

**New Castle-Rye Bridge Project  
Summary of Meeting  
Public Advisory Committee (PAC)  
April 24, 2014  
3:30-4:30 p.m.**

**Attendees:**

**PAC members**

Dave McGuckin, Selectman, Town of New Castle  
Doug MacDonald, Wentworth by the Sea Hotel  
Gary Rumph, Manager, Wentworth Homeowners Association  
Jim Cerny, Board Member, New Castle Historical Society  
Dick Gordon, Portsmouth Harbormaster  
David Walker, Transportation Planner, Rockingham Planning Commission  
Peter Weeks, Wentworth by the Sea Country Club  
Senator, Nancy Stiles, NH Senate  
Rep. David Borden, NH House of Representatives

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

Victoria Chase, Project Manager  
Robert Landry, Bureau of Bridge Design  
Robert Juliano, Bridge Engineer

**HDR Consultant Team**

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

The fourth meeting of the Public Advisory Committee for the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on Thursday, April 24, 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 began the meeting by providing a brief summary of progress to date. He shared that NHDOT and the consultant team met with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on February 6<sup>th</sup> to discuss the project. NHDOT and SHPO had a preliminary conversation about potential mitigation measures, including an interpretive panel on the bump-out of the bridge, documentation of the bridge, and portable display panels. SHPO indicated that they were not ready to sign the Determination of Effect, that they wanted direction from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) since the removal of the New Castle-Rye Bridge would not be consistent with the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Scammell Bridge, a bascule bridge that was demolished in the mid-1990s. Murphy stated that in early March the ACHP provided the necessary guidance to move forward, however by that time a fixed bridge alternative for the New Castle-Rye Bridge was already being explored.

Murphy explained that a fixed bridge at the existing profile grade was not initially considered a viable option due to anticipated impacts to navigation and area marinas. NHDOT believed that the federal

agencies with jurisdiction over the channel would not approve/permit a fixed bridge without elevating it. The Design Team did consider an elevated fixed bridge but it was determined that it would result in substantial environmental impacts. At the January Public Information Meeting, concerns were raised about the costs associated with a bascule bridge versus a fixed structure, and thus the Design Team has moved forward to investigate a fixed span at the existing profile grade. NHDOT said that they are willing to submit a US Coast Guard (USCG) permit for the fixed bridge if it is determined that restricting the channel is not an issue with regulators or the public.

Murphy then went on to compare the bascule and the fixed bridge alternatives. The fixed bridge would cost approximately \$6.5 million, while a bascule bridge would cost \$16.5 million. The profile and massing of the two bridges would be similar. The clearance between the piers would be wider with a fixed bridge, but the navigable clearance under the bridge would be 13'-8". The vertical clearance under the other two Route 1B Bridges is approximately 10' and 14'. Bob Landry stated that the original US Coast Guard Permit for the northeastern bridge, called the Goat Island Bridge, committed to maintaining the New Castle-Rye Bridge as a lift bridge.\*\*

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 Design Team.

#### **PAC Questions:**

*Q. If the fixed bridge were pursued how much would it delay the project?*

A. If pursued and approved by governing agencies (USCG, USACE, SHPO), it is not anticipated that it would delay the project by more than 3-4 months. This would not affect the proposed construction in 2017-18. If a bridge permit for a fixed bridge is submitted to the USCG, and is rejected, requiring a second bridge permit to be submitted, it could potentially delay the project longer.

*Q. We understand that the channel under the New Castle-Rye Bridge is under the jurisdiction of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Who within the Corps will make the decision about whether a fixed bridge acceptable for their purposes?*

A. NHDOT indicated that they don't know.

*Q. Why wasn't a fixed bridge at grade considered initially?*

A. Based on past work with the USCG, NHDOT didn't believe that a fixed bridge at the current elevation would get approved since it would restrict the channel. Thus, it was not formally investigated. An elevated (6'-3" profile raise) fixed bridge was investigated, but it was eliminated due to the associated environmental impacts.

*Q. When is the channel due for dredging?*

A. USACE have indicated that it is due to be dredged now (actually overdue), but that there isn't sufficient funding at this time. The channel could still be accessed for dredging with a fixed bridge but smaller equipment would need to be used.

**\*\*A subsequent review of the US Coast Guard Permit for Goat's Island Bridge issued in 1953 did not indicate that a commitment was made to maintain the New Castle-Rye Bridge as a lift bridge as a condition of the Goat's Island Permit.**

*Q. With a fixed bridge, how wide would the shoulder be? Also, could sidewalks be placed on both sides of the bridge?*

A. The shoulder would be four feet wide the same as the bascule bridge option. If New Castle and Rye planned sidewalks on both sides of Route 1B then it would be possible to design the bridge with sidewalks on both sides, however the roadway width could be an issue. After discussions, it was determined the bridge only needed one sidewalk as proposed on the bascule bridge.

*Q. Would the NH State Historic Preservation Office object to a fixed bridge?*

A. Probably, we have not discussed the fixed bridge with SHPO.

*Q. What would the lighting look like on the bridge?*

A. There is no lighting on the existing bridge. The lighting for the new bridge will be designed at a future stage in the process.

*Q. Could the water main be attached to the bridge?*

A. The water line could potentially be placed on the fixed bridge.

*Q. How many times is the current bridge opened each year?*

A. According to the NHDOT bridge logs, in 2012 the bridge was opened twice for private sailboats. In 2013, it was opened four times for private sailboats. Four hours' notice is required to open the bridge.

*Q. Could the bridge be funded sooner if a fixed bridge is selected?*

A. Construction is not scheduled to start before 2017-18 because the state has a number of other projects it is committed to funding. It is unlikely a less expensive fixed bridge will have any impact on advancing the construction schedule.

*Q. Since the bridge was only opened four times in a year wouldn't the agencies approve a fixed bridge?*

A. In addition to current use, future use will be considered in determining whether the channel can be restricted. Restricting access may have financial impacts on the local marina and property owners with moorings.

*Q. Is the USCG concerned with the maintenance of their buoys?*

A. No. The USCG has switched to smaller and lighter buoys and thus they can use smaller vessels to maintain them.

*Q. If a fixed bridge is pursued, where would the 10 million dollars that is saved be allocated?*

A. NHDOT would put the money into other bridges in the state.

#### **NHDOT Questions to the PAC:**

*Q. NHDOT indicated that the Witch Cove Marina could be affected by the construction of a fixed bridge. Are there other businesses that could be impacted?*

A. A tour boat called the Heritage passes through the bridge approximately three times a day. It could be affected if dredging is not continued. A research boat operated by the University of New Hampshire and Cornell is also located in the upper portion of Sagamore Creek. Finally, lobster boats that operate in the area could be affected.

*Q. The Design Team asked how many PAC members supported a bascule and how many supported a fixed bridge.*

*A. Four PAC members supported a bascule and one supported a fixed bridge. Several PAC members were undecided.*

*Q. NHDOT shared that they will be attending a meeting in early May with agencies to discuss various dredging projects. The PAC asked whether NHDOT can NHDOT send a summary of the comments at the dredging meeting.*

*A. NHDOT indicated that they will update the PAC and that they will also put the information from the April 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting with the USCG on the website for public review.*

*Q. The consultant team asked whether the PAC would like to have a more visible role in the next public meeting.*

*A. A member of the PAC suggested that a panel be considered that includes the Portsmouth Harbormaster, area politicians, the USACE and the USCG. Another member suggested that SHPO could be included as well. NHDOT indicated that they have invited SHPO to past meetings but that they have not been able to attend. NHDOT said that they will summarize the meeting and send it to SHPO.*

***Additional Comments Provide by the PAC:***

- Dick Gordon, the Portsmouth Harbormaster, indicated that there is a “safe harbor” up at the end of Sagamore Creek, near the Sagamore Creek Bridge where vessels can come during severe weather.*
- Gordon also stated that a fixed bridge would require smaller boats be used for dredging. He indicated that it’s possible that USACE would give jurisdiction over the channel to the state and therefore the federal government would no longer fund the dredging of the channel. The creek would likely fill up with sediment if it is not dredged. If dredging becomes necessary, the state would need to fund it and they might not have the money. Gordon stated that ultimately the trickle-down effect of the lack of dredging could cost the State of New Hampshire more than the \$10 million saved by pursuing a fixed bridge.*
- It needs to be made clear to the public that approval from three agencies (USACE, USCG, and SHPO) would be required to pursue a fixed bridge.*
- A member of the PAC suggested that the NHDOT consider limiting the comment time at the public meeting. The consultant team indicated that they will determine whether this is required when they see how many people are in attendance.*

The meeting adjourned at 4:30

New Castle-Rye 16127  
Preliminary Design

