



Meeting Minutes
Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project

Meeting Subject: Portal Bridge Regional Citizens Liaison Committee (#1)

Date/Place/Time: Tuesday, February 13, 2007 / Newark Public Library / 5:30 PM

Attendees:

Project Team:

NJ Transit: *Tom Schulze, James Richardson*
TLC: *Ruby Siegel*
AKRF: *Robert Conway, Colin Foley*
HSH: *Maura Fitzpatrick, Christie Marcella*

Members of the Public:

Lackawanna Coalition: *Gary Kazin*
American Institute of
Architects NJ: *Robin Murray*
EC Greenway: *Mike Selender*
Township of Irvington: *Wayne Smith, Dawn Martinez*
New Jersey Association of
Railroad Passengers: *Albert Papp, Jr.*
Newark Regional
Business Partnership: *Chip Hallock*
U.S. Navy: *Greg Bender*
Regional Rail Working Group: *Joseph Clift*
Interested Party: *Gary Johnson*

The first Regional Citizens Liaison Committee (RCLC) meeting for the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project began with a presentation on the results of the public scoping process and the initial screening of alternatives. Following the presentation was a question and answer period, which allowed the members of the committee to express their suggestions and concerns about the project. The following list is a summary of the questions/suggestions raised by members of the committee during the meeting:

Comment 1: Can the construction contracts of the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) and Portal Bridge be joined into one contract? Could the work be placed under one project management team?

Response: Project and construction management options will be evaluated once a preferred alternative is selected. Due to the sheer size of the ARC project it is likely that multiple construction contracts would be awarded. However, once an alternative

is selected for the Portal Bridge Project, options for combining certain elements of the two projects will be evaluated.

Comment 2: Why is the Portal Bridge Project being conducted under the authority of the Federal Railroad Administration? Why is Portal Bridge not a New Start/FTA project? What is the role of FTA in this project?

Response: As discussed in the Scoping Document, the Portal Bridge Project is an undertaking by Amtrak and NJ Transit that will require approval of FRA. The bridge is owned, operated and maintained by Amtrak. The bridge is an essential part of Amtrak's Northeast corridor operations. Therefore, FRA is the lead agency under NEPA. Unlike the ARC project, the Portal Bridge project is not seeking FTA funds under their New Start program. FTA is a cooperating agency due to their involvement with the ARC project and interest in the overall transit operations along the NEC corridor.

Comment 3: Has Amtrak had any role in the alternatives analysis process?

Response: As one of the two project sponsors, Amtrak has a major role in the alternatives analysis process.

Comment 4: Which alternatives have been ruled out and why?

Response: At this point, alternatives that did not meet the four fatal flaw criteria (termini, constructability, minimum number of tracks, navigation) have been ruled out. Currently, more than 20 alternatives are being evaluated and it is expected that, over the next several months, the number of alternatives will be reduced to four or five.

Comment 5: Are you considering a 4-track bridge either north or south of the existing bridge?

Response: A 4-track bridge, as well as two 2-track bridges, is being considered.

Comment 6: How many tracks would be constructed from Swift/Dock to Secaucus Junction?

Response: This will be determined as the rail operations analysis evolves.

Comment 7: How were the logical termini determined?

Response: For the build alternatives it was determined that the termini should be located to minimize changes to existing infrastructure such as Secaucus Station and Swift interlocking.

Comment 8: There needs to be more than 2 tracks between Dock and Secaucus. There should be 3 from Dock to Swift and 4 from Secaucus to Swift.

Response: The track requirements for future operations will be part of the DEIS analysis.

Comment 9: Who are the landowners surrounding the project site? Could any of them potentially affect the construction schedule?

Response: The DEIS will include a description of any ROW acquisitions required for each alternative under consideration. The evaluation of alternatives will consider potential delays to project construction as part of the analysis.

Comment 10: Will the project hinder Amtrak's future operations? Will the grade of the bridge limit its use by heavy trains? M&E bi-level trains will also need to go over this bridge.

Response: The development and evaluation of alternatives will consider future plans for both Amtrak and NJ Transit as part of the operations analysis to ensure that these plans are not hindered by the selected alternative.

Comment 11: The team should look at 25 years of future equipment purchases by Amtrak and NJ Transit when considering the issue of grade.

Response: The analysis will consider 2030 operating plans for each railroad.

Comment 12: How will the Portal Bridge Project be phased relative to ARC (before, concurrently, after?)

Response: Currently, it is expected that the Portal Bridge Project would be completed before ARC begins revenue service.

Comment 13: The East Coast Greenway will run along the western side of the Hackensack River, and will need a way under/over the Northeast corridor, either via the old Arlington Branch ROW, or along the Cayuga Dyke.

Response: Comment noted and these plans will be considered as the alternative designs are developed.

Comment 14: Can the ARC tunnel be phased into operation?

Response: The ARC DEIS is being planned for 2025. However it is expected that service will begin in 2016 with enough service to meet in 2016. The service would increase as needed.

Comment 15: What is the funding scheme for Portal Bridge Project?

Response: Currently, NJ Transit has committed \$300 Million to the project. Amtrak has programmed \$250 Million in its long term capital plan for this project. Other sources of funding will be investigated during the project development phase as the alternatives process proceeds.

Comment 16: What is the timing of the Portal Bridge Project?

Response: Currently, it is anticipated that the build alternatives could be completed by 2016 depending upon whether one or two new structures are contemplated.

Comment 17: For the rehabilitation alternative is there an inventory of what could go wrong with the existing structure? There was a fire two years ago and there is concern over the status of the fenders.

Response: As part of the DEIS, the rehabilitation alternatives will be evaluated to determine the maintenance needs of the bridge and their associated costs. The fender systems for the bridge piers would be part of that evaluation.

Comment 18: What contingency plan exists for interim operations of the NEC in case of a component failure such as a fire on the Portal Bridge?

Response: Amtrak has contingency plans for service disruptions that include measures such as hiring buses, stopping and turning trains at intermediate locations, putting workers in the field to manually operate infrastructure (switches, electrical switching), coordinating with other entities to handle travelers, etc. As Portal options are being examined, the exposure to disruptions will be part of the analysis.

Comment 19: Could the project schedule be affected by a significant remediation schedule?

Response: As with any construction project in the vicinity of known contamination, the possibility exists for construction delays. However, the analysis would consider the risks associated with alternatives that require significant remediation as part of their design.

Comment 20: Who will have control of the new elements along the Northeast Corridor? (NJ Transit or Amtrak?)

Response: Currently, no decision has been made regarding control of any new elements associated with the proposed alternatives.

Comment 21: What provisions have been made on Amtrak's part to make sure that they will be able to continue operating the existing Portal Bridge if the EIS process leads to an alternative that keeps the existing bridge?

Response: If the selected alternative includes retention of the existing Portal Bridge, the rehabilitation needs of the structure will be assessed as part of the alternatives analysis.

Comment 22: Look at the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex Bridges for examples for the project (specifically the Morgan Drawbridge).

Response: Comment noted

Comment 23: What kinds of clearances does the shipping channel need? What are the allowances of other bridges along the river?

Response: There are two fixed bridges upstream of the Portal Bridge with clearances above MHW of 50 feet. It is anticipated that any new fixed bridge would also require a 50-foot clearance above MHW. Currently, the existing Portal Bridge provides

two 99-foot-wide channels on each side of the center pier. The design criteria for this project include an approximately 300-foot horizontal clearance for any new structures. A moveable bridge would obviously require a lower clearance above MHW. To minimize the number of openings, the alternatives analysis is currently considering moveable bridges in the range of approximately 40 feet above MHW for vertical clearance.

Comment 24: The team should try to change the law/regulations that govern the USCG requirements for the height of fixed bridges.

Response: Due to their risk of implementation and schedule protraction, any alternatives that would require a change in existing federal law are considered fatally flawed for the purposes of this project.

Comment 25: Could the USCG limit maritime traffic to weekends?

Response: It is unlikely that the USCG would limit maritime traffic to weekends. However, alternatives strategies for bridge opening requirements will be investigated with USCG as the design process proceeds.

Comment 26: What is the cause of most of the openings of the Portal Bridge?

Response: Tugboats with barges serving the Bergen County Sewage Authority's facility in Little Ferry and Amerada Hess's Bogata Terminal.

Comment 27: Why can't the existing bridge be fixed at a lower height?

Response: Fixing the existing bridge at its current or lower height would require approval of the USCG. Based on conversations with the USCG, fixing the bridge at a height significantly below 50 feet would not meet their approval.

Comment 28: Will the project take into account global warming/rise in sea level?

Response: At present, there are no plans to consider future sea level rise in the design of the alternatives.

Comment 29: Would NJ Transit consider purchasing a low-profile tug-boat?

Response: Even if a low-profile tugboat was purchased, the USCG's would still likely require a clearance no lower than the existing upstream fixed bridges. This is based on the fact that new users could at anytime appear along the river and the required vertical clearance should not be based on the current fleet serving today's users.

Comment 30: Will the project consider/plan for the 5th (northern) possible track at Secaucus?

Response: At this time the Portal Bridge Project is not planning on any changes to Secaucus Station.

Comment 31: Can copies of the transcripts and other scoping comments be shared with the RCLC?

Response: Copies of the transcript from the Public Scoping Meeting will be made available to members of the RCLC. A summary of all scoping comments will be made available on the project's web site.

Comment 32: How and to whom can we provide input and suggestions outside of meetings themselves?

Response: Maura Fitzpatrick or Christie Marcella of HSH at mfitzpatrick@hshassoc.com or cmarcella@hshassoc.com, 917-339-0488.