

**New Castle-Rye Bridge Project  
Summary of Meeting  
Public Advisory Committee (PAC)  
January 24, 2013, 3:30 p.m.**

**Attendees:**

**PAC members**

Nancy Stiles, State Senator  
Dave McGuckin, Selectman, Town of New Castle  
Don White, Chief of Police, Town of New Castle  
Michael O'Shaughnessy, General Manager, Wentworth by the Sea  
Gary Rumph, Manager, Wentworth Homeowners Association  
Jim Cerny, Board Member, New Castle Historical Society  
Mike Magnant, Town Administrator  
John Habig, Rye Abutter  
Dick Gordon, Portsmouth Harbormaster  
Peter Weeks, New Castle Resident  
David Blanding, Fire Chief & Emergency Management Director, Town of New Castle

**New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)**

Alex Vogt, Project Manager  
Marc Laurin, Senior Environmental Manager  
Bob Juliano, Bridge Engineer  
Jon Hebert, Preliminary Design Engineer  
Sheila Charles, Cultural Resources Assistant

**HDR Consultant Team**

Loretta Girard Doughty, Project Manager  
Jim Murphy, Project Engineer  
Jill Barrett, Public Involvement

The first meeting of the Public Advisory Committee for the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on Thursday, January 24, 2013 in the Macomber Room of the New Castle, NH, Library.

Attendees introduced themselves and Jill Barrett of the HDR consultant team moderated the remainder of the meeting. There was some discussion about the role of the Public Advisory Committee (PAC). It has been organized by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to assist the department as it plans for the rehabilitation or replacement of the New Castle-Rye Bridge on Route 1B over Little Harbor. The PAC would provide information and feedback on community concerns and preferences.

Loretta Girard Doughty, HDR Project Manager, explained that her engineering firm would consider bridge type, size and location. Their analysis would evaluate both rehabilitation and replacement options. Replacement options would likely include keeping the bridge in the same location, raising the profile (height) of the bridge so it would no longer be a lift bridge and would require a much longer approach area, and looking at the option of a new alignment. The cost of each option will be examined as well as other considerations such as right of way and visual impacts.

Jim Murphy, a project engineer with HDR who participated in the structural inspection of the bridge two years ago, gave a brief presentation of the results of that investigation. He said the good condition of the paint on the bridge masks the underlying poor condition of the bridge. Using a Federal Highway Administration rating system of zero through nine, with nine being the best condition, the girders, beams and piers of New Castle-Rye Bridge received a rating of three, a rating denoting “serious condition.” The electrical/mechanical systems are in sound condition, though several components of the systems do not meet current standards, such as the motor brakes and system fail safes.

The superstructure has experienced some section loss. There is deterioration – holes at the base of the handrails and through the beams that the deck sits on. The piers are not in good condition. Several piles are buckled. These piles go into the ground and hold the bridge structure in place – a long term concern and potentially a reason why a replacement bridge may be needed. Many of the pier welds are cracking and this condition is also considered a long term problem.

Alex Vogt, NHDOT Project Manager, spoke about his agency’s planning and design process. He emphasized his interest in working closely with the PAC and public. Alex said his experience with advisory committees has been very positive as they bring up community concerns and help NHDOT work through issues as the planning process goes forward. He anticipates meeting several times in the next year as solutions are identified, potential environmental, cultural and social impacts are understood and the project moves towards final design. Alex expects the bridge will be ready to be advertised for construction in January 2015. Currently the state has \$10 million available to rehabilitate the bridge. If the bridge needs to be replaced it will likely cost between \$25-30 million. NHDOT is not anticipating the need to acquire any right-of-way.

The PAC had a brief discussion about meeting logistics and leadership. The group chose not to appoint a chair and said they wanted to move forward with the HDR team consultant organizing the agenda and moderating the meetings. The PAC agreed to hold future meetings in the Macomber Room of the New Castle Library but decided to meet one hour later, at 4:30 p.m. They asked that no meeting last longer than 90 minutes. The PAC also reviewed the composition of the committee and did not suggest adding any new people to the PAC.

PAC members were asked to identify community concerns related to the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project that should be considered in planning for the bridge project. Concerns voiced were:

- Minimize closure during construction - this is especially important for fire service and mutual aid calls
- Minimize impacts to marine environment during construction
- Minimize impacts of the construction process, i.e. use of heavy equipment
- Aesthetics – preserve the appealing visual landscape of the area
- Protect and maintain the vegetation, shrubs and trees, especially the Amurcork tree
- Ensure safe pedestrian use of the sidewalks
- Improve conditions for bicyclists – perhaps provide a solid surface for bikes as there have been a number of bicycle accidents on the bridge
- The sidewalk on the bridge should align with the sidewalk on the roadway leading up to the bridge. Currently it does not.
- Noise – reduce the sound of vehicles using bridge (currently the deck is a steel open grid deck, which is noisy)

- Be inclusive to concerns of bridge neighbors and community
- Evaluate existing electrical wires at the bridge which are prone to failure due to high winds

Throughout the meeting PAC members asked questions and offered information or concerns. They are noted below in italics with responses made by NHDOT or the consultant team members.

### **Bridge Conditions**

*How are the piers anchored into the ground?*

The piles are driven in.

*If there will be five years between the last bridge inspection and construction, is there an expectation the bridge rating will drop?*

It's possible but highly unlikely.

*If the rating drops to a two, what does that mean? What about a rating of one?*

If the rating dropped to a two, the NHDOT would determine whether the increased deterioration warranted another structural analysis. If no analysis was required, the capacity of the bridge at two would remain the same. If analysis is required, the new capacity would be based on those structural calculations, and could potentially decrease. If the bridge were rated one, the bridge would be closed but able to be repaired.

*Is that why the Sagamore Bridge closed?*

We are not familiar with [the details regarding](#) that bridge. [It is a City of Portsmouth project.](#)

*How often was the draw bridge lifted in the last year?*

[Response by Portsmouth harbormaster] According to NHDOT records, the bridge has been raised thirty times since 2009.

*Is there any expectation that the weight limit will need to be lowered before the bridge can be fixed?*

It's possible but unlikely.

### **Bridge Construction**

*Would there be a big budgeting problem if the bridge needed to be replaced?*

It could be a problem but bridges are a big state priority.

*How long will it take to replace the bridge?*

About 18 months.

*Would the bridge be closed for the 18-month construction period?*

No. A lot of the construction would be going on while the current bridge remained open.

*Our town [New Castle] recently was faced with a construction job on our causeway. We could decide whether to keep it open during construction or close the causeway and get the job done faster. Keeping it open would have taken almost three times as long. Will the town have a say in these decisions? We don't care about aesthetics. How long the bridge is closed is more important.*

## New Castle-Rye 16127 Preliminary Design

We are certainly aware of the need to keep the bridge open as much as possible, and will consider this when alternatives are being considered.

*Will the Sagamore Bridge and this bridge be done separately?*

Yes. We understand work on the Sagamore Bridge will start this July and end the fall of next year [2014].

*Could the bascule [bridge style] be retained?*

It's likely a new bridge will be a bascule.

*I would want to reduce noise pollution.*

We could look at a different decking for the bridge. The weight of the deck surface is a consideration for a lift bridge.

*When would you know if the bridge will be rehabilitated or replaced?*

We will know in about a year.

*Will there be any consideration given to building the bridge off site and moving it in?*

It's possible we will try to do that. We believe the bridge will be constructed in segments because it's faster. Cranes would be able to lift in materials working from the shore.

*Are all designs for a bridge that opens?*

There are no designs as of yet.

*I've just learned of a client who purchased a boat with a 42-foot sail. Right now it can fit under the bridge. This bridge is part of the federal channel and the Army Corps of Engineers maintains the channel.*

*Where will the staging areas be for construction?*

It will be up to the contractor to find a location.

*On the Rye side, about 50 yards from the bridge, there is an Amurcork tree. It was brought back as a sapling from the Amur River in China by a ship captain the early 1900's. There are only three in the state of New Hampshire, all in the vicinity of the bridge.*

We will have the NHDOT arborist take a look at it to see what can be done to limit disturbance during construction.

*Have you met with CLF [Conservation Law Foundation]? They have been active in this area in the past so you should reach out to them.*

We have not contacted CLF yet. The CLF along with other groups will be notified of the project as it proceeds-

Alex Vogt suggested the PAC reconvene in 6-8 weeks to review the status of the project team's investigation into natural and cultural resources – resources that will be important to consider in the design of the bridge project.

The meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.