castle experiences power outages on a regular basis probably due to the tree limbs/trees falling.
- New Castle is reaching its build capacity in terms of development and stormwater runoff. Plans are in motion to protect Lavenger Marsh by its designation as a prime wetland. A town conservation plan is in place.
- As part of bridge alternative, an exhaustive hydrological analysis would not be conducted. Currently the south side of the causeway is popular year-round recreational resource due to its calm waters. If a bridge was constructed in place of the causeway, it is assumed that an influence from the river velocities would occur in this area and would alter its current conditions.
- It is anticipated that many members of the public would support a wider causeway so bicycles and pedestrians can be accommodated.
- The speed limit has been reduced to 20 mph, but not on causeway.
- The Route 1B "loop" is exactly 10K and this lends itself to more people training on the roadway and race routes being located on the roadway. This "loop" is the 2nd most heavily traveled bicycle route in state. Route 1B also serves as the East Coast Greenway and the NH Coastal Scenic Byway (as presented in the corridor management plan).

- The Safe Path Committee is currently accepting private donations (\$71k collected thus far). The goal of committee is to identify areas where Route 1B can be expanded for bicycles and pedestrians. The committee has identified all points of concern and has prioritized sections based upon weight and scale and rank by priority.
- Rockingham Planning Commission is involved in a project listed in the NH 10-Year Plan, specifically for Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Accommodations on NH 1A & NH 1B, for year 2028.

To close out the meeting discussion, the following action items were presented as the work that would occur moving forward prior to the next stakeholders meeting:

- Gather additional information based upon the important points discussed at this June 26th meeting.
- Reach out to additional stakeholders, if needed, for further information
- Research best data sources for potential sea level rise
- Advance the alternatives (concept level only) and develop a preliminary cost estimate of each
- Plan for the 2nd stakeholder meeting in the fall

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm