

Meeting: Public Informational Meeting

Meeting Date: 08/20/09 - Open House: 4-6 pm/Meeting: 6-8 pm

Location: Portsmouth Public Library

- Purpose and Need Statement
 - Baseline Data Analysis
 - Inspection Update
 - Stimulus Update

**Maine-NH Connections Study
Meeting Report
August 20, 2009
6 p.m – 8 p.m.**

Panel: Carol Morris, Morris Communications; Paul Godfrey, HNTB; Bob Landry, NHDOT; Gerry Audibert, MaineDOT; Joe Grilli, HNTB; Todd Pendleton, HNTB; Robin Bousa, VHB; Andrea D'Amato, HNTB; Essek Petrie, HNTB; Ellen Marlatt, Independent Archaeology Consultants; Lynne Munroe, Preservation Company.

Intro/Opening: Carol Morris

Federal Stimulus Grant Update: Carol stated that Maine and New Hampshire are actively working to develop the application for submittal prior to the September 15 deadline. If the grant is successful, the Memorial Bridge will be funded for some kind of improvement and the Connections Study scope of work will be modified to exclude further analysis of Memorial Bridge alternatives while continuing to evaluate Sarah Mildred Long alternatives. If the grant is not successful, the Connections Study will provide direction for solutions going forward. Carol asked if there were questions and asked Bob Landry to provide details.

Q - Is there a difference between the two states on the grant and the associated funding?

A – There is a lot of money required for this project, and both states are looking to focus efforts on the Memorial Bridge – we are still working out what is the best bang for the money we ask for. For any work on the Sarah Long, we are looking at timing of 2012 – 2013, since we can't close both bridges at once.

Q – I think the question was, are the dollars that were set aside to fix the Memorial Bridge being used, and we are then asking for the additional funding needed - or is the grant paying for the whole thing?

A - There are no NH dollars set aside for the Memorial Bridge. There is money available for bridge work, but for no specific bridge identified.

Q – Will New Hampshire put up the money or ask for the whole thing?

Q – The dollars needed are greater than \$100 million. New Hampshire has allocated funds for a major rehabilitation in our 10-year plan.

Q - When will decisions on stimulus allocations be made?

A - February 17, 2010 is the deadline – but I read recently that it could be earlier, maybe in January.

Q – Is there anything we can do to put pressure on to get the funding – who should we talk to?

A – You should speak to your US Senators, we need community support – The letters that Ben Porter’s group have been sending are great.

Q – Are any funds available from the Department of Defense to cover their portion of bridge use?

A – There was a 1939 agreement with the railroads to get some funding for maintenance, but that was passed on the shipyard. There are no capital funds available from the Department of Defense.

Inspections: Carol said that there is not a great deal of detail yet regarding the updated bridge inspections, but that field Inspection work on both bridges is complete, and the full report is due in late September. She said in regards to the Memorial Bridge, inspection findings showed accelerated deterioration, including on the Kittery Approach Spans. The bridge was just reduced to a 10-ton load. Carol added that the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge was posted for 20-ton loads as of June 27, with the Albacore Park Connector Road opened to improve truck access to the I-95 Bridge. She said that there had been a recent rail delivery to Portsmouth Naval Shipyard that was completed without incident. She again asked Bob to respond to questions.

Q - Can you use the old inspection work in the past as part of today’s inspection?

A – Yes, using HNTB’s past work and comparing it to the new reports has been very helpful.

Q - How many photos were taken and how was the work completed?

A - More than 4,000 photos were taken, and every steel structural element on each bridge was measured to do a structural model for each bridge to determine its current capacity.

Q – Because it is a riveted bridge, does it have a better chance for survival – is that true?

A – I don't know – but many of the rivets are gone and the ones remaining are in bad shape. The gusset plates are in bad shape on both the lift span and fixed spans.

Q – You note on the slide that both bridges remain safe at their posted weights. I was on the Memorial Bridge a week or so ago and a big truck went over – I thought I was going swimming.

A – Those trucks are not supposed to be using the bridge.

Q – Do you know yet if there is any change in the lifespan for the Memorial Bridge? I think you have been saying 2 to 5 years, is there any adjustment?

A – There is no specific adjustment as of yet. Deterioration is occurring more rapidly than expected.

Study Overview and Data Analysis: Paul Godfrey

Schedule: Paul gave a brief overview of the study schedule, stating that for this meeting, baseline data has been completed, and in September we will have traffic analysis and travel demand model forecasts completed for no-build conditions. He reminded everyone that September's public meeting (on the 24th) will feature a discussion of the fatal flaw analysis and we will start to brainstorm alternatives (solutions). At that point, he said the Study Team will do the work of analyzing the alternatives and will come back in December with the results of the Fatal Flaw analysis – a list of feasible alternatives. Then, in January, the work of analyzing those begins. To date, the Study is on schedule.

There were no questions.

Baseline Analysis – Paul noted that many of the results from the baseline analysis will not surprise anyone, but that it is essential to have a baseline that is accurate and based on fact. He also noted that baseline data is required as part of the NEPA process and a standard part of any state or federally funded study.

There are five categories of data that are collected:

- Cultural and Historic
- Natural Resources
- Land Use
- Transportation
- Origin and Destination Surveys (vehicular and bike/ped)

Paul then summarized the handouts that were provided on these topics..

Questions:

Q – I was one of the people on the bridge when the bike/ped counts were made, and I talked with someone who was doing the counting. They said that many of the people using the bridge were not counted, so the numbers here are actually under-representing the usage.

A –Everyone using the bridge was counted, and if someone told you that, they were mistaken. Not everyone was interviewed for the Origin and Destination Survey, which may have been part of the confusion – but everyone was counted.

Purpose and Need Statement: Carol Morris

Carol talked about the role a Purpose and Need Statement plays in a study, stating that it is a foundation that provides direction and clarifies what the study is trying to achieve. She said that it is a starting point for development of alternatives (solutions), that it must clearly address transportation deficiencies, must clearly state the study's goals, and will be used as a basis to measure which alternatives (solutions) will remain on the table for more detailed analysis.

Carol reviewed the input on the above that had been provided from the public and the Stakeholder and Steering Committees. Included were the importance of bike/ped access over the river, the need to support tourism, the economy, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, evacuation needs, easy access between the two communities and the communities' historic and cultural character.

She then reviewed the process to-date: Initial feedback was gathered from the public in April, from which a draft was developed and presented to the Stakeholder Committee on June 30. Their comments were incorporated, and the revised Statement was sent to the Steering Committee and Stakeholder Committee on July 7. Federal Highway Administration requested a format change, and the Steering Committee met to discuss the Statement in early August and agreed to a revised format with adjustments. This revision was sent to the Stakeholder Committee August 11, and two subsequent conference calls – on August 17 and 19 – took place to resolve word-smithing

questions. Carol said that we are now on Version 8, and that she believes we have a strong base, but that the document is still a work in progress. Carol then read through the Purpose and Need Statement and asked for comments.

Q – What is the time frame for this Study – do you mean through the year 2035?

A – We are looking ahead to 2035 – that is how far our traffic projections go. We are not trying to look beyond 2035.

Q – As part of the study are you looking at river traffic?

A – Yes, navigation analysis is a part of the study.

Purpose Statement:

Q – Why are there no buses crossing the river? Is it a problem with the bridges? Is it due to federal regulations?

A – The lack of inter-state transit service is not because of the bridges, it is not an engineering issue.

From the audience: It is an inter-state regulation issue. There are different regulations and requirements for transit that is within a state vs. inter-state. Interstate commerce standards are different. The communities need to talk to federal regulators about getting special consideration for our integrated community. (Note: See further discussion on intercity transit under “Needs: Transportation Deficiencies”) The Study Team will follow up on this discussion to ascertain the level of interstate issues that may be involved.

Q - How is emergency evacuation addressed in this statement?

A – The phrase “safe and secure” is meant to cover that.

Q – The phrase “which support” sounds weak. I would prefer to use words like “encourages”, “enhances” or “promotes”.

A – Overall, it is important that the statement cannot pre-determine outcome. If you change that word to promote, or encourage, you are essentially saying that the status quo – one of the options that will surely be on the table – will not fulfill the statement of purpose.

Q – I would have to believe that you could use a word like “enhance” without impacting the legal status of the document.

Needs: Transportation Deficiencies

Q – I think you are only missing one, add something about bus service between states being limited by legal restraints – as it is systemic problem.

(Comment from audience): COAST did do a trial run – around the year 2000 – but it was not viable, the demand was not there. It ran from New Hampshire into Eliot and Kittery. The problem is funding and that New Hampshire cannot run a full service into Maine – legally they can only go in and out to the other side of the bridge if it is funded through FTA. You really need the demand in order to operate.

NOTE: It was noted that the Study Team would contact COAST to get data from this effort. (ACTION ITEM.) While noting the need for cross-bridge transit may come out as a study recommendation (this would be analyzed as part of the determination of how to increase capacity), it is a legal and also potentially a demand issue, but not an engineering issue. Consequently it should not be part of this section.

Goals:

Q – At the Portsmouth approach on the Memorial Bridge the sidewalk ends. Is there any way to improve access and sidewalks? The markings are deficient and it is not very safe.

A – We will be evaluating connections and configuration at all approaches as part of the Study. Markings and signage are a level of detail that is not included in this Study.

Q - Should there be a statement on rail somewhere in here?

A – Well, it is implied in the Goal bullet on improving connections to regional transportation modes, as well as the reference in both the Purpose Statement and the Transportation deficiencies to multi-modal. Rail is one of the modes that are part of those statements.

Q - It would be a good idea to have a statement on rail transport in the future. We need to allow for a future for passenger rail – need to capture that opportunity.

(General concurrence from the audience)

Q From the State Historic Preservation Offices' viewpoint, the alternatives must meet Section 106 requirements. Nowhere does it state that here. It should be added as a goal.

A – This is required by federal statutes and is similar to the need to develop alternatives that can be permitted. No matter how wonderful an alternative is, if we can't build it, its not very useful. We will put together some potential wording for a bullet.

NOTE: Upon further consideration of this comment in conjunction with FHWA, it was believed that a goal regarding compliance with Section 106 is not necessary. As a federally funded undertaking, this study

and any subsequent project(s) must by law comply with many federal and state laws and regulations, including Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. It is not necessary to include this in the Purpose and Need Statement; including it and not all other laws that require compliance would be misleading.

Q - The most underutilized transportation modes in the communities are rail and Pease airport. If Pease became a transport hub, we will need the direct connection.

A – We will add more words to the 3rd bullet to clarify.

Q - Both bridges are part of the evacuation plan and I don't see anything about that here. Should it be part of the "goals?"

A - Yes. That is definitely an oversight. We will add a statement to the goals section.

Q - The first and second bullets on this slide (1. Reduce operational and maintenance costs and 2. Avoid or minimize detrimental impacts to the historic significance and integrity of the area) are at cross purposes - they cancel each other out.

A – Yes, there is some conflict. That is the challenge of a process like this. There are always tradeoffs involved, and the key is finding the answer that provides the best balance.

Q - Do we know what the operational and maintenance costs would be if the bridges were in good repair?

A – We will know that later in the study, but do not know today.

Q - Do you have that information historically?

A – (Bob Landry) It would be hard to translate into today's dollars, but that is what we will do as part of the study that evaluates the different alternatives.

Q – Can we hear what we've agreed to change on this document?

A – We will post the minutes and a revised version of the Statement at www.maineNHconnections.org by next Tuesday.

Q – And you will put in some language on the preservation of rail options?

A – Yes.

NOTE: A revised Purpose and Need Statement based on feedback from this meeting and review by Federal Highway Administration will be emailed to the Connections Study Steering and Stakeholder Committee on August 26 (2009). It will be subsequently posted to this web site.

Fatal Flaw Analysis: Paul Godfrey

Paul said that the Fatal Flaw Analysis is used to evaluate and screen the full range of alternatives (solutions) identified by the Study Team and the public. Once the alternatives that have a "fatal flaw" are taken off the table, the remaining feasible alternatives receive a higher level of analysis. The fatal flaw screening will ask questions like:

- Does the alternative satisfy purpose, need and goals?
- Does the alternative have significant impacts?
- Is the alternative permissible?
- Is the alternative financially/physically feasible?
- Is the alternative clearly inferior to other alternatives?

Paul also showed examples of sample measures that could be used as part of the analysis.