

**New Castle-Rye Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Public Information Meeting
May 4, 2017, 7:00 p.m.**

The fifth Public Information Meeting for the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on Thursday, May 4th, 2017 in The Common (Recreation Center) in New Castle, NH. Jill Barrett of the HDR consultant team moderated the meeting and introduced NHDOT representatives and members of the consultant team. A brief presentation was provided on the status of the project and attendees were encouraged to ask questions.

Jim Murphy with HDR then provided a brief project history and update. He explained that a Replacement with Bascule Alternative was initially considered but in January 2014 the public raised concerns about the cost. NHDOT prepared a Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) comparing the replacement with fixed and bascule bridge alternatives. In the winter of 2014, the fixed bridge was presented to the public and was selected by NHDOT as the preferred alternative. In June 2015, the design of a four-span fixed bridge was developed and navigational survey documents were submitted to the US Coast Guard (USCG). In September 2015, the USCG held a public comment period for users of the navigational channel. In March 2016, the USCG notified NHDOT that they'd concluded while a bridge that maintains 65' vertical clearance is optimal, they were unable to produce sufficient data to support it. They indicated that 16.52' of clearance will be required for a fixed bridge, an approximately 2.5' increase over the four-span fixed alternative. They also indicated that the submission of a USCG permit will be required for final approval. In the summer and fall of 2016, the feasibility of a two-span fixed bridge was reviewed. The two-span alternative reduces costs and has fewer environmental impacts. In April 2017 the preliminary design of a two-span fixed bridge with steel beams was completed.

Mr. Murphy described the two-span fixed alternative. He explained that as designed the two-span alternative is a steel girder bridge with a concrete deck, supported by a single central pier. The design maintains the roadway widths envisioned under the four-span design alternative, but that the scenic overlook has been reduced. The steel pipe piles will either be driven or pre-drilled. Mr. Murphy explained that the fixed design would allow for the installation of a new water line along Wentworth Road (NH1B). He said that a fixed bridge was supported by the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) at the December 2014 meeting, primarily due to the water line and cost savings. Mr. Murphy explained that in the two-span alternative, the approach walls have increased in height and length but that they still sit behind the rock causeways. They will be detailed in the final design to minimize their visual impact. A drainage swale is being considered in the design to treat stormwater. To minimize visual impacts, dolphins have replaced the full fenders envisioned in the four-span alternative.

In the coming months, the project team will continue to refine the design and complete the Section 106 historic review process, various environmental assessments, and permits by December 2017. NHDOT expects to advertise the project in January 2018 and complete it by late spring of 2019.

Following the presentation, attendees asked questions and offered information and concerns. They are noted below in italics with responses made by NHDOT and the consultant team members. Where other attendees responded, it is noted.

Q. How can bikes be accommodated? There have been numerous accidents. A smooth bridge surface is important.

A. The shoulders of the roadway will be widened and the roadway surface will be solid rather than the current metal grate.

Q. This design has the potential to increase speed across the bridge by vehicles coming down the hill from New Castle to Rye. Who at the state will deal with this issue?

A. The Rye Town Engineer would investigate it and then involve the NHDOT Traffic Bureau. However, the raised profile will decrease a motorist's sight line so has the potential to slow drivers rather than increase their speed.

Q. Can you address how equipment will be moved into the Back Channel with a fixed bridge?

A. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was more concerned with the width of the channel rather than vertical clearance. The two-span fixed bridge will make the clearance wider.

Q. As planned, the sidewalk is just a segment in Rye as it does not connect to an existing sidewalk. It has the potential to impact abutters. Why construct it now?

A. Dave Walker with the Rockingham Planning Commission shared that a scenic byway is planned for NH 1B. Adding shoulders is an important element of this project. The shoulders will connect to the sidewalk at the bridge.

Q. Which side would the shoulder go on?

A. Dave Walker indicated it would go on both sides.

Q. Can NHDOT wait to build the sidewalk until it can be connected to a larger pedestrian circulation system?

A. It would be difficult to install a sidewalk after the fact as it is integral to the drainage system

Q. Where will the staging materials be kept?

A. The contractor will be responsible for finding a location for materials and vehicles. The bridge construction itself will likely be staged from barges.

Q. Can you tell us how long the bridge will be closed?

A. The goal is a three-month closure but weather could potentially impact the schedule. A single alternating lane would be used intermittently for approximately two months prior to and following the closure.

Q. Will the US Army Corps of Engineers' maintenance of the channel be impacted by the fixed bridge?

A. NHDOT has coordinated with USACE and they indicated they will still be able to dredge the Back Channel with a fixed bridge.

Q. Are the bridge and water main being undertaken simultaneously?

A. Ideally, the City of Portsmouth would contract with the NHDOT contractor to install the water line.

Q. What are the odds that the schedule as laid out will be met?

A. There are risks, including obtaining the necessary permits and concluding consultation with the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office. If the schedule slips, construction will be pushed out a full year.

Q. Is a fixed bridge a done deal?

A. NHDOT thinks so. The current bridge is only opened a few times a year, and there would be substantial cost savings by constructing a fixed bridge.

Q. Did the Benefit-Cost Analysis take into account increased boat traffic if the Back Channel is dredged?

A. Yes, this was qualitatively reviewed.

Q. Is there a reason a bascule was originally constructed, and if so, what has changed?

A. There isn't a documented reason why a lift bridge was originally constructed. The selection of a fixed bridge now is due in a large part to the limited use of the bascule.

Q. A property owner in the Back Channel said that he has a deep water dock and that the fixed bridge will restrict his use.

A. In the BCA, NHDOT looked at a range of factors to come up with the recommendation.

Q. Is a three-month closure a best-case scenario?

A. This includes 13 slack days, assuming a 5-day work week. With a mild winter, the closure could potentially be shorter. The contractor will have incentives to finish earlier.

Q. A high-tech park is planned on the Witch Cove Marina property. This use will require deep water access to accommodate large sailboats. Is it NHDOT's best practice to build for the future?

A. NHDOT is building for the future in roadways. Ultimately, the waterway is the responsibility of the Coast Guard, and that is why NHDOT went to them. The Benefit-Cost Analysis showed that NHDOT would save approximately \$14 million so they went to the Coast Guard to see if a fixed bridge could be feasible. There are a lot of red-listed bridges in the state and the cost savings from a fixed bridge could be used for another failing bridge. Coast Guard Lieutenant David Bourbeau who was in attendance said that locally a bascule was requested, but that the US Coast Guard First District decided a fixed bridge with a raised profile would suffice. He said the public will be given the opportunity to comment during the Coast Guard's permitting process.

Q. With a fixed bridge, the Back Channel can no longer be used for safe harbor for sailboats.

A. Lieutenant Bourbeau said it is up to the mariners to determine where they seek safe harbor. The Coast Guard doesn't have data to support the use of the Back Channel for safe harbor.

Q. Is there a methodology the Coast Guard uses to calculate necessary bridge height?

A. Lieutenant Bourbeau said it is based on the use of the waterway.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.