

**Hampton Harbor Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Public Information Meeting
January 14, 2021**

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) hosted the third Public Information Meeting for the Hampton Harbor Bridge Project (NH Route 1A) on Thursday, January 14, 2021, from 6:00 – 7:30 PM via the Zoom Online Webinar platform. Ms. Jennifer Reczek, NHDOT Project Manager, and Ms. Marcy Miller, Public Involvement Manager, welcomed attendees. Ms. Miller introduced key project team members, reviewed the meeting agenda, and gave instructions about how to participate in the virtual meeting.

Ms. Reczek provided an overview of the project's background, Purpose and Need, the alternatives considered, and the Type, Size, and Location Study that was completed for the project. She explained that the purpose of the Hampton Harbor Bridge Project is to provide a safe, reliable, and structurally sound crossing while improving mobility for the traveling public and marine users. The current bridge is structurally deficient and functionally obsolete, the electrical system is outdated, and the shoulder and sidewalk widths are not to current design standards. She explained that the Hampton Harbor Bridge Project would advertise first, and that the Ocean Boulevard Project would advertise later, resulting in some of their construction occurring concurrently. She said the bridge project would not change the Hampton Beach State Park driveway and that improvements to the driveway would be evaluated as part of the Ocean Boulevard Project. Ms. Reczek then summarized the key site and design considerations that informed the development of the alternatives, and the meetings and agency coordination that have occurred to date.

Ms. Reczek reviewed the alternatives that were considered, including rehabilitation of the existing bridge, a twin bridge with rehabilitated bridge, a mid-level bascule bridge, and a high-level fixed bridge. She explained that a Type, Size and Location Study was undertaken that evaluated each of the alternatives and identified the Replacement with Fixed Bridge as the preferred alternative. She said that the fixed bridge alternative would provide sufficient vertical clearance for all vessels that are known to use the harbor, it would eliminate roadway traffic delays due to bridge openings, it has the shortest construction duration, and it has the lowest lifecycle cost of the alternatives. Ms. Reczek provided an overview of potential bridge construction. She said that construction would occur over three years and that vehicular traffic and the current navigational channel would be maintained throughout this period. She showed a series of simulated views of the new fixed bridge from various vantage points north and south of the project site.

Ms. Stephanie Dyer-Carroll then provided an update on environmental and cultural resource agency coordination. She explained that federally-listed aquatic species and Essential Fish Habitat had been identified in the vicinity of the project site. She said to minimize impact to aquatic species and habitat, in-water work would be restricted to between November 15 – March 15. She further explained that federally-listed avian species have been identified as potentially occurring on and around the project site. A Biological Assessment has been submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and conservation measures will be included in the construction contract. Ms. Dyer-Carroll said State-listed plant species have also been identified on the project site and that a mitigation plan will be developed together with the NH Natural Heritage Bureau to relocate plants away from the work areas. The Project Team has coordinated with the United States Coast Guard

throughout the project and they have received a Preliminary Determination concurring with the proposed clearances.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll then gave an overview of the cultural resources documentation efforts, explaining that three historic properties and one historic district were identified within the project's Area of Potential Effects. She said that an Effects Memorandum was signed in the spring of 2020 and that mitigation for the loss of the historic bridge is being coordinated with the New Castle-Rye Bridge project, the other remaining bascule bridge in the state. Potential mitigation measures include the marketing of the bridge for another use, interpretive signage, making historic documentation related to the bridge available on a website, archival documentation of the bridge, additional archaeological survey or monitoring at the north end of the project site, and a documentary video focused on bascule bridges in New Hampshire. Ms. Dyer-Carroll stated that there are both Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) properties abutting the site. She said NHDOT is coordinating with NH State Parks, the NH Port Authority, and the National Park Service about a potential 6(f) conversion from recreational to transportation use at the Hampton State Pier and associated mitigation.

Ms. Reczek concluded the formal presentation portion of the meeting by explaining the next steps and project schedule. Next steps include finalizing the cultural resources mitigation measures, concluding formal consultation with USFWS regarding potential effects to the Piping Plover, concluding consultation with NOAA regarding impacts to Essential Fish Habitat, publishing the Environmental Assessment and 4(f) Evaluation for agency and public review, a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Hearing, and finalization of the Environmental Assessment based on agency and public comments. FHWA will then conclude the NEPA process.

Following the presentation, the public asked questions and offered comments. Questions are noted below in italics with responses made by NHDOT or the consultant team members. Comments are included at the end.

Q – Is the bridge going to be constructed consistently over the three-year duration of the project?

A – Certain in-water work will need to happen in the winter, which will likely occur during the first season. After that, construction will primarily happen during the warmer months.

Q – Are you putting conduit on the bridge to allow for fiber optic access? Will there be cameras at both ends of the beach and the harbor? Have you considered bridge deck sensors for ice?

A – Utility providers can contact NHDOT if they're interested in having their utility on the bridge, the specifics of which would be discussed with them as part of the next phase (Final Design) of the project. NHDOT does not have plans for an ITS/camera system. The possible application for bridge deck sensors will be evaluated as part of the final design phase of the project.

Q – In the Western alignment of the bridge that will be closer to the harbor, how close will it bring the boats to the channel and rocks that are just inside the bridge? There is very little room now for boats to navigate once they go under the bridge into the harbor.

A – The western alignment of the Preferred Alternative does not impact the official navigational channels.

Q – When will construction start?

A – We anticipate that construction will begin in early 2024.

Q – Tell me more of the impact on the heavy summer traffic “jams.” How much will it help?

A – The Preferred Alternative will not add roadway capacity, however it will eliminate the bridge lifts and reduce delays in that respect. The project’s traffic analysis indicated one traffic lane in each direction is sufficient for the bridge.

Q – Are the bridge clearance heights measured at high, low, or some average tide?

A – Bridge clearances are measured from Mean High Water.

Q – Is this project currently funded?

A – Yes, this project is currently included in the state’s Ten-Year Transportation Plan.

Q – Is there any effect to the small business on the north side of the bridge? Or their parking?

A – There would be no long-term impacts to the businesses or the parking. NHDOT will be constructing a retaining wall as part of the approach to the bridge to minimize impacts. There would be some temporary loss of parking during construction for contractor access to the new structure.

Q – When do you estimate the project will go out to bid?

A – It is currently expected to go out for bid late in 2023.

Q – What does Section 6(f) and Section 4(f) mean?

A – Section 6(f) properties are public lands that have been purchased with funding through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to increase public outdoor recreational space. The Hampton State Pier and Hampton Beach State Park fall under Section 6(f). Section 4(f) refers to protections afforded types of properties defined by a section of the US Department of Transportation Act. These properties can be historic properties or public parks and recreation areas.

Q – Can you confirm the project will be fully funded by the federal government and will not result in increased taxes?

A – Yes, this is a federally funded project.

Q – Will this presentation be available for viewing after the program has ended this evening?

A – Yes, the presentation will be posted on the New Hampshire Department of Transportation’s website.

Q – For the Public Hearing in Spring 2021, does the public still have to be physically present?

A – NHDOT is working on a plan with FHWA that would hopefully allow the meeting to be mostly virtual but would offer a location for the public to come if that is their preference. The environmental document will be distributed at least 15 days ahead of that meeting, will be posted on the NHDOT website and hard copies provided at physical locations accessible to the public.

Q – Can you go over the access over the old bridge as the new bridge is being built?

A – The current bridge will remain in place with traffic on it until the new bridge and approaches are sufficiently complete to allow traffic to shift to the new structure.

Q – I live in Sun Valley along the shore, when boats traffic comes through that river it causes a lot of turbulence and waves. Big boats only come through twice a day and seasonal. I’m concerned about increased navigation and speed. We had to rebuild our own shore. We had to put up reinforcement for dunes. We suggest a no wake zone in this area. Can you comment on this?

A – NHDOT does not anticipate that the new bridge will affect the type of vessel or frequency of travel through the bridge. Marine travel and speed restrictions aren't controlled by NHDOT.

Q - Boats don't use the channel that is on the charts, as it is shifting and not safe. Boats need to pass under the bridge and take a hard right and pass east of the buoy that marks the rock. By moving the bridge west, won't it restrict that path to the Hampton side? The course to Seabrook would be fine.

A – By increasing the channel width through the bridge, it will allow boats to begin their turn while still transiting the bridge, thereby improving navigability.

Comments:

- Headway speed starts at the bridge. It needs to start sooner west/sooner east.
- Marine traffic has affected the shoreline. The dunes have eroded over time.
- Traffic backups are due to traffic lights and one lane roads north and south of the bridge, not the bridge itself.
- We walk our bikes over the bridge, and while it is tight, we make it work.
- New Hampshire State Law requires that all vessels pass the bridge at headway speed. Headway speed restriction should start further east.