

New Castle-Rye 16127 Final Design

New Castle-Rye Bridge Project Summary of Meeting Public Advisory Committee (PAC) August 27, 2020, 4:30 PM

Attendees:

PAC Members

Dave McGuckin, Selectman, Town of New Castle
Jim Cerny, Board Member, New Castle Historical Society
Bill Stewart, Selectboard Liaison, New Castle Conservation Commission
David Walker, Rockingham Planning Commission
Representative Kate Murray
Senator Tom Sherman

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

Bill Cass, Assistant Commissioner
Loretta Girard Doughty, Administrator, Bureau of Bridge Design
Jillian Edelmann, Cultural Resources Program Manager
Robert Juliano, Senior Project Engineer
Marc Laurin, Senior Environmental Manager
Jennifer Reczek, Project Manager
Corey Spetelunas, Senior Design Engineer

HDR Consultant Team

Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, Historic and Environmental Resources
Nicolas Caron, Project Engineer
Marcy Miller, Public Involvement Manager
Jim Murphy, Consultant Team Project Manager
Laura Parete, Public Involvement
John Stockton, Senior Bridge Engineer

Other Attendees

Senator David Watters
Roger Groux, Chairman, Port Advisory Council
Geno Marconi, Director, Director, Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors
Thomas Maher, New Castle Select Board Chair
Phil Winslow, Rye Selectman
Dania Seiglie, Rockingham Planning Commission's Transportation Advisory Committee
Jeffrey Stieb, United States Coast Guard

Summary:

A meeting of the Public Advisory Committee (PAC) for the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on Thursday, August 27, 2020, at 4:30 PM via the Microsoft Teams Online Meeting Platform. Ms. Jennifer Reczek, NHDOT Project Manager, welcomed the PAC, noting that it had been a couple of years since the committee last met and introduced herself as the new Project Manager for this bridge project. Ms. Marcy Miller, the new Public Involvement Manager for this project, briefly outlined the agenda. She

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noted that though it was a committee meeting, NHDOT welcomed participation by members of the public in attendance. Since this was the first committee meeting held online, Ms. Miller provided an overview about how to participate using the Microsoft Teams platform.

Ms. Reczek gave an overview of the major milestones in the project's development and an update on progress since the last meeting. She noted that an Adverse Effects Memo was signed in 2018, but then the New Castle-Rye Bridge project was put on hold so that its effect on cultural resources could be assessed in conjunction with the Seabrook-Hampton Bridge project. These projects are interrelated per the 1994 Memorandum of Agreement between NHDOT and the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR), and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to preserve both bridges as part of the Scammel Bridge Replacement. Ms. Reczek explained that NHDOT is proposing a two-span fixed bridge with a solid riding surface and a scenic overlook. Ms. Reczek stated that the project is now active and moving forward. Based upon the work leading up to 2018, the preferred alternative for the New Castle-Rye project is replacement with a fixed bridge.

Ms. Reczek proceeded to discuss the projects' next steps and tentative schedule. A new Navigation Impact Report is underway as the team has been asked to reengage with the US Coast Guard (USCG). Coordination will need to be undertaken regarding federally threatened and endangered species. In addition, the project team will need to reassess the project to make sure it addresses new requirements related to stormwater treatment and Sea Level Rise (SLR).

Ms. Miller stated that following NEPA, the next step will be the preparation of permits. These have not been developed yet and there are a lot of factors to consider. She said the team appreciates both sides of the conversation and welcomes comments moving forward. Mr. Jim Murphy said that the fixed bridge alternative was extensively vetted and that the project team understands the concerns surrounding this project.

Ms. Reczek stated that NHDOT is advancing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents on the New Castle-Rye and Seabrook-Hampton projects. The Environmental Assessment (EA) documents are anticipated for public review in Winter 2020/2021. If the projects do not result in significant environmental impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be issued by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for each project. The design will enter the final phases after the completion of the NEPA process.

The next PAC Meeting is anticipated to be held in late-Winter/early Spring 2021. The meeting will occur once the USCG permit requirements are better identified. A Public Meeting is anticipated in Spring 2021, following discussion with the PAC and the release of the EA. Regarding the bridge schedule, construction is tentatively expected to start in the Winter of 2023, if the project moves forward as a fixed structure. The new bridge structure is anticipated to be in place in the Spring/Summer 2023.

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Following the formal presentation, PAC members and members of the public asked questions and offered information or concerns. Questions are noted below in italics with responses made by NHDOT or the consultant team members. Comments are included at the end.

Q – Is the presentation going to be distributed to PAC Members?

A – Yes, the presentation will be distributed to PAC Members and posted on NHDOT’s website.

Q – Is “cultural resources” what we have referred to in the past as SHPO?

A – Yes.

Q – Is the project “a go” based on the decision-making factors?

A - The project is programmed in the State’s 10-year Transportation Plan. The project team is coordinating with environmental and cultural resource agencies including NH Department of Environmental Services, NHDHR, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the USCG to make sure the project can be permitted. This coordination will be included in the NEPA document for FHWA’s concurrence on the selected alternative and we will allow additional opportunities to ensure the communities support the selected alternative. As explained in the presentation, all four factors need to be addressed in order for the decision to be finalized and the project to move forward.

Q – It seems like there will be some movement in Winter/Spring of next year. Is it possible to provide us more information as these things move along so that we are aware? It seems like there is a lot to be discussed between now and the springtime. Is there a way to provide more regular communication to keep us up-to-date and current? What I am trying to discern from this presentation is has a design been chosen?

A – NHDOT decided in 2018 to move forward with the evaluation of a fixed bridge. This is what the department is progressing unless something comes up that requires a change in course. The project team can provide more regular communications to the PAC.

Q – How do we mitigate the loss of the bascule bridge and what does a mitigation solution look like?

A – Mitigation measures could include:

- Educational panels in a public setting, such as a town library, school, or a historic site.
- A model designed to show how a bascule bridge works.
- A video that outlines the history of movable bridges in the state.

The mitigation will be discussed at future Cultural Resource coordination meetings. The Towns are welcome to submit ideas for consideration.

Q – Is there a reason for a fixed bridge over a bascule? Money plays a big role in my opinion of a fixed bridge.

A – Cost is a significant factor in the discussion. The cost difference between the two alternatives was estimated at approximately \$8 Million. The ongoing maintenance costs are also higher for a bascule bridge. Other factors include the limited waterway usage for boats requiring a lift, as the lift logs do not show a significant number of openings and the ability for the Towns to place utilities, such as their planned water line upgrade, on a fixed bridge.

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Q – It is my understanding that utilities can be buried as well as carried, according to Commissioner Sheehan. Is this true?

A – New Castle has two options for getting utilities to their Town, one option is to carry utilities on the bridge itself, the other option is to place the utility lines under the channel. Based on the information they have presented, the cost is notably higher to run the lines under the channel.

Q – What is the lifespan of the new bridge?

A – The new bridge is anticipated to last 100 years.

Q – What is the USCG using for their Sea Level Rise projection?

A – The USCG does not set specific guidance for SLR. They look to local regulatory agencies to set guidance and the permit applicant must explain how the design meet will meet future navigation needs.

Q – Is there a document that you can provide me that clarifies how some of the decisions have been made? Having to make a statement without seeing the data is a bit difficult. As someone who grew up on this waterfront, there was a lot more activity when the bridge was more operational. The NH Port Authority strongly opposes a fixed bridge and prefers a bascule bridge because of the marine traffic.

A – There is extensive information on the project website regarding existing bridge use and the initial coordination with the USCG. The website will be continue to be updated as the project develops.

Q – Is there a benefit analysis of the cost to taxpayers for a bascule bridge vs. a fixed bridge?

A – A Benefit-Cost Analysis was completed for the project. It is available on the project website. One challenge in completing it is that there is not a lot of information available about how restricting access to the Back Channel would impact property values.

Q – Could the savings from the fixed bridge be put to dredging?

A – The Port Authority stated in the meeting that, if access to the back channel is restricted, the cost of dredging this area would be significantly higher than if a bascule bridge were constructed. They indicated that the additional cost for dredging may meet or exceed the savings of constructing the fixed structure.

Comments:

- The Port Authority is opposed to a fixed bridge. The PAC has not been informed about this project in the past few years and a dialogue has not been maintained with the Port Authority. Serious discussions need to happen before the project moves forward.
- If you raise the bridge to a higher elevation, the causeways and the approach ways would also need to be raised. If we block navigation on the water, it will cost us more money to replace the bridge down the road. We need to be compliant with the State and Army Corps of Engineers requirements. The Legislature is going to be concerned about these items.
- The Back Channel needs to be dredged soon.
- A fixed bridge would restrict commercial fishing and the right of free passage.
- The Port Authority is concerned with maintaining the Back Channel as harbor refuge.
- Dredging costs would increase significantly with a fixed bridge.
- The fixed bridge does not have a mechanism for the sea level rise.
- The town of New Castle is making significant investments in the water system. The decision about the bridge will have a direct impact on the system. Maintenance and leaks are costly.

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- The water pressure needs to be increased along Wentworth Road. If the lines can't be run on the bridge, it will cost the Town of Rye \$1 Million.
- There are houses very close to the New Castle side of the bridge. It may be helpful for the PAC to be informed about the anticipated impacts once a height is determined.
- Replacement with a new bascule bridge would lead to an increase in the use of the Back Channel. There are currently two commercial boating businesses in the Back Channel, the boat yard and BG's Boathouse.