

# Memorial, Sarah Long bridge options slashed to 15

*Repair and replacement among plans*

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PORTSMOUTH — For one night, at least, there were no troubled waters under two bridges spanning the Piscataqua River.

At a public meeting between the Maine and New Hampshire departments of transportation, stakeholders and a large contingent of residents, a barrage of questions were asked and answered in an open format that at its core was about the future of two of the vital bridges linking Portsmouth to Kittery.

In a contrast to the early days of discussions on what to do with the Memorial and Sarah Mildred Long Bridges as they near the end of their respective lifespans, Wednesday night's packed session at Portsmouth High School was largely cordial as representatives for the work being done outlined how they had cut down to a current list of 15 "alternatives" for the two bridges.

Paul Godfrey of Westbrook, Maine-based HNTB Corporation kicked off his presentation by tracing the path stakeholders, a steering committee and officials took to narrow down the initial field of 63 possibilities to the current 15.

Options that have been eliminated include: an underground tunnel and high-level replacement bridges and a ferry service.

Options still on the table include: Converting Memorial to pedestrian and bicycle only, rehabilitating both bridges, installing new bridges slightly upstream or fashioning a new mid-level bridge higher off the water.

Carol Morris, spokeswoman for the Maine-NH Connections Study, said a significant number of residents use the bridge on bike or foot.

Maine State Sen. Peter Bowman, D-Kittery, expressed concern about the effect the pedestrian/bike plan would have on businesses. Godfrey acknowledged the single mid-level plan would have some negative

impact on both communities, but would cut in half the number of times a bridge is lifted to accommodate marine traffic, saving money.

Cost, however, has not been a key part of the process yet, Godfrey said, noting that would come soon. The criteria from the Maine-NH Connections Study used to cut 63 options for the bridges to 15 included whether changes would allow for current and projected traffic to cross between Portsmouth and Kittery, and the impact on the two communities.

Those in attendance asked about the closure time in the case of a rehabilitation or replacement of the Memorial Bridge (an estimated two years), the economic impact on Kittery and Portsmouth businesses from the recent closure of the Memorial Bridge (unquantified as of yet), and a host of questions on the feasibility of specific options. Portsmouth City Councilor Chris Dwyer said she was impressed with the level of questions and the fact that many residents put forth new ideas, such as making sure more Kittery businesses who would be directly affected by work on the bridges were more involved in the stakeholder meetings.

Ben Porter of Kittery, who advocates for the structures as part of the Save Our Bridges group, said he felt the discussion was heading in the right direction. While he noted that he was surprised project representatives didn't spend time talking about some of the new technology and methodology available to build bridges during Wednesday night's meeting, he said the options left on the table were sensible.

"I'm pleased with the outcome," Porter said. "Stakeholders have been pretty vocal about options still on the table, and it appears (the DOTs) have been listening."

According to Godfrey, the next look and trimming down of options will happen in December and January, with another opportunity for public input likely in January or February, and what comes out of that will go for more detailed analysis into March and April. A decision on federal stimulus funds for the rehabilitation of the Memorial Bridge is expected to come in mid-January, he added.

Documents from the meeting will be posted at [www.mainenhconnections.org](http://www.mainenhconnections.org).

