

**New Castle-Rye Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Public Advisory Committee (PAC)
January 9, 2014 4:00-5:30 p.m.**

Attendees:

PAC members

Dave McGuckin, Selectman, Town of New Castle
Don White, Chief of Police, Town of New Castle
Thomas Keane, Attorney, 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
David Blanding, Fire Chief & Emergency Management Director, Town of New Castle
David Walker, Rockingham Planning Commission
Bill Stewart, New Castle Conservation Commission
Peter Weeks, Wentworth by the Sea Country Club
Nancy Stiles, Senator

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

Victoria Chase, Project Manager
Robert Landry, Bureau of Bridge Design
Marc Laurin, Senior Environmental Manager
Jillian Edelman, Cultural Resources Manager
Robert Juliano, Bridge Engineer

HDR Consultant Team

Jim Murphy, Project Manager, HDR
Jill Barrett, Public Involvement, FHI
Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, Historic Resources, FHI

The third meeting of the Public Advisory Committee for the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on Thursday, January 9, 2014 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. Meeting participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout the presentation.

James Murphy, a Project Manager with HDR, began the presentation by reviewing the progress to date. He shared that the Raised Profile and Off-Alignment Alternatives have been formally eliminated, and the two remaining alternatives, Major Rehabilitation and Replacement with a Bascule Structure, have been evaluated in greater detail over the last several months. The analysis has been heavily influenced by the public process.

Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, a Planner and Cultural Resources Specialist with FHI, then updated the PAC on progress to date in the areas of Natural, Historical, and Archaeological Resources. The initial natural resources review identified wetlands and threatened and endangered species in the vicinity of the bridge. A wetland delineation was undertaken and the document will be finalized this month. In November 2013, the project team conducted an eelgrass survey, documenting eelgrass southeast of the bridge. Eelgrass is habitat for several aquatic species. The project team has defined a tentative November 1 – April 1 window for in-water work.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll also updated the PAC on the status of the cultural resources review. She indicated that the project team met with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) in November 2013. One key point of discussion was a 1994 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) prepared for the replacement of the Scammel Bridge. In the Scammel MOA, the NHDOT and NHDHR committed to maintaining the New Castle-Rye Bridge, only replacing it under exceptional circumstances such as natural disaster. However, the MOA was not consistent with a 1994 letter from NHDOT Commissioner O'Leary that indicated excessive costs or environmental impacts as potential reasons for replacement.

Regarding archaeological resources, Ms. Dyer-Carroll indicated that a Phase 1A Archaeological Study had been completed. The study identified the 1874 Bridge Abutments as an archaeological site that is potentially eligible for the National Register. The abutments lie within the Area of Potential Effect, but would not be impacted by either the Major Rehabilitation or Replacement with Bascule Alternatives.

James Murphy then outlined the extensive maintenance and repair that have been completed on the bridge since 1994. This includes the rehabilitation of the piers, the repainting of the structure, repairs to the machinery and electrical systems, and repairs to the beams and bridge deck.

Mr. Murphy then went on to compare the two alternatives. He stated that the Major Rehabilitation Alternative would require the replacement of virtually all of the bridge's original fabric, resulting in a replica bridge. Major Rehabilitation would require a longer closure (approximately 5 months) and would not resolve pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns. This alternative would impact the approaches to the bridge and would require one-way travel on the bridge for up to five weeks. It would not impact private properties. While it would require in-water work, it would also seek to minimize impacts to natural resources. The cost of this alternative would be \$15.3 million, with lifetime costs in the order of \$41.6 million over 75 years (with current day expenditure). The Major Rehabilitation Alternative would have a shorter life-span (35-40 years). Although it adheres to the Scammel MOA as much as possible, it would likely result in an Adverse Effect under Section 106. This alternative is not preferred by the public.

The Replacement Alternative would require a shorter closure (3 months) and would provide flexibility in the construction season to limit impacts to the public. It would improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and would not include a guardrail, a potential hazard for vehicles. The Replacement Alternative would cost in the order of \$15.8 million, with lifetime costs in the order of \$24.3 million (with current day expenditure). It has a longer life span (75 years). Like the Major Rehabilitation Alternative, the Replacement Alternative would require one-way travel on the bridge for up to five weeks, it would not impact private properties, it would require in-water work, and it would also seek to minimize impacts to natural resources. This alternative is not in accordance with the Scammel MOA and would result in an Adverse Effect under Section 106. The Replacement Alternative is preferred by the public.

Mr. Murphy shared that the Replacement Alternative has been recommended by the project team. It would require a shorter closure time, lower life cycle costs, and a longer service life. It would allow for a wider shoulder and a sidewalk on the east side of the bridge in order to improve pedestrian safety. In addition, it would allow for a closed deck system.

Mr. Murphy closed the presentation by outlining next steps in the process. This includes a Natural Resources Agency Meeting on January 15th, a Public Information Meeting on January 30th, and a meeting with SHPO on February 6th. The project team will continue to move forward with developing the design and coordinating with the SHPO. The team anticipates that 30% design will be complete by July 2014. The advertising date of the project construction has been postponed from 2015 to 2017 in the NHDOT Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan, but the design will continue on its original schedule, so that the design will be ready in the case that funds become available earlier.

Throughout the meeting, PAC members asked questions and offered information or concerns. The first questions were those posed by the PAC. The additional questions were asked by NHDOT.

PAC Questions:

Q. What is the lifespan of the Rehabilitation Alternative? In August we heard it was one half the lifespan of a Replacement. Has that changed?

A. No. We are using the same structure type and detailing as the current bridge which only lasted 33 years until it needed major rehabilitation.

Q. How far out will the bumper system go?

A. In the range of 40 feet.

Q. How deep do the piles go?

A. The piles go 35' to 90' below grade.

Q. With all the replaced parts under the Rehabilitation Alternative, is the bridge life similar to the Replacement Alternative?

A. No. Due to the design and construction details, as well as the fact that some components are still being re-used, the life of the bridge would be shorter under the Major Rehabilitation Alternative than under the Replacement Alternative

Q. What materials will be used for the bridge surface?

A. On the Replacement Alternative, the roadway approach would be asphalt and the sidewalk would be concrete. On the Rehabilitation Alternative, both the approaches and the sidewalks would be concrete.

Q. If a scenic overlook is included in the design of the Replacement Alternative, would it promote more pedestrian traffic? If so, this could cause safety hazards.

A. As designed, the bridge would include a four-foot shoulder and a five-foot sidewalk. The overlook would bump out an additional five feet from the sidewalk, and would be located on the northeast side of the bridge. It is not anticipated that this would cause hazards to pedestrians.

Q. Has the New Hampshire SHPO weighed in on the project?

A. NHDOT met with SHPO in November to update them, but the project team did not have as much information on the Replacement and Rehabilitation Alternatives as they do now.

Q. What are the SHPO's specific concerns? Under the Replacement Alternative, if the bridge looks the same aesthetically, would that satisfy them?

A. No, because they are specifically interested in maintaining the existing bridge.

Q. Who has the final say on the Alternative selected?

A. FHWA, as the lead federal agency, will ultimately determine what is done.

Q. Could an increase in manpower reduce the closure time?

A. The limited size of the working area would not allow more equipment than is currently planned. Once the NEPA documentation is complete, NHDOT will move into the Final Design process. At that point, they will seek creative ways shorten the construction timeline.

Q. In what year would the closure occur?

A. The project would be advertised in 2017 and the closure would occur in the winter of 2018. The project was originally scheduled to be advertised in 2015, but was moved out to 2017 due to funding.

Q. When will the work on the Sagamore Bridge be complete?

A. The bridge will be reopened in 2015.

Q. How would the driveways on the Rye side be impacted?

A. They would be graded to meet the roadway.

Q. The engineering report makes reference to a grass swale. What is this and where would it be located?

A. The swale would be used as a stormwater management measure. It would be located in the southwest quadrant of the bridge, north of the existing driveway. However, it is unclear that it will be necessary.

Q. Would either the Replacement or the Rehabilitation Alternatives require taking land?

A. No.

Q. Is there the possibility of putting the electrical conduit below the channel, rather than up in the air?

A. This is a possibility for the Operator's House, but NHDOT cannot relocate the main electrical line for the town.

Q. Will the channel be excavated?

A. No. Dredging is not planned.

Q. Does the budget include a contingency?

A. Yes.

Q. Why are the Rehabilitation and Replacement Alternatives similar in terms of capital costs?

A. The similarity in cost is primarily due to the fact that the Replacement Alternative is a wider bridge, increasing material and construction costs. .

Q. Will the bridge last another four years?

A. NHDOT believes it will last, but they are watching it closely.

Q. Can NHDOT notify the PAC of the results of the SHPO meeting?

A. Yes, they will, but PAC members can also attend the meeting or participate via teleconference.

Q. Is it necessary that the PAC meet again?

A. Nothing has been scheduled at this point. The PAC can meet if it is determined that it is necessary.

NHDOT Questions to the PAC:

Q. The scenic overlook was recommended at an earlier PAC meeting. Is it still wanted?

A. One of the PAC members thought it might be a safety hazard but other supported it. It should be brought up at the PIM at the end of the month.

Q. Is a single lane closure better in the fall or the spring?

A. There is more hotel traffic in the fall, so the spring would be better.

Q. Does the PAC have any recommendations for historic mitigation? Typical mitigation is documentation per NHDOT standards. Other options could include lesson plans, outreach education, or interpretive panels.

A. Research to find additional documentation on the construction of the bridge, such as plans or historic photos, would be valuable. A plaque could also be useful.

Additional Comments Provide by the PAC:

- It appears that the engineers have completed a thorough analysis and that it's better to replace the bridge. The bridge will look similar, the closure time will be minimized, and the bridge will have a longer life than the Rehabilitation Alternative.
- The timing of the bridge closure is essential. On Christmas Day, the Wentworth by the Sea Hotel had 2,000 people for breakfast. With this in mind, a January-March closure would be best.
- The PAC voted and they unanimously supported the Replacement Alternative.
- The PAC expressed concern with the delay of funding in the NHDOT Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan, from 2015 to 2017.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30