

THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

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Public Scoping Meeting :
Re: :
Environmental Impact Statement for the :
Proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement :
-----x

City of Elizabeth
City Hall
Council Chambers
50 Winfield Scott Plaza
Elizabeth, New Jersey

October 6, 2004
6:00 p.m.

B e f o r e:

GARY KASSOF
Bridge Program Manager
The United States Coast Guard

MAURA FITZPATRICK
Moderator
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates

KEN HESS
Project Manager
Louis Berger Group

A P P E A R A N C E S:

For The United States Coast Guard:

Gary Kassof

Ernest Feemster

For Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates:

Maura Fitzpatrick

Chris Ryan

For Louis Berger Group:

Ken Hess

For Parsons Brinckerhoff:

Judy Versenyi

For Port Authority of New York and New Jersey:

Jim Blackmore

Steve Coleman

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. FITZPATRICK: Good evening,
everybody, welcome.

On behalf of The United States
Coast Guard I want to say thank you for coming
and thank you for being here for this Public
Scoping Meeting for the Proposed Replacement of
the Goethals Bridge.

My name is Maura Fitzpatrick and I
will be facilitating this meeting, this scoping
meeting.

We are going to have a short
presentation, about twenty-five minutes, and then
we'll follow that with the public comment portion
of our meeting.

And if you're interested in
making a statement, you need to fill out one of
these blue forms at the registration desk where
you signed in. And I'll tell you more about the
groundrules of that part later.

But just a couple of things.

You can't bring food or drinks
in this room, but we have cookies and some juice

out in the Open House area for you. So help yourself there.

And the restrooms are, if you go out this way (indicating), the ladies room is to the right and the men's room is to the left.

And I think that's it for now.

I just want to introduce to you now Gary Kassof, who is the Bridge Program Manager for The United States Coast Guard.

MR. KASSOF: Thank you, Maura.

And I too welcome you all to the evening session of the Goethals Bridge public scoping meeting.

For the record, this meeting is part of the environmental review process for the Proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement Project. This review is being conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, otherwise known as NEPA, and the applicable regulations implementing NEPA as set forth in Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations Part 1500.

This is one of two public scoping meetings that are being held in the communities nearest to the bridge for this

environmental review process. The other meeting was held yesterday, October 5th at The Staten Island Hotel, Staten Island, New York, with sessions from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. and 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Let me first introduce the participants to you.

I along with Ernie Feemster, who is seated behind me, represent The United States Coast Guard which is now an agency within the Department of Homeland Security. The Coast Guard is responsible for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, in accordance with the laws and regulations I cited earlier.

The Coast Guard is directing a team of consultants working on the preparation of this EIS and you have met or will meet many of them this evening.

There are numerous federal, state and local agencies with expertise or jurisdiction in the environmental review process that will ensure that the studies and evaluations for the EIS are in conformance with existing law

and regulation.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey is the project sponsor. The Port Authority submitted a Preliminary Bridge Permit Application to The Coast Guard in June of this year pursuant to the General Bridge Act of 1946. In a few moments Ken Hess, the Project Manager for The Coast Guard's consultant team, will be providing you with more information on the bridge project itself and some of The Port Authority's reasons for making this application.

You, the public, are an essential part to this process and we are here tonight to hear your comments, your perspectives and your recommendations.

As you have seen, we have informational boards and project staff available in the Open House area to the rear. The staff will be there to listen to your questions and provide you answers whenever possible, along with background information. We also have materials about the project at the sign-in area for you to review and to take home with you. And here in this area of the meeting we will be taking your

comments for the formal record following this presentation.

For those of you who have not been to a scoping meeting before, the purpose of the scoping meeting is to gather information to help establish the scope of an environmental review. As such, we will not be responding to your comments and statements here but will do so in the ensuing scoping and EIS documentation. In other words, we are here to listen to you.

These are the laws and regulations that govern this environmental review. Because the waterway crossed by the bridge, the Arthur Kill, is a navigable waterway of the United States, The Coast Guard is responsible for consideration of issuance of a bridge permit and for preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement.

With that said, now I would like to introduce you to Ken Hess of the consultant team.

MR. HESS: Thank you, Gary.

I'm going to briefly go over the topics that you see up on this board.

And excuse me. I'm struggling with a cold and if I lose my voice, I apologize.

I'll be talking -- I'll be giving a background history of the Goethals Bridge. Then I'll talk about the EIS process that we will be going through. Then I'll talk about the purpose and need for the Goethals Bridge improvements as well as the related project goals.

Then I'll talk a bit about the types of preliminary alternatives that we will be investigating and the methodologies that we will be using for investigating them.

And also we'll talk about the preliminary study areas that we will be analyzing, as well as the potential environmental issues.

Also I'll give you a description of the schedule that we will be going through as well as describing some of the elements of our public participation program.

Now I want to reiterate that we have more information for you in the Open House area up front and I hope you will take advantage

of the staff there to learn more. Members of The Coast Guard consulting team are wearing name tags similar to what I'm wearing here.

The construction of the Goethals Bridge was completed in 1928 making it one of the early capital projects undertaken by The Port Authority which was created in 1921.

The design of the bridge has remained virtually unchanged since its initial construction, and by the 1990s The Port Authority determined it to be functionally obsolete.

As a result, The Port Authority proposed construction of a second bridge on the south side of the existing bridge. Under this proposal the existing bridge would have carried New Jersey-bound traffic and the new structure would have carried Staten Island-bound vehicles.

A third lane for buses and ridesharing vehicles would have been provided each way, as well as emergency shoulders, a bicycle/pedestrian lane and the potential to accommodate future transit.

The Coast Guard, as Federal lead agency, then published a Draft EIS in 1995 and a

Final EIS in 1997. The FEIS documented serious deterioration of service during peak hours in the No-Action Alternative.

However, the project was ultimately not funded and no bridge permit was issued.

In the years following completion of the FEIS The Port Authority reassessed its needs at the Goethals Bridge taking into account a variety of recent changes in conditions. As a result, The Port Authority proposed a Goethals Bridge Modernization Program in September of 2003.

As Gary mentioned, The Port Authority then submitted a Preliminary Bridge Permit Application to The Coast Guard for a new replacement bridge on June 3rd of this year. The action officially triggered the need to comply with NEPA, with The Coast Guard to serve as the Federal lead agency once again.

The Coast Guard has made a determination that a full Environmental Impact Statement is required for this project.

The Notice of Intent to prepare

a Draft EIS was published in The Federal Register on August 10th of this year. As a result of that Notice of Intent, we are all here today attending this public scoping meeting.

Now, this chart that you see on the slide shows the progression of steps that will be undertaken throughout the EIS process until the final decision is made on this proposal. You can take a closer look at this on a board in the Open House area.

We are currently in the interagency public scoping step, which is right here (indicating). This will help us to better understand the issues and concerns of the regulatory and review agencies and the general public. The understanding gained during scoping will then help us to formulate the alternatives to be studied and the methods to be used in performing the environmental impact evaluations.

Now, as most of you probably know, this effort is taking place in a time when Staten Island continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in New York State with many traffic and development issues.

The City of Elizabeth and Union County in New Jersey are attracting new development and economic activity, in addition to the area's role as transportation hub for the region.

It is in this context that The Port Authority's stated purpose and need for proposing improvements to the Goethals Bridge addresses deficiencies in the existing bridge.

The first issue with the bridge is that its lanes are narrow as shown in all of the photos on this slide (indicating). The travel lanes on the bridge and its approaches are ten feet wide which is below the standard width of twelve feet.

There is also a pronounced bend in the alignment of the New Jersey approach to the bridge which tends to cause drivers of wider trucks and buses traveling in the right lane to encroach on the left lane, similar to the situation shown on the second photo of this slide, which you can see right here (indicating).

The next issue is that the lane width hasn't changed since its original

construction when vehicular sizes and traffic volumes were much smaller in comparison to today's conditions.

The bridge has seen a marked increase in traffic over the years and an increase in truck and bus size as well.

Also there are no emergency shoulders as you can see in all of the photos on the slide. You can see on either side that there are no shoulders (indicating).

This condition often results in significant delays as stalled vehicles and those involved in minor accidents have no ability to pull off to the side to allow traffic to continue unimpeded over the bridge.

Safety concerns have also mounted as accident rates on the Goethals Bridge are the highest of the three Port Authority Staten Island bridges and are higher than the rate for comparable facilities in both New York State and New Jersey.

The design of the bridge is also deficient from seismic protection and security perspectives. Given that earthquake activity is a

possibility in the region and that there is a need for enhanced measures in light of recent heightened security levels, these concerns have taken on increased importance in recent years.

Also, pedestrian access across the bridge has been unavailable for nearly a decade due to deterioration of the sidewalk and there is a desire to reintroduce pedestrian and bicycle access across the bridge.

There are also extended and continuing service disruptions for essential, periodic rehabilitation, as shown in the photos on this slide (indicating). This periodic rehabilitation results in increasing costs, which have already averaged \$6.7 million annually since 1987. Repair costs are expected to continue to increase in future years.

The existing bridge configuration also precludes any type of priority transit lanes which could help alleviate growing traffic pressure.

And, finally, because of the conditions described above, that I've just described, the bridge operates below the

threshold of acceptable conditions.

The Port Authority anticipates that without improvements to the bridge traffic conditions will continue to deteriorate in the future. This also impacts the entire regional transportation system. Any type of an incident or closure on the Goethals Bridge has a ripple effect on the other Staten Island bridges as well.

This was illustrated earlier this year when a five-vehicle accident on the Goethals Bridge necessitated closure of the bridge for hours causing traffic to reroute until a second five-vehicle accident on the Outerbridge Crossing further contributed to a massive traffic backup and hours of delay throughout the region.

Now, in response to the various elements of purpose and need that I've just discussed, a number of specific goals have been established by The Port Authority. The goals are:

To eliminate design deficiencies and functional obsolescence of the bridge and its approaches;

To avoid the disruptive and

costly rehabilitation required to maintain structural integrity;

To reduce roadway congestion and delays on the bridge and to enhance its operational flexibility;

To address local and regional goods movement needs, especially in light of the revitalization of the Howland Hook area;

To create the capability to accommodate a High Occupancy Vehicle or HOV lane and transit capability should such options become feasible;

To restore and enhance the pedestrian and bicycle access of the bridge;

To improve structural security of the bridge and regional redundancy within the State Island transportation system;

And, finally, to minimize any environmental, economic and social consequences of the improvement that is ultimately undertaken.

So what happens from here?

Today and through November 5, 2004 we are looking for your feedback on the draft purpose and need and goals for the project,

as well as suggestions for potential alternatives that can meet the purpose and need and fulfill the goals. Once this is done, the process of evaluating alternatives involves three separate levels of analysis.

At the first level (indicating), we look at all potential alternatives, including the No-Action Alternative, and screen them to determine each one's feasibility and ability to satisfy the purpose and need.

Those alternatives that are clearly infeasible due to major flaws or do not have the potential to minimally satisfy most project goals will be eliminated from further consideration.

Those that remain are developed in terms of alignment, system components, operations and other factors, and in some cases individual alternatives may be combined to create multimodal alternatives. These then go through a comparative screening process, which is here (indicating) to allow us to identify advantages and shortcomings of each alternative and highlight key differences in terms of their

performance.

At the conclusion of the comparative screening process, alternatives that best satisfy the project purpose and need and meet the project goals will be advanced for detailed evaluation in the Draft EIS (indicating).

We are identifying preliminary alternatives for the initial screening process through a variety of sources including:

Comments received from agencies and the general public during the scoping process;

Previous Port Authority engineering and planning studies for this bridge as well as other Staten Island bridges and transportation facilities;

The Final EIS prepared for the previously proposed Staten Island Bridge Program EIS that I described earlier, which provides a very broad set of alternatives within the region;

Also regional transportation plans and studies;

And an analysis of existing and

future transportation demand in the study area, as well as transportation system gaps and deficiencies.

The alternatives that are currently being identified and which will soon be evaluated via the initial screening process are intended to be broad and inclusive of a variety of modal, structural and non-structural solutions.

The No-Action Alternative, as required by NEPA, will evaluate potential impacts of future conditions in the study area if no action is taken to replace or improve the Goethals Bridge other than regular maintenance. This alternative also includes other transportation projects and improvements that are programmed and committed to in the region.

Another option is a bridge rehabilitation for significant extension of the existing bridge's lifespan.

Another alternative is The Port Authority's proposal to construct a replacement bridge south of the existing bridge and to remove the existing structure.

Other structural replacement or improvement alternatives will also be considered. These may include:

A replacement bridge north of the existing bridge;

A new parallel bridge with continued operation of the existing bridge;

New twin replacement bridges, one either north or south of the existing bridge and one in the existing bridge's right-of-way;

A new crossing with fixed-guideway transit or roadway-based transit options;

Or a new crossing with supplemental ferry service.

Finally, a variety of non-structural alternatives will be considered including:

Enhanced traffic demand management programs;

Use of congestion pricing techniques;

Traffic system management programs;

And the use of transit service options that do not require new infrastructure.

This map shows the proposed study area levels that will be used in the various environmental studies.

The primary study area, which is the inner area shown in the solid line (indicating), is proposed to cover approximately four hundred to five hundred feet both north and south of the existing bridge right-of-way for assessing direct impacts to environmental resources such as wetlands and ecological resources, contaminated properties and cultural resources. The end points of this study area are located approximately at the interchange with the New Jersey Turnpike on the west (indicating) and with the West Shore Expressway on the east (indicating).

The secondary study area, which is the larger area, the dashed area (indicating), is proposed to cover approximately a half mile in all directions from the bridge and its approaches in order to ensure that indirect and socioeconomic impacts are adequately assessed.

This area generally extends from a point on Bay Way halfway between the New Jersey Turnpike and Route 1 and 9 on the west (indicating) to South Avenue on the east (indicating).

Specifically for the analysis of transportation, there are two broader study areas. The Primary Traffic Study Area, which is the area shown on this slide, includes the immediate counties where traffic and transportation impacts may occur. The Regional Traffic Study Area, which is the broadest study area, encompasses all or portions of twenty-eight counties in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut that are included in the transportation demand model that is to be used.

The graphic that you see up here is available for closer inspection in the Open House area.

Now, the key environmental issues that will be examined in the EIS are shown on this list. For each, direct and indirect impacts will be considered as will cumulative impacts as appropriate.

I will not further discuss these

issues in this presentation, but you can learn more about these issues from the consultant staff in the Open House area.

Our anticipated schedule for the EIS process is shown on this slide.

The first key date was the agency scoping meeting held on this past September 14th.

Our two public scoping meetings, including this session, are being held this week.

Another important date is the close of the scoping comment period on November 5th. Therefore, we request that you submit any official comments related to this EIS process by that date. All the comments that we receive will assist us in defining the scope of the EIS.

The next major date is the public release and distribution of the Draft EIS which is targeted for sometime in early 2006. At that time we will hold public hearings similar to this meeting tonight and have a comment period to hear your feedback before finalizing the document.

There is an ongoing role for the

public to play as we carry out this Draft EIS process and related studies. I hope some of you have had a chance to look at the project website at www.goethalseis.com. It will be updated frequently and we welcome your feedback on it. Further information about the website is available in the Open House area.

Those of you on our mailing list have received our first newsletter and meeting announcement flyer. We will keep you apprised of project developments on the website and in future newsletters. Those of you who are here tonight who were not on our mailing list will be added for future mailings.

We will be holding public information sessions between now and the completion of the Draft EIS to receive public input on our alternatives evaluation process.

We will be establishing a Stakeholder Committee for organizational representatives. This Committee will meet periodically to provide input and to help us disseminate information about the project to a broader audience.

And, lastly, as I mentioned earlier, we will hold hearings to receive feedback on the Draft EIS once it is completed.

We hope you will continue to participate and that you encourage your friends, neighbors and colleagues to do the same.

Now Gary will return and let you know the various ways that you can submit your comments.

MR. KASSOF: Thanks, Ken.

Along with providing your oral comments this evening, there are a variety of ways you can provide feedback during the comment period.

At the registration area you were given a comment sheet like this (indicating). You can fill that out and leave it with the staff this evening or mail or fax it as indicated on the sheet.

You can also mail or e-mail your comments to the address listed on the screen.

All ways to contact us are available on that comment sheet.

I remind you that the comment

period ends at the close of business November 5, 2004. So bear that in mind. We certainly hope to hear from you.

That concludes our formal presentation. So without further delay, Maura will get us started with the public comment segment of the meeting.

Please take this opportunity to speak and make your oral comments to us here tonight. I along with The Coast Guard consultants and the staff will be here to listen to all of your comments tonight.

Again, welcome to this meeting and I thank you in advance for your participation.

MS. FITZPATRICK: Thank you, Gary.

I'm now going to be announcing the names of the people who have registered to speak. And at any time if you choose to speak, just go out to the front desk where you signed up and fill out one of the these blue cards and then we will call your name as well.

And when you do come up to

Speak, if you could come up to this microphone in front of the stenographer and say your name and your organization, if you have one. And I'm going to ask you to speak for about five minutes and I will indicate if you run over your time.

If any of you have any problem with getting to this microphone, please just let us know and we will bring a wireless mike to you.

You can also, as Gary mentioned, you can submit comments in a number of different ways and you can also take advantage of the staff in the Open House area who can answer your questions.

Here in this room we will not be answering your questions. This area is to hear from you. But out in the Open House area the staff will certainly be able to talk to you and answer your questions. But just bear in mind that in the Open House those comments do not get put on the record. It is here in this room that your comments will become part of the formal record.

And this portion of the meeting lasts until 8:30 and we will be here until 8:30 to take your comments. And if you change your

mind and you decide you want to speak, by all means let us know.

And with that -- I think that's it.

And so I would now like to call the first speaker. And that's Joe Doherty, followed by Alex Garcia.

Mr. Doherty, please come to this microphone and state your name.

MR. DOHERTY: Joe Doherty, 119 Bayway Avenue, Elizabeth.

Relocated Bayway is nestled in the shadows of the Goethals Bridge. There is a community there. It may not be large, but nonetheless people reside in that area.

And my main concern is how the residents of relocated Bayway will be affected by this new bridge. If a new bridge is built south of the present structure, will the homes and properties be allowed to remain intact or will they be bought out at a fair price or will they be subjected to an eminent domain scenario?

That is basically my concern. And other than that, I have no other comments.

Thank you.

MS. FITZPATRICK: Thank you,
Mr. Doherty.

Alex Garcia is next.

MR. ALEX GARCIA: Good evening.
My name is Alex Garcia. I'm with
the Hispanic-American Chamber of Commerce --

MS. FITZPATRICK: Speak right
into the microphone.

MR. ALEX GARCIA: -- of Essex
County. And our membership has asked me to attend
tonight to endorse this project which we think
it's a much needed replacement of the bridge.

And we would like to participate
in future activities concerning the bridge. And
we --

MS. FITZPATRICK: Mr. Garcia,
I'm sorry. People in the back can't hear you.

MR. ALEX GARCIA: Okay.

And we are confident that -- one
of the things that we are interested in is in the
area of procurement and we are very confident
that going forward in the construction of this
bridge that The Port Authority, like it has in

many other projects, will ensure that there is a participation of minority companies in the construction both as contractors and as employees in the repairs or rebuilding of the bridge.

And our members endorse this project. And I'll be brief.

Thank you.

MS. FITZPATRICK: Thank you, Mr. Garcia.

Our next speaker is Daniel Nozza. He's outside. He's going to be here in just one second. We'll bear with Mr. Nozza.

MR. DANIEL NOZZA: My name is Dan Nozza. I live at 1109 Applegate Avenue, Elizabeth.

I understand this is just comments.

MS. FITZPATRICK: That's correct.

MR. DANIEL NOZZA: Well, my comment is Elmore Avenue is a block behind me. And especially at 1 and 9, getting into Bayway Avenue going to the Goethals Bridge is a bottleneck there. It narrows down to one - I

guess it would be a question, but if I make it a comment -- I don't know how I can state this, but how will this -- I believe that it will adversely impact upon the city. I don't know if it will or not, but I hope it won't.

I'll leave it at that. All right? That will be a comment. Thank you.

MS. FITZPATRICK: Thank you, Mr. Nozza.

And that is everybody we have that signed up to speak. So, again, we will be here to 8:30. If you change your mind, we would love to hear you.

Otherwise, I hope you take advantage of the staff in the Open House area. Have a cookie, have a drink and enjoy yourselves, and safe travel home.

Thank you very much for coming.

(At 6:34 o'clock p.m. there was a recess in the proceedings.)

(At 8:30 o'clock p.m. the proceedings were resumed.)

MS. FITZPATRICK: This is the close of our formal scoping meeting for the

Proposed Goethals Bridge Replacement. It is 8:30
p.m. on Wednesday, October 6th.

(At 8:30 o'clock p.m. the
proceedings were concluded.)

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STATE OF NEW YORK)
) SS.
COUNTY OF NEW YORK)

I, ROY A. SELENSKE, a Certified Shorthand
(Stenotype) Reporter and Notary Public
within and for the State of New York, do
hereby certify that the foregoing pages 1
through 81 taken at the time and place
aforesaid, is a true and correct
transcription of my shorthand notes.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
my name this 12th day of October, 2004.

ROY A. SELENSKE, C.S.R.

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