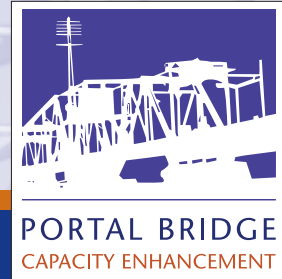


The Portal Bridge Link

Issue No. 1, January 2007



A NEW AND IMPROVED NORTHEAST CORRIDOR LINK



The Portal Bridge is a two-track, moveable swing-span rail bridge over the Hackensack River in New Jersey between the cities of Kearny and Secaucus. Built by the Pennsylvania Railroad, it began operation in 1910 with direct service between Newark Pennsylvania Station and the newly constructed Pennsylvania Station in New York City. Today, the rail bridge is utilized by Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT and is a vital part of the Northeast Corridor system. The Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project will evaluate alternatives to improve and increase the capacity of the crossing. The proposed project is now in the Environmental Impact Statement stage. You are invited to learn about it and to become involved.

Project Need

Amtrak operates approximately 103 scheduled trains in both directions over this segment of the Northeast Corridor; four of NJ TRANSIT's rail lines (393 trains each weekday in both directions) utilize the Portal Bridge. The nearly century-old structure is nearing the end of its economic life and has insufficient capacity to accommodate future transportation needs. In addition to heavy usage by Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT, the crossing must be opened to allow most marine traffic to pass—sometimes causing long delays in both rail service and maritime activity.

Goals

The goals of the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project are to:

- Enhance capacity to meet current and future demand including new service along the Northeast Corridor

- Improve service reliability and operational flexibility
- Provide a redundant Hackensack River crossing to facilitate maintenance and enhance passenger safety and security
- Minimize conflicts with maritime traffic
- Optimize existing infrastructure and planned improvements
- Minimize impacts on the surrounding environment

Benefits

A new or improved Portal Bridge will enhance existing Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT rail operations and allow for planned future infrastructure improvements to support regional growth and mobility.

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PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

4:00 – 8:00 PM

Newark Public Library
Centennial Hall, 2nd Floor
5 Washington Street
Newark, NJ 07101

PURPOSE:

To hear your comments on the EIS study, which will evaluate the environmental, economic and social impacts of the proposed Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project.

The Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project is being undertaken by Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT, with the Federal Railroad Administration acting as the lead federal agency for environmental review.





THE EIS PROCESS

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will review and determine if the proposed bridge improvements will have any significant impacts to the environment or the community surrounding the bridge. Conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the EIS will include the following four major components:

- A Purpose and Need Summary
- Alternatives for Bridge Modification or Replacement
- Identification of the Affected Environment and Evaluation of Environmental Consequences
- Mitigation for Adverse Environmental Consequences

Initial EIS findings will be summarized in a draft EIS (DEIS), future newsletters and on the project Web site (www.portalbridgenec.com). Following a period of public comment the DEIS will be revised and published in final (FEIS) form.

WHAT'S NEW

- The FRA issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare the EIS in the Federal Register on December 12, 2006. This officially began the scoping process for the EIS.
- The draft Scoping Document is available. Visit our Web site, www.portalbridgenec.com, and download the PDF.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the Portal Bridge's current limitations?

The 961-foot span currently has only 23 feet of clearance between mean high water (MHW) and the lowest steel elevation of the bridge. As a result, bridge openings are required to allow most marine vessels navigating the Hackensack River to pass through. The lengthy amount of time that is required to open and close the bridge for marine traffic interferes with rail operations. Also, frequent bridge openings increase the likelihood of mechanical malfunctions, which have caused the bridge to remain in the open position for inordinately long periods of time, causing system-wide delays in train service. Finally, the present two-track crossing will not support future demand on the Northeast Corridor.

Is the bridge safe?

The bridge is safe, but it requires ongoing costly maintenance and repairs. These can be viewed as interim solutions. However, increasing rail traffic and service improvements along the Northeast Corridor will further stress the aging structure's condition and may not be able to support future transportation demand.

Why is the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) directing preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

As the federal agency responsible for national rail transportation policy and railroad safety, the FRA also oversees Amtrak's discretionary capital programs; Amtrak owns the Portal Bridge and most of the Northeast Corridor infrastructure.

What alternatives will the EIS consider?

The range of preliminary alternatives may include a combination of rehabilitation bridge options, replacement bridge options or reasonable alternatives that may be identified by the public during the scoping process for the draft EIS (DEIS). The EIS will also evaluate a "No Action" alternative, which considers possible future conditions in the Northeast Corridor if no project is undertaken to rehabilitate or replace the Portal Bridge.

Would a new Portal Bridge include more tracks than the existing one?

Possibly. The existing bridge has two tracks; a new bridge design might include three tracks to allow for greater flexibility in demand and train routing. However, an exhaustive evaluation of all alternatives will be made with a view towards satisfying the purpose and need for the project and its related goals.

What is the estimated cost of the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project?

The cost of the project will depend on the alternative selected in the EIS process.

What is the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement project's relationship to NJ TRANSIT's THE Tunnel Project?

Under the umbrella of the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) study, THE Tunnel Project involves the construction of a new passenger rail station underneath 34th Street in New York (near New York's Penn Station) and a two-track tunnel under the Hudson River—a connection allowing for a one-seat ride to New York City for passengers on the Main and Bergen and Pascack Valley lines, and additional improvements that will allow NJ TRANSIT to increase its rail capacity and improve service. The Portal Bridge complements the ARC project by addressing a crucial bottleneck along the Northeast Corridor at the Hackensack River. Both projects would serve to provide commuters with additional capacity along this transportation corridor.

What can I do to participate further in the Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project?

You can join the Regional Citizens' Liaison Committee—which was created as a counterpart to the Technical Advisory Committee to provide community members the opportunity to have input—or you can subscribe to our mailing list to stay informed of the latest project developments.



PROJECT TIMELINE

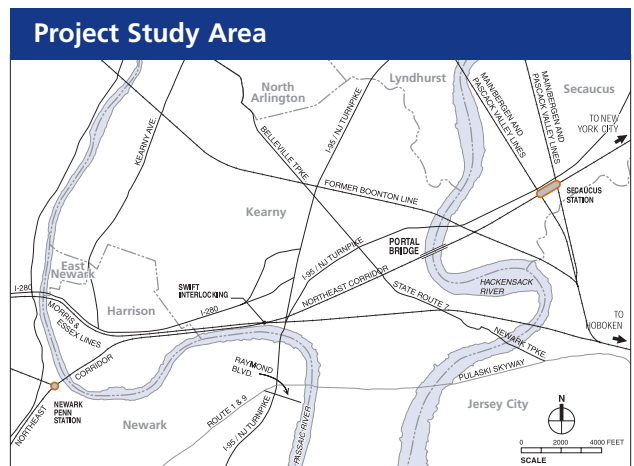


GET INVOLVED

The Portal Bridge project team is committed to open, active public participation during the EIS process. We will be mailing periodic newsletters to keep you updated on the progress of the project, and we will conduct two information open houses so that you can ask questions and find out more. You will also be able to participate in a formal public hearing after the draft EIS (DEIS) document has been published. If you did not receive this newsletter by mail and wish to be added to the project mailing list, please fill out the form on page 4. Written comments will be accepted at any time during the process.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FORMED

To ensure that the interests of agencies are represented in the EIS process, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) has been formed. The purpose of the TAC is to give agency representatives an opportunity to share their expertise and provide input into the EIS in a working group forum with project staff. A TAC meeting was held in early January; additional meetings will be scheduled throughout the process.



JOIN THE REGIONAL CITIZENS' LIAISON COMMITTEE

The committee will meet several times for information sharing among stakeholders, community groups and individuals. Please see Project Timeline above and fill out the form on page 4.



CONTACT US

- Yes, I would like to be added to the study mailing list
 Yes, I would like to join the Regional Citizens' Liaison Committee

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Comments: _____

Please cut out and send to: **Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project**

c/o Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc.
517 West 35th Street, 7th Floor
New York, New York 10001
Attn: Christie Marcella

Or fax the form to:

Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc.
Attn: Christie Marcella, 917-339-1068



Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Project

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