

**Hampton Harbor Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Public Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting
Virtual Meeting
April 1, 2020, 4:00 p.m.**

Public Advisory Committee

Chris Jacobs, Hampton Department of Public Works, Director
Jay Diener, Hampton Conservation Commission, Chair
Nancy Stiles, Hampton Beach Area Commission, Chair
Kate Bashline, Hampton resident
David Walker, Rockingham Planning Commission
Seth McNally, NH Seacoast Greenway
Sen. Thomas Sherman, District 24
Catherine Silver, Hampton Resident
Johanna Lyons, New Hampshire State Parks and Recreation
Rep. Pat Bushway, District 21
Mary-Louise Woolsey, Hampton Selectman
Eric Feldbaum, New Hampshire State Parks and Recreation
John Nyhan, Hampton Area Chamber of Commerce
Rep. Kate Murray, District 24
Chuck Rage, Hampton Beach Village District, Chairman
Rep. Michael Edgar, District 21
Jen Hale, Hampton Department of Public Works, Deputy Director

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT)

Jennifer Reczek, Project Manager
Marc Laurin, Bureau of Environment
Jill Edelman, Bureau of Environment
Maggie Baldwin, Roadway Section Group Leader

HDR Consultant Team

Jim Murphy, Project Engineer
Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, Environmental and Historic Resources
Jill Barrett, Public Involvement
John Stockton, Engineer

The fifth Public Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting for the Hampton Harbor Bridge Project was held on April 1, 2020 as a virtual “Zoom” meeting. Jill Barrett, a member of the HDR Consultant Team, explained to participants the structure of the meeting and the features of Zoom that enable participation by attendees. Jennifer Reczek, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation’s (NH DOT’s) Project Manager, moderated the meeting. A brief presentation was provided updating the PAC on the progress to date, the findings of the Type, Size and Location Study (TS&L), agency consultation, and next steps. Participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout the presentation.

Ms. Reczek began the meeting by outlining coordination to date. She said there had been four PAC meetings, two Public Information Meetings, two meetings with marine users, and a meeting with

abutters. In addition, the project team had met with a number of review agencies including: the US Coast Guard (USCG) to discuss navigational clearances; the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to discuss in-water work; the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) regarding effects to historic properties; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to discuss listed aquatic species and water quality; and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to discuss potential impacts to listed avian species. Ms. Reczek said this coordination has informed key decisions throughout the project's development.

Ms. Reczek said that initially NHDOT considered three alternatives – Rehabilitation, Replacement with a Fixed Bridge, and Replacement with a Bascule Bridge. NHDOT added the Twin Bridge Alternative when they realized the extent of the repairs required to the existing structure and in response to comments from NHDHR. All four alternatives considered would meet the project's purpose and need to provide a safe, reliable and structurally sound crossing for the traveling public.

Ms. Reczek explained that at the November 2018 PAC meeting the project team shared the results of the Traffic Study. The study showed that additional travel lanes are not necessary. Concerns were brought up at that meeting that emergency vehicles couldn't get around traffic. Ms. Reczek said that the widened shoulders were incorporated into the design to allow passage of emergency vehicles.

At the December 2018 PAC meeting, NHDOT shared the results of the Alignment Study. Ms. Reczek said an eastern alignment would have resulted in property impacts. The western alignment would result in impacts to the dunes on the south side of the bridge and could result in impacts to the State Pier to the north. The project team also discussed the potential height of the bridge and said that the 44 feet of underclearance initially proposed for a new fixed bridge would have allowed for the passage of the area party boats and four feet to address anticipated sea level rise. However, the USACE requested an increase to 48 feet to accommodate their dredge vessel, the *Currituck*. Ms. Reczek said the new design minimizes the overall increase in the height of the bridge; most of the increase would occur over the channel.

Ms. Reczek then shared the findings of the TS&L. She said the State wants to advance the design of the Replacement with Fixed Bridge on a western alignment. She said this alternative would widen the channel under the bridge to 150 feet, and it wouldn't impact the channels leading to the Seabrook and Hampton Harbors. It would provide vertical clearance sufficient to accommodate all vessels that have been documented entering the harbor. It would also accommodate the *Currituck*. She said the fixed bridge alternative would eliminate traffic delays and it would have the shortest construction duration of the alternatives. The fixed bridge would also have the lowest life cycle cost and that the initial construction costs would be the lowest of the four alternatives.

Mr. Jim Murphy, the Project Engineer, then walked through each of the alternatives. He said NHDOT must widen the bridge in order to meeting the needs of the traveling public and to accommodate legal vehicle loads. He said the Rehabilitation (with Widened Bridge) Alternative would maintain the existing horizontal and vertical clearances of the navigational channel. He said it would be an expensive alternative and that a temporary bridge would be required, which would have temporary impacts on the west side. This alternative would require the full replacement of the superstructure and would result in an adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Twin Bridge (with Rehabilitated Bridge) Alternative was developed in response to comments from NHDHR. He said this alternative would build a second bridge to the west to carry southbound traffic. This alternative would require the full replacement of the existing superstructure and would result in an adverse effect under Section 106. The Twin Bridge Alternative would also have substantial life cycle costs, would impact the Hampton Harbor navigational channel, and could

require underwater blasting. The Replacement with Bascule Bridge Alternative would increase the navigational clearance under the bridge, thereby reducing lifts by 55%. It would increase the width of the navigational channel to 80 feet, but it would result in vehicular traffic delays when the bridge was opened. It would impact the navigation channel in Hampton Harbor and could require underwater blasting. It would also result in an adverse effect under Section 106 and the life cycle costs would be high. Finally, Mr. Murphy said the design of the Replacement with Fixed Bridge Alternative had been refined so that it would not impact the Hampton Harbor Channel and wouldn't require blasting. The bridge would have sufficient vertical clearance for vessels and would widen the channel under the bridge to 150 feet, while also reducing obstructions for small vessels. There would be no vehicular delays, it would have the shortest construction duration, and it would have the lowest cost. Landside impacts on the northwest side would be reduced by the use of retaining walls.

Ms. Reczek then showed a table that compared the alternatives. She said the Fixed Bridge Alternative had the greatest number of green dots (denoting beneficial features) and the lowest life cycle and capital costs. She said the design team is considering both steel and concrete beams, but that steel is recommended.

Ms. Reczek wrapped up the meeting with a discussion of next steps. She said the project team will be identifying mitigation for the loss of the historic bridge and that they welcome input from the PAC. She said education will likely be a component of the mitigation. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) will be developed which will document the agreed upon mitigation. The project team is also preparing an Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and two Biological Assessments (BAs), one for aquatic and one for avian species, as well as an Environmental Assessment for the Project and a Section 4(f) Evaluation. A public meeting will be held in the future and the project team will prepare and submit a permit to the USCG. She said NHDOT will potentially hold another PAC meeting this summer and one in the spring of 2021.

Throughout the presentation, PAC members asked questions and offered information and concerns. They are noted below with responses made by NHDOT or the consultant team.

Design Features

Q: Why was four feet used for sea level rise?

A: 3.9 feet is the projection for 2100 based on the findings of the New Hampshire Coastal Risk and Hazards Commission.

Q: What is the life span of a new bridge?

A: Generally, it's 100 years.

Q: Why isn't the project team then designing to address potential sea level rise in 2120?

A: By 2100, sea level rise is anticipated to have substantial impacts on the surrounding landscape. Without major changes to the landscape, the bridge would be obsolete because the roadways north and south of the bridge would be inundated. Designing to 2100 rather than 2120 would just mean some sailboats wouldn't be able to get under the bridge at high tide after 2100.

Q: Will you be discussing crosswalk locations today? The crosswalk needs to tie into Route 1A to work. It is of great interest to the public.

A: No, that portion of the design is not complete yet. It will be complete by late summer or early fall and will be presented at a future PAC meeting. A committee will be formed for the Ocean Boulevard project this summer. That project will address the State Park entrance.

Type, Size and Location Study and Alternatives

Q: Can we take the bascule bridge out of our vocabulary?

A: Not until the environmental document is complete. However, the identification of the preferred alternative allows us to move forward.

Q: Wouldn't a bascule bridge be problematic for utilities?

A: A bascule bridge wouldn't allow utilities to be run on the bridge. A fixed structure would be able to carry utilities. The gas company is potentially interested in running a line on the bridge and the Town has expressed interest in running water and sewer on it.

Q: If there is an infrastructure bill, would this project be shovel ready?

A: It's unlikely that it would be ready in 6 to 12 months, but it would free up money down the road if other projects can be funded and advanced.

Q: What would the grade be on the fixed bridge?

A: It will be 5% at the steepest section of the bridge and will gradually reduce as the bridge transitions to the roadway on land. It would not be steep near the houses on the southeast side of the bridge.

Q: Is there another bridge with a 5% grade for comparison?

A: The Sarah Long Bridge is a similar grade. A maximum of 5% is mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Q: Where would the new bridge touch down in relation to the existing bridge? I own property at 16 and 20 Portsmouth Avenue on the south side of the bridge.

A: It would be about 200 feet further than the existing bridge, but the elevation would only be about three feet above existing grade at 16 and 20 Portsmouth Avenue.

Q: Are bump-outs planned on the bridge? Can I advocate for them at this point? If there are no bump-outs, the sidewalks will get clogged with people fishing and looking at the views.

A: We are planning to include bump-outs and will discuss them at a meeting in the fall. Bump-outs can't be located at the peak of the bridge because the navigational channel lies below.

Q: Is there the possibility of a pedestrian walkway under the bridge?

A: Yes, that is being considered.

Q: Would the drainage structures be located in the bike lanes? You should consider bicycle traffic in the design of the drainage system.

A: The drainage structures would most likely be located in the shoulders. The shoulders will be eight feet wide to accommodate both drainage and bike traffic.

Q: Who is designing the bridge?

A: HDR, Inc.

Q: In lieu of a traditional public meeting, could public comments on the project be received online?

A: NHDOT is looking at different options, however the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is not comfortable with holding online meetings at this time.

Q: When will you know the construction schedule for land managers? For Section 6(f) properties, you need to consider staging that lasts longer than six months.

A: The project team has a schedule now and can share it, though it will be refined in the future. In-water work would occur in the winter. Impacts to the businesses on the north side of the bridge are being considered. Staging in the parking lots of the State Pier and Hampton Beach State Park wouldn't occur during the summer months.

Comments:

- Why is the project team still considering a bascule bridge? It is a nightmare.
- Designing for the anticipated sea level rise in 2100 is appropriate.
- We will need to discuss a bascule bridge at New Castle-Rye.
- The issue of utilities will be important at New Castle-Rye as well.
- The Town of Hampton is looking at how to hold public meetings while also social distancing. The Seashell complex might be an option.
- Six to eight years ago a historic group suggested setting up the components of the bridge, if replaced, to demonstrate how a bascule works. This could serve as mitigation for the loss of the historic bridge. If the elements of the existing bridge couldn't be used, then a replica could be created. It could potentially reside at the Hampton Beach State Park.
- In any historic mitigation, it's important to consider the Mile-Long Bridge (opened in 1902) that was at the crossing prior to the construction of the Neil R. Underwood Bridge.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM.