



MEMORANDUM

TO: TPB Technical Committee
FROM: Lyn Erickson, TPB Plan Development and Coordination Program Director
SUBJECT: Governor Harry W. Nice Bridge Interim Project Status Report
DATE: June 1, 2018

When the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) took action to amend the 2016 Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) to accommodate Maryland's accelerated schedule for the Governor Harry W. Nice Bridge Replacement Project in November 2017, several questions and concerns were raised by TPB members regarding project development details. The TPB wrote a letter and requested that the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) present detailed project information on the Maryland Governor Harry W. Nice Bridge project. In response to that request, Will Pines, the MDTA Director of Project Development, presented detailed project and schedule information to the TPB's Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee on May 15. This memo provides a summary of that presentation.

BACKGROUND

The Governor Harry W. Nice Replacement Project is located in southern Charles County and crosses the Potomac River into King George County, Virginia. The TPB was most concerned with the following: 1) the proposed bridge height; 2) emergency breakdown shoulder width; and 3) bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Please see the attached letter exchange for further details.

Bridge Height

The bridge vertical clearance issue has been resolved. Since the November discussion, the MDTA has determined that the bridge will provide the 135 feet vertical clearance that is required at the existing bridge today.

Emergency Breakdown Shoulders and Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations

MDTA is providing two-28' travelways (one in each direction), which will offer adequate width for one lane passage during most vehicle breakdown events. The current bridge does not allow for this, and both directions are typically affected today during incident response. The travelway for the proposed Nice Bridge is similar to MDTA's existing Hatem and Key Bridges, which both have higher traffic volumes than the Nice Bridge. Mr. Pines noted that incidents are effectively managed at these similar structures, giving MDTA a high degree of confidence that the new Nice Bridge will perform very well during incidents. There are two alternatives for addressing Bicycle and Pedestrian access that the MDTA Board will make a final selection from in the Fall of 2019. MDTA has stated that both alternatives meet the requirements for safety for shoulders and for bicycle accommodations. One alternative does not provide accommodations for pedestrians.

PROJECT AND SCHEDULE DETAILS

The MDTA will be delivering this project through a design-build process. The planning phase is essentially completed and two alternatives are being carried forward at this time. The project will be advertised on or before October 2018, and the bidding process will begin. Contractors will provide cost estimates for the two alternatives which are being carried forward and the MDTA Board will make a final alternative selection in the Fall of 2019. (Note: while part of the “one” MDOT family, MDTA is the toll authority and has separate funding/legal/decision-making authority than MDOT. The Maryland Secretary of Transportation is the Chairman of the MDTA 9-person Board.)

Mr. Pines briefed the TPB’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee on May 15 on the project including a focus on the proposed bicycle and pedestrian accommodation proposed for the new bridge. Mr. Pines described in detail two alternate cross-sections which the MDTA has previously made available to the public, and for which bid proposers will be asked to prepare cost estimates:

1. A 61’ cross-section with four 12’ travel lanes, a median barrier, and 2’ shoulders. There would be no pedestrian accommodation for this option. Bicyclists would share the 12’ travel lane with motor vehicles. The example of current permitted bicycle use of the Hatem Bridge over the Susquehanna River was cited and discussed.
2. A 71’ cross-section with four 12’ travel lanes, a median barrier, 2’ shoulders, and an 8’ barrier-protected bicycle and pedestrian path on one side.

Mr. Pines emphasized the importance of financial stewardship with customer’s toll money by evaluating the cost/benefits of the structure width, noting that each additional foot of width of a bridge of this length adds an estimated \$6 million in project costs. Mr. Pines noted that the proposed 2’ shoulder width on the bridge was consistent with the existing shoulder width on the Virginia side and several bridges in MDTA’s inventory with good safety records.

Mr. Pines said that the 8’ shared-use path met minimum AASHTO guidelines, and will make the path option more cost feasible when it would be time to make the final decision.

MDTA modelling predicted that less than 50 bicyclists/pedestrians per day would use the path. MDTA anticipates that there is little potential for growth in bicycle/pedestrian traffic, due to the low population density of the surrounding area, the lack of bicycle connections to the bridge in Maryland and Virginia, and the lack of short term funding by others for projects that may provide those connections.

MDTA is required to toll all users as a condition its trust agreement with bondholders, so a means of collecting tolls from bicyclists will be included in the project.

In January 2018, MDTA provided a public web video with a comment period that received more than 6,000 views from the project website and on social media outlets. The video provided detailed project information, including information on the decision on the bridge vertical clearance and on the options that the MDTA Board will consider for the bridge width. Mr. Pines noted that less than ten percent of the viewers of the presentation offered comments on it. MDTA received comments both supporting and opposing the construction of a barrier separated shared use path. Nearly all

comments received in support of a barrier separated shared use path were from viewers not local within a normal daily cycling commute to the bridge.

Attendees had a number of comments and questions. There were several questions regarding the potential economic development benefits of a trail, as well as some concern that non-provision of bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the bridge would turn the lack of connecting bicycle and pedestrian facilities into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Meeting participants emphasized the potential for long-distance tourism. Several participants mentioned their concerns about the safety of the shared lane use option, given the proposed 50 mph speed limit and 4% grades on the proposed bridge, which will make it difficult for bicyclists to sustain high speeds on the uphill climb, and could produce grade-related line-of-sight issues between motorists and bicyclists. At a minimum, lane sharing would not be adequate for “family use”, attracting only strong and bold cyclists. The attendees desired convenient and comfortable cycling provided by a shared-use path for a new bridge. Mr. Pines reiterated to the group that no decision has been made to date on a specific bridge width option and both options under consideration will provide cycling access. He added that the lane sharing option provides legal access consistent or safer than the access provided at many other river crossings throughout Maryland, such as the US 1/Conowingo Dam.

NEXT STEPS

This project will be constructed through a design-build process. The advertisement date for the project will be on or before October 2018. At that time, the potential bidders will develop detailed design plans and cost estimates for the two alternatives that are under consideration. The MDTA’s Board will then make a final decision in the Fall of 2019 and select one of the two alternatives.



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February 5, 2018

Ms. Bridget Donnell Newton
Chairman
National Capital Region Transportation
Planning Board
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington DC 20002



Dear Ms. Newton:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Maryland Transportation Authority's (MDTA) new Gov. Harry W. Nice Memorial (Nice) Bridge project. As Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary and MDTA Chairman, I am pleased to respond.

We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss your concerns about the new Nice Bridge height, emergency breakdown shoulders, and bicycle/pedestrian accommodations. Please contact MDTA Director of Project Development William Pines at 410-456-8045 to schedule a meeting.

Thank you again for your letter. If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact Mr. Pines at the number above or via email at wpines@mdta.maryland.gov. Mr. Pines will be happy to assist you.

Sincerely,

Pete K. Rahn
Chairman

cc: William Pines, P.E., Director of Project Development, Office
of Engineering and Construction, MDTA
Mr. Kevin C. Reigrut, Executive Director, MDTA



November 8, 2017

Secretary Pete K. Rahn
Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary and
Maryland Transportation Authority Chairman
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Boulevard
Hanover, MD 21076

Re: Governor Harry W. Nice Bridge Replacement Project

Dear Secretary Rahn:

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) recently took action to amend the National Capital Region's Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) to accommodate Maryland's schedule acceleration of the Governor Harry W. Nice Bridge Replacement Project. Several questions and concerns were raised by TPB members regarding project development details. On behalf of the TPB, I am asking that a senior knowledgeable Maryland Transportation Authority representative meet and engage in a dialogue with the TPB in the near future regarding aspects of the bridge replacement that are of concern to TPB member governments in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

The TPB appreciates and supports the State of Maryland's efforts to accelerate and accomplish the replacement and upgrade of this vital link in the Maryland, Virginia and National Capital Region transportation infrastructure, as evidenced both by the TPB's previous inclusion of the project in the CLRP, as well as our October 18, 2017 actions to include this project with the updated schedule in the latest air quality conformity determination and CLRP amendment. Before taking the actions at the TPB's October 18 meeting, however, a number of TPB members raised questions and concerns and provided comments for the record. These concerns were, in summary:

1. *Bridge Height:* District of Columbia and City of Alexandria representatives expressed concerns about the impact of the proposed bridge height reduction on movement of historic tall ships and other tall vessels that currently access Washington and Alexandria ports. Inability for such vessels to reach Washington and Alexandria, among other destinations, will have negative community and economic impacts.
2. *Emergency Breakdown Shoulders:* The Charles County representative raised issues also noted in an (attached) October 6, 2017 letter to you from the Board of Charles County Commissioners. This letter was forwarded to TPB and is included in our official comment records as part of the conformity determination and plan approval. Charles County is concerned that a new bridge without adequate shoulder widths for emergency breakdowns "will not help relieve the congestion that is currently being seen on this bridge."
3. *Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations:* Also raised at the TPB and in the Charles County Commissioners' letter was the inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian connections on the replacement bridge. With a planned 100-year lifespan of a replacement bridge, this represents a once-in-100-years opportunity to provide such a bicycle and pedestrian connection, with important community and economic benefits. Including a bicycle and


Secretary Pete K. Rahn
November 8, 2017

pedestrian connection would also be consistent with the TPB's adopted Complete Streets policy. Additionally, the Charles County Commissioners' letter asked for consideration of keeping and repurposing the existing Harry Nice Bridge as a bicycle and pedestrian facility.

The TPB would appreciate the chance for expert briefings and dialogue as the project design proceeds given these major concerns from jurisdictions around the region. We appreciate the ongoing participation in the TPB by Maryland Department of Transportation representatives of the Office of the Secretary. However, it will be vital in this case also to have senior representation from the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) for these discussions, given the role that the MDTA and its board have in this project.

The TPB is currently engaged in the update of our long-range transportation plan for the National Capital Region, known as Visualize 2045. We look forward to providing our members with this opportunity for such a dialogue which will enable support for a timely and cost-effective replacement of the Nice Bridge that best enhances the National Capital Region's community needs and development for 2045 and beyond. We appreciate your leadership and assistance on these important considerations.

Sincerely,



Bridget Donnell Newton
TPB Chairman

Attachment

cc: Mr. R. Earl Lewis, Deputy Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation
Mr. Kevin C. Reigut, Executive Director, Maryland Transportation Authority