



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
GOETHALS BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

# **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**

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**July 23, 2004**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement is being conducted under the direction of the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) as the Federal lead agency, in coordination with the Port Authority of NY & NJ (Port Authority), the project sponsor. The Goethals Bridge spans the Arthur Kill between Staten Island, New York, and Elizabeth, New Jersey, providing direct connections between the Staten Island Expressway/West Shore Expressway on the east of the Kill, and the New Jersey Turnpike/Routes 1/9 on the west. The EIS will comprise:

- an alternatives analysis of potential options for replacement of the Goethals Bridge and addressing traffic and safety needs in the Goethals Bridge corridor;
- detailed social, economic, and environmental analysis of a short list of alternatives that appear most reasonable and feasible for satisfying the purpose and need for the project;
- and a program of public participation and interagency coordination throughout development of the EIS.

It is vital that those who are interested in or potentially affected by this study have an opportunity to share their concerns and provide input regarding the EIS. This Public Participation Program outlines the objectives, strategies, and tools that will be used to engage stakeholders and the general public throughout the environmental review process.

## **The Environmental Review Process**

The EIS will be performed in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA is a procedural act aimed at ensuring that environmental information is available to the public and public officials before decisions are made and actions are undertaken. Public participation is a requirement of the environmental review process. In addition to dealing with the public, NEPA regulations require that there be thorough and complete documentation of participation by all involved government agencies and other interested parties.

Since 1969, NEPA has been amended, regulations have been promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and other federal agencies, and a whole body of EIS “best practices” literature has been established. Regulations and best practices cover many technical issues, as well as public participation efforts. The best practice for accomplishing this is to have a public participation program that is viewed as objective. This means that:

- The action under environmental review cannot be perceived as a foregone conclusion.
- All reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including no action, need to be considered as well.
- All social, economic and environmental impacts of the project, both adverse and beneficial, must be identified and analyzed.
- Pro-active, early, and continuous efforts need to be made to involve a broad spectrum of the public in this process. This includes study area residents and businesses, as well as a wide range of stakeholders and groups who may be affected by impacts of the action.

Throughout the NEPA process, the public participation effort focuses on gathering input and dispersing information about the following key areas:

- The purpose and need for the proposed action and related goals.
- The potential set of reasonable alternative actions, including not implementing the action at all.
- Methodologies that will be used to assess impacts. This typically includes such items as models that will be employed to estimate such impacts as traffic conditions, air quality and/or noise

impacts, as well as methods used to assess environmental, socioeconomic, cultural resource and/or hazardous material impacts.

- Potential impacts and associated mitigation.

There are two distinct points in the NEPA process where public participation is focused: Scoping and publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (known as the Draft EIS, or DEIS). However, it is valuable to engage the public during the period after scoping and prior to the Draft EIS publication, and doing so is encouraged as a good practice under NEPA.

During scoping, the plan for how the environmental review is going to be conducted is issued in draft form. It is known as the Draft Scoping Document; an abbreviated version is sometimes prepared to facilitate public review. The public (and all relevant agencies) are invited to offer comments on this plan, both orally at publicized meetings and via written submittal of comments. The Draft Scoping Document describes the project purpose and need, the range of anticipated impacts to be analyzed, the methodologies to be employed to assess impacts, and may include, at least, a preliminary range of alternatives to be considered (though these may be developed in more detail later on in the process).

When the environmental analysis is nearing completion, a Draft EIS is published for public (and agency) review. Review comments can be provided both orally at publicized hearings and via written submittals. Following completion of the comment period, a Final EIS (or FEIS) document is published and made available.

The scoping and Draft EIS review stages are formally announced via notifications in the *Federal Register*. Public scoping is announced by the issuance of a Notice of Intent (to prepare an EIS), while a Notice of Availability announces the publication of the Draft EIS, kicks off the comment period, and announces public hearing dates and locations.

Other public participation techniques are used during the NEPA process to gather and disperse important information. *Federal Register* notices announcing scoping meetings, public hearings and formal comment periods are typically supplemented by media releases, flyers, newsletters, website announcements, briefings and public notifications. Following scoping, the public (and agencies) are provided with opportunities to offer input to the alternatives development and analysis steps through such means as public open houses and advisory committees. Information about the status of the NEPA process is typically dispersed through newsletters and a project website.

### **Goals and Objectives of the Public Participation Program**

The public participation program is one that will require outreach to commuters, the general public, local businesses, associations, stakeholders, affected government agencies and others on both sides of the Arthur Kill to effectively engage the public in the planning and impact assessment process.

The overriding goal of the public participation program is to engage a diverse group of public and agency participants to solicit relevant input and provide timely information throughout the environmental review process. In order to best accomplish this, the following objectives will be pursued:

- Establish ongoing, inclusive and meaningful two-way communication with stakeholders, agencies and the general public.
- Educate the public about the environmental review process and the role of government, stakeholders and the general public.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of outreach activities on a continual basis in order to refine this Plan, as necessary, and utilize the most effective techniques throughout this study.

As part of this process, this public participation program will seek to meaningfully engage minority, low-income, and traditionally under-represented populations in the environmental review process. As a

general rule, the following principles will be adopted to support involvement of “environmental justice” (EJ) populations:

- Documents, notices and meetings will be made concise, understandable and readily accessible to the public.
- When appropriate, notices of meetings will also be provided in Spanish for targeted public audiences and stakeholders.
- Informational material will be made available through a variety of outlets.
- All public events will be scheduled at convenient, accessible locations.
- Various community leaders and groups will be contacted to increase public participation of constituent communities.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES**

### Basic Support Mechanisms:

**Study Team Communication Protocols** – The study staff will establish communication protocols early in the process to facilitate information sharing with the public and agencies in a timely and efficient manner, to comply with NEPA requirements for preparation of the EIS.

**Stakeholder Identification** – Relying on a variety of sources, including earlier environmental studies of the bridge and the corridor, stakeholders will be identified to become members of the Stakeholder Committee, which will meet at milestones throughout the EIS. These Stakeholders will represent an array of local and regional perspectives, and include representatives of environmental justice areas.

**Project Branding** – In order to assist the public in identifying project-related materials that will be produced and disseminated by the study staff, a banner and readily recognizable “look” will be established and used on all project materials including meeting announcements, flyers, the website, newsletters, etc.

**Mailing List** – A mailing list will be developed for the purpose of publicizing public meeting opportunities via meeting flyers and for keeping interested parties apprised of study developments through periodic newsletters. The list will be comprised of area residents, businesses, civic associations, shippers, commuters, community groups, schools, health care facilities, etc. Multiple copies of meeting notices and newsletters will be distributed to libraries and community centers in the study area.

**Issues and Media Log** – A log of comments received from the public relating to the project will be kept for informational and study purposes.

### Meetings:

**Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):** The TAC will include the necessary federal, state, local and regional agencies to address traffic and transportation issues, air quality, and noise issues related to changes in traffic volumes and patterns, and transit-related air quality issues if transit survives as either an alternative or a component of a multimodal alternative. The TAC will meet several times during the course of the EIS, for discussion among their respective agencies about the same EIS topics, but focusing on their respective jurisdictions and expertise. The first formal meeting of the TAC will not occur until after the formal agency scoping meeting.

The agencies invited to join this committee will include:

- US Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal Highway Administration
- New York State Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Bridges & Tunnels, NYC Transit)
- New York State Department of Transportation

- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- New Jersey Department of Transportation
- New Jersey Department Environmental Protection
- North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority
- New Jersey Turnpike Authority
- New Jersey TRANSIT
- New York Metropolitan Transportation Council
- New York City Department of Transportation
- New York City Department Environmental Protection
- New York City Economic Development Corporation
- New York City Department of City Planning
- Union County Department of Economic Development
- City of Elizabeth Traffic Engineer

**Environmental Task Force:** One of the mechanisms for eliciting participation of involved agencies in developing an EIS is formation of an Environmental Task Force (ETF). ETFs provide an opportunity for concerned agencies to interact and discuss issues and areas of potential concern, as well as provide comments on the development of the EIS. This group will comprise agencies with jurisdiction and special expertise in a range of environmental categories other than traffic/transportation, air quality, and noise (which will be the focus of the TAC, discussed above) social, economic, and environmental impact categories, with the principal project-related issues likely to be related to natural resources. The ETF will be convened several times over the course of the EIS process. Meetings will take place after formal agency and public scoping meetings. A list of potential agencies that will be invited to participate in the ETF follows.

- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal Highway Administration
- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
- NYS Department of State
- NYC Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination
- NYC Department of City Planning
- NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
- NYC Department of Environmental Protection
- Staten Island Borough President's Environmental Representative
- NJ Department of Environmental Protection
- NJ State Historic Preservation Office
- City of Elizabeth Environmental Representative
- Union County Environmental Representative

**Elected Official Briefings:** Briefings will be held with elected officials, as requested. These briefings will be arranged in concert with the Intergovernmental Relations officers at the Coast Guard. Among the officials that will be contacted with information about the study are the Staten Island Borough President, the Mayor of Elizabeth, and the Union County Freeholders. Meetings with members of the federal, state and local legislative bodies serving the study area will be held upon request.

**Agency and Public Scoping Meetings:** Following the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) by the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard will conduct scoping meetings for agencies and for the public. The purpose of these meetings is to gather input and feedback on the study's draft statement of the purpose and need for the proposed replacement of the Goethals Bridge, and potential alternatives for consideration; issues to be addressed in the EIS; methodologies to be used to evaluate impacts; and the

public participation program. One agency scoping meeting will be held at the Coast Guard offices, and public scoping meetings will be held in Staten Island, NY, and in Elizabeth, NJ, spanning both afternoon and evening hours to gather as broad participation as possible. Meeting participants may make statements orally, which will be transcribed by a stenographer, or submit comments in writing either at a scoping meeting or subsequently by mail, fax or e-mail during the scoping comment period. Meeting announcements will be mailed to the EIS mailing list, posted at libraries and community centers, announced through media press releases, through paid advertisements in newspapers, and posted on the EIS website. Upon request by a prescribed date prior to the public scoping meetings, Spanish translators and/or assistance to individuals with hearing or sight impairment will be provided at meetings for which such services are requested. The public scoping meetings will take place in central, convenient locations, and the facilities will be fully accessible to those with disabilities.

**Stakeholder Committee Meetings:** The Stakeholder Committee will provide an open forum for discussion and encourage interaction among key stakeholders, who represent a cross-section of organizations and interests. Organizations that join the Stakeholder Committee will be invited to assign a representative to the Committee. The Committee will update its membership as additional interested organizations are identified. Stakeholder Committee members will agree to bring their members' concerns to the attention of the study staff, and bring project information back to their membership. The Stakeholder Committee will meet several times in the EIS process. The first meeting will be held shortly after public scoping to review the methodology and criteria by which the alternatives will be screened, as well as to review the list of preliminary alternatives. Below are the types of organizations anticipated to be represented on the Stakeholder Committee:

- TransOptions (TMA)
- Tri-State Transportation Campaign (TSTC)
- Regional Plan Association
- Environmental Defense
- NRDC
- Alliance for Action
- Local Emergency Services
- CSX
- Shipping (UPS/FedEx)
- Private Bus Operators
- Trucking Associations
- AAA (NY & NJ)
- Chambers of Commerce
- American Lung Association/Other Health Groups
- Hospitals
- Schools & Colleges
- Large Employers in SI & NJ
- Utilities (PSE&G, ConEd, KeySpan)
- Service/Community Groups who serve low-income and and/or minority populations
- Civic Associations
- Brooklyn-based Groups (Gowanus Area)
- Staten Island Borough President
- Mayor of Elizabeth

If deemed appropriate, non-Port Authority personnel from the following facilities:

- Newark Liberty International Airport
- Port of Elizabeth
- Port Newark
- Howland Hook Marine Terminal

**Public Open Houses:** Between public scoping and the public hearings following completion of the Draft EIS, there will be two rounds of public open houses. Each round will include a meeting in Staten Island, NY, and Elizabeth, NJ. These meetings will include both static displays and informal discussions with EIS study staff and meeting attendees, as well as presentations. These meetings will be publicized in a similar manner to the public scoping meetings. The first open houses will follow the first Stakeholder Committee to review the EIS process, and the criteria and methodology for screening of potential alternatives. The second round will review the impacts of the alternatives undergoing detailed analysis.

**DEIS Public Hearings:** After circulation of the Draft EIS, public hearings will be held both in Staten Island, NY, and in Elizabeth, NJ, to gather comments on the document. The document will be available for review prior to these hearings, and the public comment period will be open for an appropriate period of time following the hearings. The comments received during the hearing process will be addressed in the Final EIS. The method for publicizing these hearings, and the format of the hearings themselves will be similar to the public scoping meetings described above.

#### Materials:

**Newsletters:** Four newsletters will be produced and disseminated to the EIS mailing list for the purpose of educating the general public about the EIS process, providing information on the study as it progresses, announcing public participation opportunities, and providing study contact information. These newsletters will be written in straightforward language. Graphics will be used to assist in communicating the appropriate information. The first newsletter will announce the public scoping meetings, the second will review the results of the alternatives analysis, the third will announce the Draft EIS completion, and the fourth will announce the completion of the Final EIS.

**Meeting Announcements:** Meeting flyers will be used to publicize all public meetings. These flyers will be mailed to the project mailing list, and distributed in bulk to libraries and community centers. Spanish versions of the meeting flyers will be available at libraries and community centers.

**Press Releases:** Press releases will be issued by the Coast Guard in advance of public meeting opportunities and to announce the availability of project materials. It is anticipated there will be press releases to announce public scoping, the two rounds of public open houses, the DEIS public hearings, and the availability of the DEIS and FEIS.

**Website:** A public website will be developed for the EIS and will include information on the EIS process, project activities and progress, public participation opportunities and project contact information; and will have downloadable documents (pdf format) for information and/or review.

**Meeting Materials:** Handouts will be available at all public meetings for attendees. Public meeting presentations will be available as handouts, as appropriate, and on the website for review by those unable to attend meetings.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**

A three-phase public participation effort is planned for the EIS, as listed below:

- Scoping – during scoping, agencies and the public will comment on the study purpose and need statement, analysis methodologies and preliminary alternatives to be considered.
- Alternatives Analysis – during the Alternatives Analysis phase, the preliminary list of alternatives gathered in scoping will be reduced through a screening process. The screening criteria and methodology for reducing the number of alternatives to those which warrant detailed evaluation in the DEIS will be shared with the TAC, ETF, Stakeholder Committee and the public. Alternatives will be evaluated based on their transportation performance, environmental impacts, costs, and other considerations.

- Draft EIS and Final EIS – the alternatives identified through screening will be put through a rigorous evaluation of impacts, mitigation, and costs prior to selecting a preferred alternative as part of the Final EIS. The Coast Guard will, upon completion of the Final EIS, publish a Record of Decision for the action that has been agreed to through this process.

The following outreach activities are anticipated under each phase:

- Scoping: During this phase, the following activities will be undertaken:
  - Distribute the first newsletter
  - Launch website
  - Hold briefings with local municipal officials, other elected officials, as requested
  - Conduct agency scoping meeting
  - Conduct public scoping meetings
  - Create and update mailing list
  - Document all agency and public comments during the scoping process
- Alternatives Analysis: During this phase, the following activities will be undertaken:
  - Update website materials
  - Meet with TAC and ETF and Stakeholder Committee on screening criteria and list of preliminary alternatives, and alternatives recommended for detailed evaluation
  - Conduct two rounds of Public Open houses on screening criteria and list of preliminary alternatives, and alternatives recommended for detailed evaluation
  - Distribute second newsletter
- DEIS and FEIS: During this phase, the following activities will be undertaken:
  - Distribute third and fourth newsletters
  - Update website materials
  - Meet with TAC and ETF and Stakeholder Committee
  - Conduct Elected Official briefings, as requested
  - Conduct public hearings for DEIS
  - Categorize agency and public comments on the DEIS, and prepare responses.

## **EVALUATION OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

Evaluation of the public participation program is important to the EIS process. The purpose of carrying out this program review is:

- To get valuable input that can make the whole public participation process more effective as well as increasing the chance of its successful completion.
- To ensure the public and concerned parties are reached and engaged in the process.

Some examples of critical questions and techniques that will be considered to assess the public participation program include:

- How many hits does the EIS website receive?
- Are EJ populations and typically under-represented groups involved?
- Are input and comments pertinent and substantive, showing understanding of project information disseminated to the public?
- Conduct brief survey/questionnaire at public meetings for participants to judge the value of the activities.
- Review content of issues log to judge the value of the overall outreach effort.

The results of ongoing evaluation will be discussed with the Coast Guard, with the intent of making mid-course refinements to the public participation program, if and as appropriate.