

**New Castle-Rye Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Public Advisory Committee (PAC)
December 4, 2014
4:00-5:15 p.m.**

Attendees:

PAC members

Dave McGuckin, Selectman, Town of New Castle
Gary Rumph, Manager, Wentworth Homeowners Association
Jim Cerny, Board Member, New Castle Historical Society
Peter Weeks, Wentworth by the Sea Country Club
Rep. David Borden, NH House of Representatives
Mike Magnant, Rye Town Administrator
Bill Stewart, New Castle Conservation Commission
Thomas Keane, Attorney, Wentworth by the Sea
Bob Diodati, Vice President, Wentworth by the Sea Country Club
Michael O'Shaughnessey, Manager, Wentworth by the Sea Hotel

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

Victoria Chase, Project Manager
Robert Landry, Bureau of Bridge Design
Marc Laurin, Senior Environmental Manager

HDR Consultant Team

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

Other Attendees

Senator Nancy Stiles, NH Senate
State Representative Tom Sherman, Rye/New Castle
John McDonald, U.S. Coast Guard (Bridge Construction)
David Desfosses, City of Portsmouth Water Department

The fifth meeting of the Public Advisory Committee for the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on Thursday, December 4, 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 presentation by outlining what had taken place since the last time they met in April 2014. He indicated that NHDOT received 30 written comments following the May Public Meeting. The Town of Rye then requested that NHDOT prepare a Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) that compared the fixed and bascule options. The BCA was undertaken in the summer and fall of 2014.

The BCA looked at both quantifiable and qualitative benefits. In terms of quantifiable benefits, a bascule bridge would provide slightly better access to the channel than a fixed bridge. The current cost to

dredge the channel is estimated at \$750,000. Regarding the issue of costs associated with vehicular delays, the study found that openings are so infrequent that any cost difference is insignificant. Both alternatives would employ accelerated construction techniques and would not differ substantially in duration. In examining the issue of property values, the analysis looked at whether the value of vessel access could be identified, however no studies were found. Instead, the BCA determined that a 16.6% increase in property values would be required to offset the increased cost of a bascule bridge.

The BCA also examined qualitative benefits. A bascule bridge would continue to provide a safe harbor and would allow for growth in the fishing industry. A bascule bridge would also allow for continued development in boat tours and wouldn't restrict growth in the back channel. Other benefits considered include climate change resiliency and noise. Overall, the study found that a bascule bridge would cost \$9.9 million more than a fixed bridge, but that a bascule span would generate more qualitative benefits. An informal straw poll of meeting attendees indicated that the majority supported a fixed span.

Murphy then outlined next steps in the process. He indicated that the BCA will be finalized incorporating comments from the PAC, and NHDOT will then select the preferred alternative. The United States Coast Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits will then be prepared and submitted. NHDOT will be meeting with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in January 2015 and the project will be advertised in 2017.

Throughout the meeting, PAC members asked questions and offered information or concerns.

PAC Questions:

Q. Would a fixed bridge affect Army Corps funding for dredging?

A. NHDOT stated that USACE would need to answer that question.

Q. How many times a year is the bridge opened?

A. Three or four times since 2010.

Q. What kind of notice is needed to get the bridge opened?

A. It requires four hours' notice to be opened.

Q. How difficult would it be to raise the profile of the bridge? This is important due to sea level rise.

A. The bridge can only be elevated a small amount, up to approximately one foot because of the stone causeways. Increasing further would cause significant environmental impacts. The cost would be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Q. What is the process from here?

A. NHDOT is leaning towards a fixed bridge due to the cost savings. There are a lot of other structures in the state that require work as well. However, there are risks with recommending a fixed bridge because the Coast Guard or SHPO may not support the design.

Q. How long do we have to wait to see if a fixed bridge can be approved?

A. Coast Guard representative John McDonald stated that the permit process takes 6-12 months or longer.

Q. If NHDOT has vetted the concept of a fixed bridge does this carry weight with the Coast Guard?

A. The US Coast Guard representative stated that, as part of the permit process, they will solicit public comments. If it's controversial, a hearing will be held.

Q. What is the next step and when?

A. A formal announcement of NHDOT's decision will be made within a week.

Q. Will NHDOT meet with SHPO in January?

A. Yes. The replacement with bascule was a bit contentious so this may be more so.

Q. Would the \$10 million saved with a fixed bridge go to other New Hampshire projects?

A. Yes.

Q. What percentage of the public comments supported a bascule?

A. Ninety percent.

Q. Is it possible to put in a new water main when the bridge is constructed?

A. No. It would not be done as part of the bridge construction.

Additional Comments Provided by the PAC:

Economic Impact

Some of the properties inside the harbor could decrease in value due the loss of access to the open water. This is not accounted for in the \$10 million savings. We should be trying to maintain property values not reduce them.

- PAC members expressed concern that if NHDOT moves forward with a fixed bridge, and if boats can't get in to dredge, or if the dredging is no longer funded. HDR responded by informing the PAC that the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) stated a fixed bridge would not prevent dredging. The USACE also stated that while a new bascule bridge would provide better access for dredging, both fixed and bascule alternatives improve the ability to dredge the channel, since either would provide a wider horizontal clearance than that of the existing bridge.
- The estimate of a necessary 16.6% increase in property value to offset the cost of the bascule may not be accurate if property values decrease under a fixed option. HDR stated that there was no precedent found that states property values would increase or decrease due to accessibility through a bridge.
- The discussion of property value takes up a large portion of the report but was not really considered an important factor in the analysis. In response to that comment, NHDOT said that they would cite briefly in the report and move this analysis to an appendix in the final report.

Other comments

- The Portsmouth Coastal Resiliency estimates of sea level rise in the area are between 7 and 10 feet.
- Welfare and societal benefits should be considered in the BCA; there is value, we just don't know what it is.

- Only certain classes of boats would be affected. A fixed bridge wouldn't affect fishing or sightseeing vessels.
- The commercial fishing industry prefers a bascule bridge. They feel strongly that they need the bascule as a back door in bad weather.
- The Portsmouth Coastal Resiliency estimates of sea level rise in the area are between 7 and 10 feet.

Near the conclusion of the meeting a straw poll about bridge design was taken. Not all PAC members expressed an opinion or indicated that they were undecided. Of those who indicated a preference, seven supported a fixed, four supported a bascule. The Town of New Castle Select Board now favors a fixed bridge since the City of Portsmouth Water Department would have money to replace the water line that runs under the harbor from Odiorne Point with a new line along Wentworth Road. However, the board has not taken official action and will not do so until it hears from the public. Selectman David McGuckin said there needs to be another public meeting to gauge support for a fixed bridge rather than a bascule bridge now that the Town of New Castle has new information pertaining to the water line. NHDOT suggested having representatives from New Castle, Rye, and Portsmouth promote and run the meeting while NHDOT will be responsible for publicizing (sending mailings) for the public meeting as it has done for previous meetings. FHI said that the direct mailing for the last public meeting was expanded to include the area of Portsmouth in proximity of the Back Channel. Residents from the Town of Rye from Route 1B to 1A received direct mailing for all past meetings. FHI noted that many of the Rye property owners on record were trusts and said for the upcoming meeting that they would seek help from the Town to need to make sure that the residents of Rye are properly notified.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15