

**Hampton Harbor Bridge Project
Summary of Meeting
Public Information Meeting
September 26, 2018**

The first Public Information Meeting for the Hampton Harbor Bridge Project was held on September 26, 2018 at the Marston School at 4 Marston Way in Hampton, NH. Jill Barrett, a member of the HDR consultant team, opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and introducing the project team. She then turned the meeting over to Jennifer Reczek, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation's (NHDOT's) Project Manager.

Ms. Reczek began by providing some background on the project. She explained that the bridge is a vital transportation link which is used by vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists, and that it's opened approximately 800 times per year to accommodate vessels coming into and out of the harbor. Constructed in 1949, the Neil Underwood Bridge replaced the "Mile-Long" bridge at the crossing. Ms. Reczek explained that bascule is French for "seesaw," and that the structure's mechanical system lifts the bridge using a counterweight to balance the span. It's made up of 12 fixed spans and a bascule span, with two 12-foot travel lanes, one-foot shoulders, and a narrow sidewalk which doesn't meet requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The vertical navigational clearance mean high water is 18', and the horizontal clearance within the channel is 40'.

Ms. Reczek explained that the Hampton Harbor Bridge has been rehabilitated numerous times over the last 50 years, including emergency repairs to the bascule span mechanical system in March 2018. She said the purpose of the project is to provide for a safe, reliable, and structurally sound crossing, while also improving mobility for the traveling public, bicyclist and pedestrians, and marine users. The project is necessary because the bridge is structurally deficient and functionally obsolete. Many of the mechanical components are original and the bridge's electrical system is outdated. In addition, the shoulder and sidewalk widths are substandard.

Ms. Reczek said the project will evaluate three major alternatives: Rehabilitation, Replacement with a High-Level Fixed Bridge, and Replacement with a Movable Bridge. Alignments east and west of the bridge will be considered for replacement and temporary bridge structures, if they're required. Key considerations in the evaluation of the alternatives will include vessel traffic, right-of-way, the driving public, pedestrians, bicyclists, historic resources, environmental resources, constructability, construction impacts, traffic controls, and utilities. All of these key considerations will need to be reviewed and balanced in the effort to select the preferred alternative to address the purpose and need of the project.

Ms. Reczek then explained the project process. She said the project team has been evaluating the existing conditions of the bridge and will then develop a range of reasonable alternatives and associated costs, and prepare a Type, Size and Location Study (TS&L) which will evaluate each of the alternatives from an engineering perspective. The project team will evaluate the impacts of the alternatives on a range of natural and man-made resources, before selecting a Preferred Alternative to carry into the preliminary and final design phases. Ms. Reczek said, since the inception of the project in May, the team has formed a Public Advisory Committee and begun coordination with natural and cultural resources agencies; collected key data; and begun the engineering review of the Rehabilitation Alternative.

Dan Hageman, an Environmental Specialist and member of the HDR consultant team, explained the necessary environmental compliance for the project. He said agency coordination has already begun, and that this information will be used in the preparation of the Environmental Assessment for the project. He said consultation and coordination for the project will also occur to comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Section 4(f) of the US Department of Transportation Act, Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Mr. Hageman stated that listed species have been identified as potentially occurring at the site, including the piping plover, least tern, red knot, and several state listed plant species. In addition, 26 Essential Fish Habitat species; four threatened or endangered species of sea turtle; five threatened or endangered Distinct Population Segments of the Atlantic sturgeon; and the endangered shortnose sturgeon have also been identified as potentially occurring in the waters around the bridge.

Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, a Cultural Resources Specialist and member of the HDR consultant team, described the cultural resources review that's occurred to date. She explained that the project team has defined both a direct Area of Potential Effect (APE) for assessing impacts to archaeological resources, and a Visual APE for assessing effects to above-ground buildings and structures. She said NHDOT has identified Consulting Parties and invited them to participate in the Section 106 consultation. Consulting Parties are organizations or individuals who have an interest in historic issues surrounding the project. The first Cultural Resources Coordination Meeting was held with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources and Consulting Parties in July. She explained that pamphlets were available at the meeting's sign-in table which describe the Section 106 process and the role of Consulting Parties. Interested individuals could also talk to members of the project team.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll then summarized the preliminary findings to date. She said the Neil Underwood Bridge is listed in NHDOT's historic bridge inventory and that a study is underway to determine its eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, the project team has identified the National Register-eligible Eastern Railroad Historic District at the far western edge of the Visual APE, and they're looking at the potential eligibility of other buildings and structures in the Visual APE. Archaeological research and fieldwork have identified some potential for archaeological deposits related to late-19th century residential development at the north end of the Direct APE, as well as the potential for remains of the Mile-Long Bridge, or structures related to the construction of the existing bridge on the south side.

Ms. Dyer-Carroll said that in addition to Section 106, this project will have to comply with Section 4(f) and Section 6(f). Potential 4(f) properties in the vicinity of the bridge include the Neil Underwood Bridge itself, recreational areas, and potentially historic neighborhoods. If the project requires the use of any of these properties, a 4(f) Evaluation will be undertaken. Ms. Dyer-Carroll said there are also potential 6(f) properties including Hampton Beach State Park, the Hampton State Pier, and Harborside Park, and that NH State Parks is working with the National Park Service to determine the 6(f) boundaries. If the project requires the conversion of all or part of one of these properties to a non-recreational use, a 6(f) evaluation will be prepared.

Jim Murphy, the HDR Team's Lead Engineer and Project Manager, then provided background on the condition of the bridge and study of the Rehabilitation Alternative. He explained that in July 2017 a deteriorated coupling and pinion failed, causing vessel users to modify their schedules to get in and out of the harbor. Emergency repairs were conducted shortly thereafter, and interim repairs were

completed in early 2018. In their evaluation of the Rehabilitation Alternative, the Project Team has reviewed the existing condition of the structure and is in the process of determining the work needed to meet the project's purpose and need. He said the Rehabilitation Alternative must ensure the safe and reliable operation of the bridge, while also minimizing modifications to the bridge, since it's a potential historic resource.

Mr. Murphy explained that the Project Team has conducted a visual inspection of the existing bridge. He said the Seabrook-Hampton Bridge is number one on the State's Priority List for Red List bridges, as well as the Rehabilitation and Replacement Priority List, and that the inspection showed deterioration and outdated mechanical and electrical systems. He explained that the bridge is safe for current uses, but that NHDOT must address the structure's condition issues. He went on to explain that the evaluation of the Rehabilitation Alternative will look at a range of considerations, such as waterway traffic; needs of vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians for roadway design; natural and cultural resources; and impacts to abutters.

Ms. Reczek concluded the presentation by listing next steps. She said NHDOT anticipates completion of the analysis for the Rehabilitation Alternative in late fall. They will then begin reviewing roadway alignments and profiles for the replacement alternatives and determining navigational clearance requirements before developing the concepts. The Project Team will continue coordination with reviewing agencies and the PAC. She said the next Public Information Meeting is currently scheduled for December. At that time, the Project Team will provide updates on the historic review process, the Rehabilitation Alternative, and the alignments and profiles for the replacement alternatives. They anticipate completing a study of all of the alternatives and selecting a Preferred Alternative in the spring of 2019. Another Public Information Meeting will be held at that time to get input from the Towns and users. Looking ahead, it is anticipated the project will be advertised in 2023, with construction spanning several years beginning in 2024.

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

Q. I attended a meeting years ago and asked if they could build the existing piers higher and wider as part of the rehabilitation of the bridge to increase clearance. Has this been considered? Also, has the Design Team considered a tunnel in lieu of a bridge?

A. Widening of the existing piers is being considered as part of the rehabilitation analysis, but there is scour and limited capacity in the piers. The programmed cost would not allow for a tunnel and the tunnel is unfeasible given the residents and businesses on each end of the bridge.

Q. Why is rehabilitation even being considered? It's wasting time.

A. An evaluation of rehabilitation is required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on projects for which federal funds are used.

Q. Why hasn't the federal government dredged the harbor?

A. The NH Dredge Management Task Force, an interagency group that reviews dredging projects in the state, is looking into the future dredging of Hampton Harbor. Dredging the harbor is not part of this effort.

Q. What is a Red-Listed bridge?

A. Bridges are rated on a scale of 9 (highest) to 0 (lowest). When one of the bridge components declines to a condition of 4 it goes on the State's Red List and is considered in poor condition. This designation means the bridge gets inspected twice per year versus every two years.

Q. When was the bridge put on the Red List?

A. We do not know that off-hand but will provide that information in the meeting minutes.
(Note: The bridge was placed on the Red-List in 1999.)

Q. Why are you allowing an unsafe bridge to continue operating? Is it safe for emergency responders?

A. NHDOT takes safety very seriously. The bridge is not unsafe. It is safe for all current loads, but the issues need to be addressed to ensure the long-term consistent and dependable operation of the bridge and waterway.

Q. What if the bridge is stuck open?

A. There are procedures and responders in place to address issues as they arise. There is also an operations and maintenance manual that addresses short term work needed for bridge to minimize the risk of more emergency issues such as the bridge getting stuck.

Q. Do you have a plan to meet with the fishermen and boat owners who use the bridge?

A. Yes, NHDOT plans to meet with them this fall to learn about how they use the waterway.
(Note: The meeting was later scheduled for October 25th)

Q. Are you taking sea-level rise into consideration? What are the sources?

A. Yes, sea-level rise is being considered. There are a number of sources available for projections, and the project team is still looking at how to best assess the impacts of sea level rise. NHDOT follows the recommendations/guidance of the NH Coastal Risk and Hazards Commission.

Q. If a fixed bridge were constructed, how much higher would it be?

A. We don't know at this time. We will be working with the US Coast Guard and the marine users to determine the navigational requirements.

Q. Please explain the funding – is the money there now?

A. The money has been programmed but it is not yet available. The state has a 10-year planning process and the bridge is identified as a future project in 2023. The funding comes from New Hampshire's share of the Federal Highway Trust fund; the amount of funding that the State receives is dependent on continued Federal legislation.

Q. How often is funding not available for a project?

A. The state knows the bridge condition is not going to improve and measures will have to be undertaken so it's unlikely that funding won't be available. This is also the number one bridge priority in the State.

Q. Have you looked at the traffic conditions, in particular traffic stopped by the casino? You can build a four-lane bridge and at times traffic still won't move because the roads on both sides of the bridge are only 2-lanes.

A. NHDOT is collecting traffic data in both directions from the bridge in order to fully understand the conditions in the area.

Q. If the bridge is determined to be historic, what does that mean?

A. If determined historic, any potential effects to the existing bridge would need to be discussed in the Section 106 consultation process with the NH Division of Historical Resources and Consulting Parties, but it doesn't mean the bridge can't be replaced.

Q. What impacts would a new bridge have on the homes on Route 1A south of the bridge?

A. The project team is currently looking at a cumulative impact area that encompasses the full range of possible alternatives. More information will be available at the meeting in December once additional analysis has been undertaken.

Q. Will it be a done deal in December?

A. No, we are very early in the planning process. Once we have all the factors, we can start to look at potential impacts and taking input from the users and residents of the area.

Q. Is it a given that the existing bridge will be maintained and another bridge will be located to the east or west?

A. If a new bridge is put in the same location, a temporary movable bridge would be necessary. There are three alternatives – a new fixed bridge, a new movable bridge, and rehabilitation. If a new bridge is built to provide the needed roadway width, the existing bridge will be removed.

Q. Are you going to meet with residents who live near the bridge before the meeting in December?

A. We will be presenting various alignments and bridge alternatives in December. If it's determined that there would be impacts outside of the right-of-way, a public hearing will be held by NHDOT.

Q. Why wouldn't you meet with residents before December if you're meeting with fishermen?

A. The project team will be meeting with fishermen to help understand how the waterway is used. We can and will meet with residents as soon as we have gathered more information on the range of alternatives being evaluated.

Comments:

- There was once a toll for crossing the bridge. This could be used to increase funding for the project.
- 15 years ago, a public-private venture was discussed to fund the replacement of the bridge, but it didn't come to pass.
- In 2010 when the bridge was being re-decked NHDOT talked about future rehab work. A member of the Project Team stated that this is where the current project originated. Funds were not available to do all the work needed at the time. Since then other bridge deficiencies, including bicycle and pedestrian circulation, have become a factor and that is what has led NHDOT to the alternatives being considered as part of this project.
- The Sun Valley neighborhood sued the Town of Hampton years ago because of difficulties with emergency access over the bridge.
- It makes no sense to study rehabilitation; two lanes are insufficient. We need four lanes.
- NHDOT should consider removing the existing bascule span and making it a fishing pier. Then they should construct a new fixed bridge.
- The north side of the bridge is referred to as Locke's Point.
- The bridge should be opened on a schedule, rather than on demand.
- The malfunction of the bridge has caused commercial party boats to have to refund their passengers because they couldn't get under the bridge.

- The current bridge should be rehabilitated.
- The community needs bike lanes, but not a large fixed bridge.
- Al Gauron's party boats require 22' of clearance from the high-water mark. They don't require lifts at low tide.
- If a fixed bridge were constructed, there would be impacts on the Sun Valley neighborhood.
- A dual-level bridge should be considered to address the traffic issues. It would allow for more capacity and a narrower structure.
- Eight years ago, we were told if the bridge was historic, it would be maintained.
- Traffic should not be a consideration. We need a safe bridge. It should be repaired as quickly as possible.