

P.A. shows it's moving on project to raise Bayonne Bridge roadbed

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Proof of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's commitment to raising the roadbed of the Bayonne Bridge is now in writing.

In an open letter dated March 2, the Port Authority is advertising for a consultant to provide engineering design services to raise the roadway. The deadline for responding to the agency is 2 p.m. March 28.

The Port Authority is seeking to raise the roadbed to at least 215 feet above sea level by 2014 when an expanded Panama Canal is expected to spur the use of larger cargo ships that cannot pass under the bridge now. The bridge's current height is 151 feet above sea level.

Port Authority Deputy Executive Director Bill Baroni said the bi-state agency's in-house design team released the request-for-proposal months ahead of schedule in an effort to meet the looming deadline.

"We are moving this project forward at speeds that this agency has not seen before," Baroni said. "We cannot allow a 150-foot barrier to prevent us from being the leading port on the East Coast."

The design and engineering phase of this project is expected to take 21 months.

Joseph Curto, president of the New York Shipping Association, said he would like to see construction start sooner, but said the early release of the RFP shows "the commitment of Port Authority and state of New Jersey to move this forward."

The Port Authority estimates that the Port of New York and New Jersey - which includes Port Newark and Port Elizabeth - has seen a 16 percent growth in trade over calendar year 2010.

"Trade is back to 2007 levels - which brings us back to before the recession and all that followed; 2007 was the best year that the port has had in its history," Curto said.

The Port Authority has committed \$1 billion to cover most of the projected cost for this project.

Rep. Albio Sires, D-West New York, has repeatedly said that some 270,000 regional jobs are dependent on the success of the region's ports

"This is great news," Richard Turner, Sires' chief of staff, said yesterday. "The congressman would agree that this is being done as fast and expeditiously as possible."