

Port Authority says it's ahead of schedule on Bayonne Bridge raising

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A project to raise the Bayonne Bridge and allow it to accommodate larger cargo ships from the Panama Canal could be completed as early as late 2015 or early 2016, a top official at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said Friday.

"We are on schedule if not a little bit ahead of our schedule internally," deputy executive director **Bill Baroni** told real estate, shipping and logistics executives Friday morning at a NAIOP New Jersey event at the New York Shipping Association Training Center in Elizabeth. He said the agency is preparing to hire its first contractor for the project,

The span needs to be raised by about 65 feet in order to accommodate larger container ships that are expected to come through the Panama Canal, which is being expanded in a project expected to be complete by 2014. The Port Authority late last year pledged \$1 billion for the project, which will come as port activity is expected to pick up in the coming years as a result of the canal's expansion.

The updated timetable was welcomed by **Martin Robins**, director emeritus and founder of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Public Policy at Rutgers University. But he also said the agency should continue to report publicly on whether it is considering other alternatives, such as plans to deepen nearby waterways before the bridge is fully raised.

"I think this could be a great engineering and construction victory for the Port Authority to get it done so quickly, because a few years ago, it looked they had a much more drawn-out prospect," Robins said. "I think that the question is: Are they going to have a fallback in the short term so they won't just say no, the ships can't come here?"