

Raising Bayonne Bridge makes way for new ships

Plan to boost roadbed keeps landmark span intact

By Steve Strunsky
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The iconic steel arch of the Bayonne Bridge will remain a landmark of the New York Harbor region, under a plan announced yesterday to raise the bridge's clearance above the Kill Van Kull by replacing the bridge's roadbed with one located much higher above the water.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had been studying ways to raise the clearance of the 79-year-old bridge from the current 151 feet by an additional 64 feet to allow the latest generation of container ships to pass below it en route to container terminals in Newark and Elizabeth.

The so-called post-Panamax ships are expected to begin putting in at East Coast ports following a widening of the Panama Canal sometime in 2014. Officials say the region could lose shipping business to competing ports if the bridge's clearance problem is not addressed, threatening the \$36 billion in annual economic activity and 269,000 jobs that officials say depend on the port.

Solutions studied by the Port Authority had included tearing down the bridge and building a new one or a tunnel, and jacking up the entire bridge, arch and all. After a lengthy study period, the Port Authority announced yesterday that leaving the arch in place while raising the height of the roadbed was the "preferred alternative."

"We have found what we believe is a cost-effective, workable solution to fixing the Bayonne Bridge,



Gov. Chris Christie speaks about the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's efforts to adjust the Bayonne Bridge to allow for larger ships, framed by the span in September.

JERRY MCCREA/THE STAR-LEDGER

which will ensure that we keep the economic activity and good jobs the port business provides for decades to come," said the Port Authority's deputy executive director, Bill Baroni.

There was no price tag attached to the project in the announcement, and Port Authority officials declined to elaborate. In October, the Port Authority approved setting aside \$1 billion toward is cost.

It was also unclear how much the project would disrupt the 12,000 daily crossings by commuters and truckers. For example, it is not known whether the existing roadbed will remain in use while the higher one is constructed or whether motorists will have to use the Goethals Bridge or Outerbridge Crossing as alternative routes to Staten Island.

Even so, the project was welcomed by officials on both sides of the isle — and the Kill Van Kull.

Bayonne Mayor Mark Smith and Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro both welcomed the project. New Jersey's Democratic state Senate president, Stephen Sweeney, called it "the fastest, most efficient and best way for the Port Authority to protect jobs and keep our ports running."

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In a statement, Gov. Chris Christie said the roadbed project was the most, "fiscally appropriate and environmentally sound solution."

Jeff Tittel, executive director of the Sierra Club of New Jersey, agreed, welcoming a solution that spared massive demolition

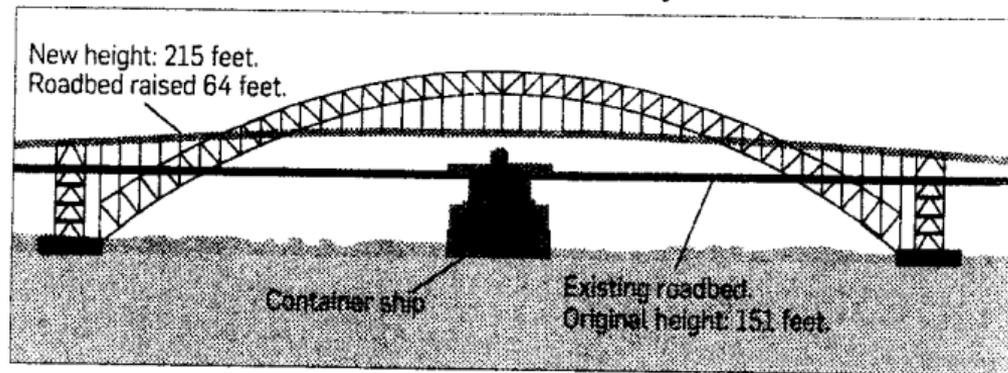
and rebuilding and still allowed for larger container ships that will increase efficiency of shipping operations, and thus reduce pollutants.

Fari Barzegar, a California-based structural engineer who specializes in bridge construction, recognized the historic nature of the Bayonne Bridge, which was the longest steel arch bridge in the world when it was completed in 1931. But Barzegar said retrofitting an existing bridge can be more costly than building a new one.

And, he added, "Sometimes

BAYONNE BRIDGE CLEARANCE

Larger container ships are expected to begin pulling into East Coast ports following a widening of the Panama Canal in 2014, prompting officials to increase clearance by 64 feet.



Source: Port Authority of N.Y. and N.J.

TIM SPARVERO, THE STAR-LEDGER

the complications aren't known ahead of time."

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