

**New Castle-Rye Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Cultural Resources Coordination Meeting
January 15, 2015**

Attendees:

Sheila Charles, NHDOT
Victoria Chase, NHDOT
Bob Landry, NHDOT
Marc Laurin, NHDOT
Jamie Sikora, FHWA
Laura Black, NHDHR
Edna Feighner, NHDHR
Jim Murphy, HDR
Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, FHI
Esther Kennedy, Consulting Party

The fourth coordination meeting with New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on the New Castle-Rye Bridge Project was held on January 15, 2015 at the offices of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT). Bob Landry with NHDOT opened the meeting with a brief review of the status of the project. When the NHDOT and SHPO last met on the project on February 6, 2014, the preferred alternative was Replacement with Bascule. However, NHDOT received public comments suggesting that a fixed bridge should be considered due to cost. Landry 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. A fixed elevated bridge was investigated but rejected due to potential visual, environmental and property impacts. In subsequent conversations with the U.S. Coast Guard, however, they indicated that they would not necessarily reject a fixed bridge and that a final decision will be made once NHDOT submits a permit application.

Landry stated that NHDOT went back to the Public Advisory Committee in April 2014 to get their input before holding a public meeting in May 2014. At the public meeting, the majority of attendees supported the Replacement with Bascule Alternative. Following the meeting, the Town of Rye Board of Selectman requested that a Benefit-Cost Analysis be prepared that looked at both the bascule and a fixed bridge on the current horizontal alignment (Fixed Alternative). The analysis indicated that the Fixed Alternative would cost approximately \$10 million less, considering both capital costs and maintenance. Landry explained though that the study identified benefits of the Bascule Alternative that could not be quantified, such as maintaining unobstructed access for the fishing community, providing for safe harbor in storms, boat-related economic activity, climate change resiliency, and the maintenance of property values. Bob Landry indicated that the Army Corps of Engineers has told NHDOT in an email that dredging of the back channel could occur under either alternative, but that it would be easier and less costly with a bascule span.

NHDOT held another meeting with the Public Advisory Committee in December 2014 to brief them on the Benefit-Cost Analysis. Attendees discussed the fact that the Fixed Alternative would allow for a new water line to be run along Wentworth Road and across the bridge, addressing issues with low water pressure in the area. Members of the Public Advisory Committee expressed support for the Fixed

Alternative, primarily due to the water line and cost savings. Landry indicated that, due to the cost savings, the Fixed Alternative is now NHDOT's preferred alternative. He then showed attendees renderings of both the Fixed and Bascule Alternatives.

Landry ended the presentation by outlining next steps. These include a public meeting to be held on February 5, 2015; revisions to and resubmission of the Determination of Effects Memorandum; the preparation of a 4(f) Evaluation; the preparation and execution of a Memorandum of Agreement; and the preparation of a U.S. Coast Guard Permit.

Questions and comments followed the presentation, including the following:

- Jamie Sikora with FHWA asked when the last maintenance dredging was undertaken. Bob Landry stated that it was definitely dredged in 1971, but that it may have been dredged more recently. He indicated that he could look it up.
- Edna Feighner asked whether the team had considered climate change and if a fixed bridge will be viable for the next 20 to 30 years. Bob Landry indicated that there is a range in predicted sea level rise and that it depends on where it falls within this range.
- Laura Black said that it's good that NHDOT is holding another public meeting. She pointed out that the majority of attendees at the last public meeting supported a bascule span and that the New Castle Historical Society submitted a letter in support of a bascule. She further stated that a fixed bridge goes against the prior commitment to maintain the bascule type in New Hampshire.
- Esther Kennedy stated that there are businesses that will be impacted by the selection of a fixed bridge. She mentioned Creek Farm which is located on Sagamore Creek. It is a historic property that has recently been rented to Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire, but is currently vacant. The property is owned by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.
- Laura Black indicated that a fixed bridge has the potential to restrict access to the Wentworth Coolidge National Historic Site. She suggested that NHDOT coordinate with Ben Wilson at the Bureau of Historic Sites.
- Bob Landry stated that at low tide the channel is only six feet wide. He has been told that it can't accommodate large boats. He stated that he would confirm this with the Port Authority.
- Laura Black said that when NHDOT discussed a fixed bridge before there were property impacts. Jim Murphy indicated that that was due to the fact the fixed alternative then under consideration raised the profile by six feet. It was dismissed due to potential environmental and property impacts. There would be no property impacts under the current Fixed Alternative.
- Esther Kennedy stated that there is a tradition of fishing in the area. It would be a loss to the area if commercial fishing died out to the restricted access. She indicated that the fishermen use the back channel as a safe harbor during storms and that they made this clear at the last public meeting. In addition, she said that she knows two sailboat owners and that it would be inconvenient for them to have to take their masts down. She stated that both the City of Portsmouth Port Committee and the Fishing Industry Committee voted and that they support a bascule.
- Edna Feigner said that NHDOT should talk to Kevin Nyan about storms. Storms and sea level rise will be important issues over the next 20-30 years.
- Esther Kennedy said that there are ways to work around the water line. Running a new line across the bridge is not the only way to increase water pressure in the area. She indicated that the water line has not been formally considered by the Portsmouth City Council. Bob Landry said that NHDOT

is trying to get the cost to trench the water line. He also said that Peter Rice with the Water Authority has been invited to the public meeting to speak to the issue of the water line.

- Sheila Charles stated that she would send the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers email to the consulting parties.
- Laura Black indicated that NHDOT needs to look more closely at the impacts of a fixed bridge that cannot be quantified.
- Victoria Chase requested that a representative from the SHPO's office attend the public meeting on February 5th.
- Bob Landry indicated that NHDOT is trying to get *Seacoastonline* to do an article about the fixed alternative and the upcoming public meeting.
- Jim Murphy said that NHDOT will meet with SHPO following the public meeting to discuss the schedule.