New Goethals Bridge Span Opens to Traffic

The eastbound span of the Goethals dual-span cable-stayed bridge opened to New York-bound traffic shortly after 4 p.m. Saturday, June 10. On Sunday, June 11 the New Jersey-bound traffic was added at 12:30 p.m., five and a half hours ahead of schedule connecting Staten Island, NY, and Elizabeth, NJ.

“Construction is just the part of the iceberg people see. Five-sixths of it is all the work that goes on prior to construction,” said Jim Blackmore, The Authority’s program director for the Goethals Bridge Modernization Program. “The success of the Goethals Bridge replacement has relied and continues to rely on our committed team. The new Goethals Bridge will make traffic flow safer and improve mobility in the region. As mobility improves, so do economic benefits.”

The $1.5 billion crossing over the Arthur Kill is the first new bridge for The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey in 86 years (1931-Bayonne Bridge). The original Goethals Bridge opened to traffic on June 29, 1928. The Bridge was named after Major General George Washington Goethals, who administered and oversaw the construction of the Panama Canal, and served as the Port Authority’s first consulting engineer.

The new bridge is being built under a Public-Private-Partnership (P3) format in order to design, build, finance and maintain (DBFM) the new structure. The westbound span is slated to open in 2018. When complete, the new state-of-the-art bridge will have three 12-foot lanes along with 12-foot outer shoulders and five-foot inner shoulders on the eastbound and westbound spans. The westbound span will also feature a ten-foot shared use path for bicyclists and pedestrians. The dual-span also allows for a future mass-transit corridor. Upon completion of key milestones, including substantial bridge completion and the demolition of the original bridge; the dual-span will be supported by four V-shaped 272-foot tall concrete towers and 144 stay cables, each up to 450 feet long and 14 inches in diameter.

Opening the first of the new Goethals’ dual-span, located next to the original Bridge, was an undertaking that required enormous planning and preparation, said Luke Chenery, Chief Executive Officer at NYNJ Link Developer LLC. “Maintaining the safety of the traveling public requires months of intense planning, coordination and review.

But once the plan was finalized, we worked around-the-clock, closing the original bridge at 10 p.m. Friday night, transferring eastbound traffic to the new bridge on Saturday afternoon, followed by opening the new span to westbound traffic on Sunday afternoon.”

A key part of the I-278 corridor, the Goethals Bridge is located near the Howland Hook Marine Terminal and provides access to airports, seaports, and markets throughout the region. More than $33 billion in regional goods pass over the Goethals annually. “This is the first major new bridge erected in New Jersey in decades and it was long overdue,” said Governor Chris Christie. Further, the new structure represents a significant improvement over the original Goethals Bridge, which was built to criteria and with standards of that time, had 10-foot lanes, no shoulders, and no shared-use pedestrian/bike path. “The new Goethals bridge will streamline congestion, improve safety and create a stronger, more reliable transportation network across the entire New York metropolitan area,” said Governor Andrew Cuomo, “After decades of neglect, this administration is investing in New York’s future by rebuilding its infrastructure, supporting economic growth and prosperity for generations to come.”
The Goethals Bridge Replacement Project has been very good for the Urban Griddle (www.urbangriddle.com). Located in the heart of Elizabeth, Urban Griddle serves breakfast, brunch, and lunch every day to the neighborhood and to the teams of workers building the New Goethals Bridge.

Urban Griddle Owner George Vlahos says the current restaurant is the most recent evolution of this family-owned business, which has been in this same location since 1993. Except for a short stint in East Brunswick, NJ to open another restaurant, Vlahos has been a fixture in Elizabeth. He took over the existing family diner, the Olympic, in 2014 and closed it for a gut renovation. It reopened in October 2015 as the Urban Griddle. “People who are working on the bridge have been very supportive and we’ve seen an uptick in business,” he says.

“It’s not a regular diner with a million things on the menu,” Vlahos says. “We decided to limit our offerings to focus on special and interesting brunch, breakfast, and lunch offerings as we are only open from 7 am – 3 pm. During the week, we focus on the workers in the area, especially the Bridge.

One regular is William (“Bill”) McCann, Director of Operations for NYNJ Link LLC. “I’ve been working at the Bridge for a year,” he says, “and I’ve been there about a dozen times, with my colleagues at NYNJ Link and my boss Luke Chenery. What I like is that as soon as you walk into the Urban Griddle is its cleanliness. There are a lot of young people serving and they wait on you hand and foot. It’s not a going out for a ‘candlelit dinner,’ but the food is top notch. My favorite is the Siracha Yucca Fries — they are out of this world — as is the chicken cheese steak. I walk out of there on cloud 9.”