



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

GOETHALS BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

NEWSLETTER 4 / OCTOBER 2006

INTRODUCTION

The United States Coast Guard is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement (GBR). The Port Authority of NY & NJ, the project sponsor, has proposed this action as part of its Goethals Bridge Modernization Program. This is the fourth in a series of newsletters to inform stakeholders and the public about this study as it progresses.

IN THIS NEWSLETTER

Introduction.....	1
Alternatives for EIS Analysis	1-2
Project Purpose & Need.....	2
Public Outreach.....	3
Frequently Asked Questions.....	3-4
What's Next.....	4

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For project information, visit the GBR EIS Web site at www.goethalseis.com. The site contains links to meeting presentations, as well as to previous newsletters and other study materials.



United States Coast Guard

ALTERNATIVES FOR EIS ANALYSIS

On the basis of the findings of the study's alternatives screening process and input received during outreach meetings held in June 2006, the following bridge-replacement alternatives have been selected for detailed evaluation in the GBR EIS:

- Single 6-lane bridge replacement-south of the existing Goethals Bridge
- Single 6-lane bridge replacement-north of the existing Goethals Bridge
- Twin parallel 3-lane bridge replacements – one south of the existing Goethals Bridge and one in the existing alignment
- Twin parallel 3-lane bridge replacements – one north of the existing Goethals Bridge and one in the existing alignment

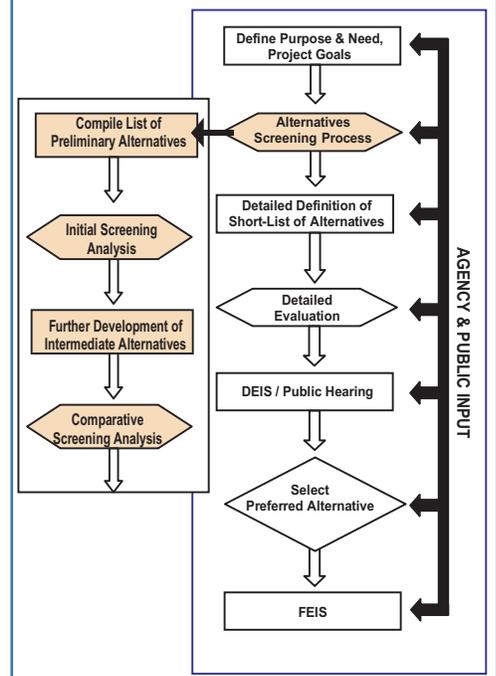
These four bridge-replacement alternatives will undergo detailed analysis in the Draft EIS (DEIS). In addition, "special use lanes" for express buses and high occupancy vehicles (HOVs), as well as congestion pricing on a replacement bridge(s) will also be investigated. The DEIS will also evaluate a "no-build" alternative to represent future conditions without the proposed project. The impacts of the bridge-replacement alternatives will be compared to the future no-build conditions to determine any potential impacts with any given "build" alternative.

HOW WERE THESE ALTERNATIVES SELECTED?

The Coast Guard held agency and public scoping meetings in October 2004 to solicit comments and input on potential project alternatives, as well as on the proposed project purpose and need (see Page 2), the study area, and potential environmental issues and concerns. Following scoping, the alternatives screening process was initiated.

This process is designed to objectively assess all preliminary alternatives against a consistent set of criteria as a basis for selecting those that would address the project purpose and need and goals and, therefore, warrant detailed study in the DEIS.

CONTEXT OF ALTERNATIVES SCREENING PROCESS



A list of preliminary alternatives was developed from suggestions received during the EIS scoping process and from our own studies. The preliminary alternatives identified for the screening process were those that appeared to have the potential to address the purpose and need for the proposed project. A total of 15 preliminary alternatives were considered:

- 6 New-Crossing Alternatives
- 2 Transit Alternatives
- 3 Freight-Movement Alternatives
- 4 Travel Demand Management Alternatives

Continued on Page 2.

PROJECT PURPOSE & NEED

The project's purpose and need was vetted and approved through the public and agency scoping process in fall 2004. A proposed replacement for the Goethals Bridge is being considered due to the following conditions on the existing Goethals Bridge:

- functional and physical obsolescence;
- need for ongoing maintenance, repair and rehabilitation at increasing costs;
- need for seismic retrofit;
- deficiency as a reliable transportation link;
- deteriorating traffic conditions and relatively high accident levels;
- configuration/design and approach limitations for:
 - maximizing traffic flow improvements with E-ZPass technology
 - providing dedicated space for potential future transit and other non-single-driver commutation options
 - providing safe/reliable truck access across the bridge
 - providing safe/secure pedestrian/bike access across the bridge



ALTERNATIVES FOR EIS ANALYSIS (CONT'D)

An initial, qualitative screening analysis of the preliminary alternatives was conducted to shorten the list of alternatives retained for further, more detailed investigation. A preliminary alternative that failed the initial screening was eliminated for one or more of the following reasons:

- It would not address the project purpose and need and project goals;
- It was found to be not reasonable or feasible;
- It would not have logical connection to existing transportation infrastructure;
- It could not be implemented without a new bridge.

The result of the preliminary alternatives screening was that four alternatives met the criteria of fundamental reasonableness and feasibility and also could largely satisfy the purpose and need and project goals.

These alternatives included:

- A new 6-lane bridge to replace the existing Goethals Bridge, to be constructed either directly south or north of the existing bridge, followed by demolition of the existing bridge; and
- Dual bridges to replace the existing bridge, each with three lanes for one direction of traffic. A new bridge would be built either directly south or north of the existing bridge and a second new bridge would be constructed in the existing bridge's alignment following demolition of the existing bridge.

All bridge-replacement alternatives would be designed to include provision for a future transit corridor on the structure and the approaches.

Bus rapid transit (BRT), with use of a special bus lane, and ferry service did not survive the initial screening since neither could independently address the project purpose and need. Nonetheless, due to general interest in enhancing transit options in the region, BRT and ferry services were considered in the second, comparative phase of the screening



process as possible complementary transportation improvements with any 6-lane-capacity bridge-replacement alternative.

These alternatives were advanced through a second quantitative screening, to evaluate them against a broad set of traffic and transportation, environmental and construction-related criteria; and evaluation of the relative merits of each. The comparative screening determined that, because of the dispersed nature of bus travel using the Goethals Bridge corridor, BRT would not attract sufficient riders to improve traffic on the bridge, and would result in only a few instances of travel time savings compared to travel by auto. In effect, BRT lanes on a replacement bridge would be under-utilized while the general-use lanes would remain congested. As a result, further study of using one lane in each direction on a replacement bridge(s) for a dedicated BRT lane is not warranted at this time. Expanded express bus service, however, will be investigated as a possible component of potential special-use lanes (e.g., with congestion pricing, HOVs) on the proposed replacement bridge(s).

The comparative screening also determined that morning period ridership for ferries would be very limited; therefore, ferry service to complement a bridge replacement does not warrant further investigation as part of the DEIS.

The comparative screening results did not identify a clear cut choice among the four bridge-replacement alternatives, so all four are being evaluated in detail in the DEIS to better determine a preferred alternative.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The results of the comparative screening analysis and the alternatives recommended for detailed evaluation in the DEIS were presented and discussed at the following meetings hosted by the Coast Guard:

On 6/1/06, the study's **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)** met at the Coast Guard's offices in lower Manhattan. The TAC is comprised of transportation and environmental resource agencies with expertise in traffic/transportation and related air quality and noise issues and areas of potential concern related to the proposed project.

On 6/1/06, the study's **Environmental Task Force (ETF)** met at the Coast Guard's offices. The ETF is comprised of regulatory and resource agencies which focus on all environmental issues and areas of potential concern related to the proposed project, other than air quality and noise, which are addressed by the TAC (above).

On 6/15/06, the study's **Stakeholder Committee (SC)** met at the Elizabeth Public Library. The SC includes representatives of key stakeholder organizations potentially affected by the proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement Project and provides a forum for discussion and interaction concerning EIS-related issues.

On 6/27/06 and 06/28/06 **Public Open Houses** were held respectively at the Elizabeth Public Library in Elizabeth, NJ and the Staten Island Hotel in Staten Island, NY. These open houses provided a forum for discussion of the screening results and recommendations, and encouraged interaction among the public attendees and the study team. The open house in Elizabeth drew 34 public attendees; 50 persons attended the Staten Island open house.



More information on the screening results can be found on the project Web site at www.goethalseis.com in a PowerPoint presentation that was shown and discussed at the public open houses.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

During the June round of outreach meetings, a number of significant questions were raised. These questions and the Coast Guard's responses may be of interest to our readers.

Why is the Coast Guard the lead federal agency?

The Goethals Bridge Replacement Environmental Impact Statement (GBR EIS) is being prepared in accordance with regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. NEPA regulations govern the environmental review process for projects that require federal action to ensure that all significant issues are identified and the full range of alternatives and impacts of a proposed project are addressed. The Goethals Bridge crosses the Arthur Kill, a navigable waterway of the United States. As the federal agency responsible for navigable waterways, the Coast Guard issues bridge permits. Since issuance of the bridge permit is the major federal action for the Goethals Bridge Replacement, the Coast Guard has assumed the lead agency role.

Why isn't the project considering freight?

The study initially considered several freight movement alternatives but concluded that, while they may be worthy of consideration in other studies, none of them would address the specific purpose and need for this proposed project. However, truck traffic will be evaluated in the GBR EIS as a component of the traffic impact analyses.

Why not rehabilitate the existing bridge?

Rehabilitation of the existing bridge would not meet the project's principal purpose and need, which is to address the existing structure's functional and physical obsolescence which includes reduction of traffic congestion, safety considerations, and future transit opportunities.

What will be the height of a new proposed bridge?

The height of the proposed replacement bridge(s) will be determined through the analyses conducted during the environmental review process, including review of the EIS by the public, and the Coast Guard's formal bridge permitting process. The vertical clearance of a replacement bridge(s) over the Arthur Kill's navigable channel is expected to be, at

minimum, that of the existing bridge, which is 135 feet above mean high water, although it may be slightly higher. Maximum bridge tower height will be designed to accommodate the requirements of the Federal Aviation Administration and the major airlines operating at Newark International Liberty Airport, as they relate to the flight patterns of aircrafts leaving and approaching the airport.

Will a new bridge have bicycle/pedestrian access?

Yes, any new bridge structure would include, at minimum, a 10-foot wide lane dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian use.

Why does the study only extend to the year 2030?

The year 2030 was based on the original estimate of time of completion of construction plus 20 years, as is the practice for DEIS impact analyses. The study year has been updated to 2034.

What is the study area for traffic impacts?

Two study areas have been defined for the analysis of potential traffic impacts. One regional traffic study area includes the major roadways in a 28-county area in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. The other is a more specific corridor study area surrounding the Goethals Bridge that includes communities like Elizabeth, Union, Woodbridge, Perth Amboy, and Jersey City, in New Jersey; and Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, in New York.

What will be the impacts on local traffic in Elizabeth?

Potential impacts to local traffic in Elizabeth – and for other locations throughout the traffic study area – are being studied in the detailed evaluation of the bridge-replacement alternatives and will be documented in the DEIS.

When will the missing link between I-278 and Routes 1/9 northbound be completed?

The missing link between I-278 and Routes 1/9 is not part of the proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement project, but will likely be addressed by NJDOT (the roadway operator), in coordination with the Port Authority.

Continued on Page 4.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONT'D)

Will the transition from a six-lane bridge to four lanes on both sides of the bridge result in bottlenecks?

The detailed traffic impact analyses being conducted of the bridge-replacement alternatives will determine whether bottlenecks would likely occur, and where. The analysis results will be documented in the DEIS and, as necessary, mitigation measures to alleviate any bottlenecks will be considered.

What is the predominant direction of traffic in the morning peak period?

Travel on the Goethals Bridge during the morning peak-commuting period is reverse of what might be expected, as more vehicles travel westbound towards New Jersey in the morning than towards New York.

Why is the new bridge designed only to achieve a Level of Service (LOS) D?

The proposed new facility would be designed so that during most times of the day the level of congestion will allow traffic to flow. During

the peak morning commuting hour, the bridge would experience heavy traffic flows without excessive delays. In other words, it would operate at LOS D. This is an improvement over the current breakdown conditions (LOS F) experienced during peak travel times on the existing bridge.

Will there be transit on a new bridge?

Traffic modeling has demonstrated that there would not be enough riders to warrant a dedicated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lane or light rail on a replacement bridge with six lanes, and that dedicating a lane strictly to buses would result in unacceptable traffic volumes in the remaining lanes. However, conceptual designs for the bridge-replacement alternatives being studied in detail in the DEIS will not preclude the ability to accommodate some form of transit in the future, if and as warranted.

How does one become a member of the Stakeholder Committee (SC)?

The purpose of the SC is to provide a forum for discussion and encourage interaction

about EIS-related issues among key stakeholder organizations and entities potentially affected by the proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement Project. Therefore, representatives of organizations in the study area with a stake in the project were invited to participate in the SC. Public Open Houses are being held for members of the general public.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Coast Guard will provide future opportunities for stakeholders, agencies and the public to learn more about the study, and to review and comment on the results of the Draft EIS analyses:

- The next meetings of the ETF, TAC, and SC, are currently scheduled for early 2007.
- Public Open Houses are scheduled for early 2007 in Staten Island, NY, and Elizabeth, NJ.



printed on recycled paper

