



**Meeting
Notes**

Attendees: Chris Cross, ATF Chairman, RPC
Tom Fargo, SRPC
John Burke, Portsmouth
Jack Newick, Dover
Bruce Woodruff, Dover
Sandy Hislop, Newington
Chris Waszczuk, NHDOT
Mike Dugas, NHDOT
Marc Laurin, NHDOT
Butch Waidelich, FHWA
Jim Garvin, DHR
Tim Roache, SRPC
Frank O'Callaghan, VHB
Members of the Public

Date/Time: 2/23/05

Project No.: 5142500

Place: Newington Town Hall

Re: Advisory Task Force
Meeting No. 10

Notes taken by: Frank O'Callaghan

Chris Cross, ATF chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:40 PM and welcomed all. He explained the role and function of the Advisory Task Force (ATF), noting that members represent the communities of Newington, Dover and Portsmouth and that ATF members have offered comment and advice to the project team and assisted in refining alternatives that were being developed and considered for further study. Chris stated that members of the public would be asked to comment during the presentation of information following comments and questions from ATF members. From a schedule perspective, he noted that development and refinement of a preferred alternative would likely take a year's time, and that ideas and suggestions from the public are welcome. He also noted that a representative from the Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce would be joining the ATF, and reminded all of the wealth of information contained on the project website – www.newington-dover.com.

Chris then asked ATF members if they had any review comments on the draft ATF meeting notes of January 12, 2005. Chris Waszczuk noted two minor edits – a misspelling of Leon Kenison's name in the attendees list, and a clarification on page 3 that one rail alternative (expanded Downeaster service) was being carried forward for further study. Frank O'Callaghan noted a typographical error on page 5, where a reference to a cost comparison between Options 8 and 3 should have referenced Options 8 and 2. There being no further edits or corrections, the draft meeting minutes of January 12, 2005 were unanimously approved as revised.

Chris Cross then requested comments from the ATF members. Chris Waszczuk stated that NHDOT has received three comment letters on the Rationale Report that in general concur with the range of alternatives that are being carried forward for further study. He noted that there were several comments (i.e. location of soundwalls, minimizing impacts to Hilton Park, location of the Hilton Park connector, level of TDM, profile of the Turnpike, etc.), which would be addressed as the study progresses, and that he would summarize the response to comments at the next ATF meeting. Chris Cross then asked members of the public who were in attendance if anyone had any questions or comments. There being no public comments, Chris Waszczuk reviewed the meeting agenda and noted that copies of the agenda and other meeting information were available for those in attendance.

Frank O'Callaghan then began a macro level review of 8 and 6-lane options that varied by treatment of the Little Bay Bridges (LBB), the General Sullivan Bridge (GSB), the level of transit improvement, the level of employer-based TDM activities and the width of pavement cross section. He referred to a matrix summary (handout) that compared the general characteristics and impacts associated with each of the 10 options. Frank noted that the 8-lane options generally had more property impacts than the 6-lane options, and that the off-line replacement of the LBB (Options 4 and 5) impacted 10 buildings in comparison to the other 8-lane and 6-lane options which impact 3 buildings. He noted that Dover ATF representatives have previously expressed concern over pavement cross sections that exceed 150' in width, options that do not include some level of transit and TDM, and the lack of ridership to justify HOV lanes. Frank stated that the major impacts on Hilton Park resulted from the location of the local connector road, and that both moderate and aggressive TDM programs were combined with each of the 6-lane options. He noted that reuse of the GSB for pedestrians, bicyclists, recreation, and possibly for transit use only during reconstruction of the LBB was included in several of the options, and that there would be a serious 4(f) justification issue under all the options that included removal of the GSB due to its historical significance. Frank concluded his summary of the comparison of options by noting that the options varied in their respective ability to be modified in the future to accommodate travel demands beyond 2025, and that the 6-lane options required an auxiliary lane between Exits 3 and 6 to manage traffic that enters and exits at these interchanges and traffic that changes lanes between these exits. He then requested comments from the ATF.

Bruce Woodruff inquired as to the system-related constraints on travel demand in estimating the life span of improvements and whether the Seacoast Travel Demand Model took into account the potential for diversion to other routes when the Turnpike is congested. Frank responded that system constraints, such as the capacity of US 4 and ME 236 are reflected in the travel demand model estimates for future travel. The effects of peak spreading – expansion of the current weekday PM peak hour of traffic (4:45 – 5:45 PM) to a peak period of 3:00 – 7:00 PM under 2025 No Build traffic conditions – and peak shifting – drivers that will divert to other roadways such as NH 108, NH 125 and ME 236 as future levels of peak hour congestion increase – are also reflected in the future traffic volumes on both the Turnpike and other state and local roadways. Frank noted that as the Turnpike capacity is increased, traffic would tend to divert from local roadways to the Turnpike.

Chris Cross noted that Newington generally supports removal of the GSB due to its presence on Dover Point and the valuable space it takes up for a limited transportation benefit. With respect to the assessment of Options, he stated a preference for Option 10 (Peak Hour Shoulder Use). In comparison to Option 9 (Borrow Lane/Zipper Lane), he noted that a zipper lane might be confusing to drivers, whereas peak shoulder use (Option 10) entails permanent lanes. John Burke inquired as to the safety aspects of peak shoulder use. Frank responded that shoulder use, as proposed, would be adjacent to the median, which is safer and less confusing in comparison to the current peak period outside shoulder use along sections of I-93 and I-95/MA 128 in Massachusetts which can be confusing and challenging when driving through interchange areas.

Gail Pare expressed concern with the aesthetics of a very wide bridge and suggested an aerial or plan view rendering or model would be helpful in visualizing the various options. Chris Waszczuk noted that computer generated visualization will be completed for the Little Bay Bridges to provide before and after comparisons. He also noted that the Rationale Report contained different cross section plans associated with each of the bridge options which would be of assistance in trying to identify the scale and impacts of each option.

Bruce Woodruff stated that he would eliminate 8-lane Options 1, 2 and 4, and 6-lane Options 6, 7 and 8. He offered the following rationale: Option 1 removed the GSB, had no transit and no TDM; Option 2 removed the GSB; Option 4 removed the GSB and had no transit; Options 6, 7, and 8 require additional traffic management lanes and provide less service life than Options 9 and 10. Bruce further noted that while Option 3 removes the GSB, it does provide transit. Option 5 preserves the GSB, and provides transit and TDM programs which the Dover community supports. In comparing Options 9 and 10, he stated that a zipper lane (Option 9) will require constant maintenance, while Option 10 (peak shoulder use) provides the "best bang" for the dollar.

Tim Roache asked if the project would support employer-based TDM programs. Frank responded that such support could be directed to Transportation Management Association, such as the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce, which promotes such activities as ride-sharing matching and providing emergency ride-home service to ride-sharing employees.

Butch Waidelich, FHWA, addressed the 4(f), historic resource issue associated with the GSB. He noted that before one could remove the GSB as part of any option, one must first demonstrate that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the bridge removal. Since there is a feasible alternative, i.e. use of the GSB for a multi-use path (bicycle and pedestrian use) and possibly transit use, the basis for GSB removal would be prudence, i.e., the cost of rehabilitation being excessive or an unreasonable expenditure of limited resources. He then noted that if a signature off-line LBB replacement bridge is considered feasible (Option 5) which would remove the GSB and cost approximately \$29 M - \$41 M more than other options (3 and 10) which would rehabilitate and widen the LBB and rehabilitate the GSB, then one cannot argue that preserving and rehabilitating the GSB is imprudent due simply to the added cost. As such, if Option 5 is carried forward, one cannot justify the removal of the GSB based on cost. He further stated that this situation needs to be understood and assessed early in the evaluation of options and alternatives.

Further discussion ensued relative to the GSB. Tom Fargo noted the deteriorated condition of the bridge, its seismic vulnerability and its profile which limits driver sight distance to 45 MPH. Chris Cross added that the bridge is very narrow, and if rehabilitated, has a limited reuse capability, and as such, the cost of rehabilitation should be relevant to the justification decision of whether or not to preserve the bridge. Jack Newick stated that feasible options need to be cost effective.

Jim Garvin noted that the DHR had just received a report authored by an historic resources specialist that documents the historic significance of the GSB at the local, state and national level. He added that the GSB scored, on a comparative basis, 28 points, 2 points below the highest rated (30 points) historic bridge in the state. Bruce Woodruff stated that the current pedestrian and bicycle use of the GSB is justification for rehabilitation, and that potential transit use is not critical to justifying its rehabilitation and reuse. John Burke added that the GSB is a system component of the bicycle system that serves the Tradeport and the City of Portsmouth.

Chris Waszczuk then asked the ATF if they thought it was possible to eliminate options that did not make sense for one or more reasons, e.g. the absence of transit or TDM? The consensus of the ATF

was that HOV lanes were not practical, at this time, since ridership estimates were relatively low and the cross section requirements result in relatively higher impacts due to pavement width. The zipper lane concept involves undesirable maintenance and operating conditions and costs. After some discussion, the ATF voted to eliminate Options 1, 4, 7, 8 and 9 from further consideration and to carry Options 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10 forward for further development. John Burke asked if further analysis of Options 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10 would be conducted. Chris Waszczuk replied that additional engineering of these options would be initiated.

Chris Waszczuk then referred to the meeting agenda and a handout summarizing first a number of reasons to retain the General Sullivan Bridge, followed by a number of reasons to remove the GSB. With respect to retaining the bridge, Chris cited: historic preservation; reuse for recreation, pedestrians and bicyclists; the future flexibility and redundancy provided by a second bridge with respect to incident management and emergency access; and congestion relief during construction of the LBB if a dedicated bus lane is feasible. He echoed Butch Waidelich's, FHWA, comments regarding the significance of the 4(f) resource, and noted that justification of removing the GSB hinged on demonstrating that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to its removal. He noted that the basis of prudence is cost. Chris also referred to the handout prepared by Jim Garvin, DHR, that highlighted the historic significance of the bridge and excerpted portions of the summary. He then enumerated a number of reasons to remove the GSB: initial costs, noting that the net initial cost to rehabilitate the bridge ranged from approximately \$8M - \$11 M which was the heart of the prudence issue; future maintenance costs, inspection costs and liability; navigational opening within the channel; and the potential to expand Hilton Park and improve E-W connectivity. Chris stated that he tried very hard to be objective in summarizing the pros and cons related to either bridge rehabilitation or bridge removal, and that there was, in his view, no clear cut or obvious conclusion. The preservation of the historic resource will be weighed against the additional cost of bridge rehabilitation and maintenance. Chris concluded his remarks on the GSB by noting the importance of construction sequencing vis-à-vis rehabilitation of the bridge. If the GSB were rehabilitated first, the current bicycle and pedestrian connection would be lost for two years, whereas the potential for a bus lane on the GSB during the construction of the LBB would be possible. If the bus lane proves to be feasible, then the next phase of construction would need to include the Exit 6 interchange, which would be necessary to take advantage of the GSB busway. If the GSB rehabilitation followed the LBB reconstruction, the pedestrian/bike connection could be temporarily provided on the LBB during the time the GSB is rehabilitated. On the other hand, if the GSB were removed, reconstruction of the LBB would likely be easier.

Tom Fargo asked, given the current condition of the bridge, could rehabilitation of the GSB wait until 2012 or the last stage of project construction. Chris responded that while there are no guarantees, the bridge is monitored periodically to ensure safe passage for pedestrians and bicycles. He noted that the floor system is very deteriorated; however, the truss elements are in reasonable condition, and that the piers, while showing some cavitation, sit on ledge. Jack Newick added that the absence of some grout in the piers is visible. Tom Fargo asked for recollection of the US Coast Guard's position. Chris responded that it is the USCG's view that the bridge cannot be ignored since it would be a hazard to navigation if it were not maintained. The disposition of the GSB will need to be addressed as part of this project.

John Burke inquired as to the mitigation costs if the GSB is removed. Chris Waszczuk suggested that, as a minimum, costs to memorialize the bridge would be required. Jim Garvin noted that discussion of mitigation costs is premature; the focus of discussion should be on preserving the bridge. If it comes to mitigation, costs will likely be more than memorialization. He noted that there are many abandoned and bypassed bridges statewide. Chris responded that he understood Jim's point, and that he only mentioned mitigation at this moment so that everyone would understand that there would be an additional cost if the GSB were removed. Chris Cross stated that he felt that retention of

the GSB is a problem for Dover Point given the narrow land mass. Bruce Woodruff concluded this discussion of the GSB by suggesting that resolution of the GSB must reflect a balance of needs: needs of residents, regional travel demand needs, and recreational needs.

Frank O'Callaghan then summarized a recent meeting among transit operators (COAST and Wildcat), regional planners and the project team that discussed the potential use of the General Sullivan Bridge as a busway during reconstruction of the Little Bay Bridges (LBB). The goal of such transit use would be to assist in traffic management during construction, the promotion of transit use, and increasing the justification for reuse and preservation of the GSB. Frank reviewed the potential routing and noted the difficulty northbound in connecting from the GSB and Dover Point Road/Boston Harbor Road to the Turnpike due to the Exit 6 configuration and lack of a northbound on-ramp. Temporary connections from Spur Road to the Turnpike were explored and deemed infeasible. As such, he noted that if the GSB were to be used as a busway for traffic management, Exit 6 would also have to be reconstructed prior to initiating reconstruction of the LBB. Transit operations through the study area consist of C&J intercity service from Dover to the Portsmouth Transportation Center (PTC) and south via I-95 to Boston, local COAST Route 2 (Rochester – Portsmouth) and Wildcat Route 4 (Durham-Portsmouth) and COAST express service between Rochester and the Tradeport/PTC scheduled for 2006. The only service deemed to benefit from the GSB busway is the COAST express service, assuming that a connector roadway from Nimble Hill Road to the Tradeport is constructed (consistent with the preferred solution for the Exit 3 interchange) to complete the transit route. Such a system would serve potentially four peak period buses southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening. The C&J service is likely to remain on the Turnpike and access the PTC directly from I-95. Both the COAST and Wildcat local service require connection to the retail activities located along Woodbury Avenue which would not benefit from the GSB route. As such, the local service will also remain on the Turnpike. Frank concluded by noting that reuse of the GSB for buses appeared potentially viable for only the COAST express service and requires the first approximately \$50M of project construction for the necessary GSB rehabilitation, Exit 6 reconstruction and Tradeport connection. This would delay reconstruction of the Little Bay Bridges.

Bruce Woodruff and John Burke both concurred that the COAST express service was the only potentially viable service that could utilize the GSB. Both emphasized that the COAST service, which is slated for start-up in 2006 and intended for commuters, needs a dedicated lane to provide consistent and effective service. Mike Dugas noted that if the GSB is rehabilitated as a first phase project, the current pedestrian and bicycle connection would be lost for approximately two years. Gail Pare asked if the GSB could be re-opened to local traffic. Frank responded that opening the GSB to local traffic was unlikely given the concern for residents' quality of life; use by employer van pooling may be viable. Both Bruce Woodruff and John Burke agreed that potential transit use of the GSB was only viable during construction of the LBB. They questioned whether an evaluation of potential ridership during construction could be evaluated. Frank observed that the COAST express service would be operational for two to four years prior to project construction, depending on availability of funding, and will have ample time to evaluate ridership. It is quite possible that, given construction related delays on the Turnpike, ridership may be sustained or increased without the GSB busway due to the convenience of not driving. John Burke noted that it is worthwhile to continue to investigate the GSB transit route given that demand for the service may increase providing a great transportation benefit for the area. He asked if VHB could estimate the difference in travel times between the GSB transit route and the Turnpike transit route. Frank responded that VHB would conduct such an analysis.

The final meeting agenda item was review and discussion of preliminary mainline Turnpike profile alternatives. Frank referred to preliminary profile and slope impact plans for Alternative 3 in Dover and Alternatives 10 and 12 in Newington. In contrasting Alternatives 10 and 12, he noted that under

Alternative 12, the industrial connector roadway and the relocated railroad right-of-way (ROW) travel under the Turnpike with the extension of Woodbury Avenue traversing above the Turnpike and connecting to the Exit 3 southbound ramps, the Tradeport and Nimble Hill Road. Woodbury Avenue would be approximately 25' above the new grade of the Turnpike, or approximately 20' above the current grade of Turnpike. Alternative 10 locates the industrial connector roadway and future railroad R.O.W. (traversing under the Turnpike) to the north of Woodbury Avenue at the location of the existing railroad R.O.W. The elevation of the Turnpike at this location is approximately 27' above the current elevation of the Turnpike. On the Dover side of the channel, Frank noted that the grade-separated connector in the vicinity of Hilton Park had been relocated to the north to minimize impacts on Hilton Park. Tom Fargo suggested that an alternative for mitigating the impact on the park would be to extend the bridge, thereby creating additional parkland below the bridge which might compensate for the parkland impact of the connector being located further south towards the channel. VHB will assess the parkland impacts of both locations.

Tom Fargo questioned the need for planning and providing for a future railroad R.O.W. to the Tradeport; he suggested eliminating the R.O.W. from the project, and in reference to Alternative 10, suggested keeping the Turnpike at-grade and flying the industrial connector roadway over the Turnpike. Chris Waszczuk responded that it was his understanding that planning for the future rail R.O.W. connection to the Tradeport was reflected in the Tradeport's masterplan and required by state legislation. He offered to research and confirm his understanding. Frank noted that his understanding was the same. Tom responded that he didn't see the connection between preserving a rail R.O.W. which, in his view, did not currently exist, and the project's purpose and need. Aside from the planning perspective, accommodating for the future rail R.O.W., as proposed under Alternative 10, resulted in potential noise and visual impacts. Frank responded that the potential for future transfer of goods movement into or from the Tradeport from trucks to rail would, if realized, have a positive impact on study area transportation efficiency, not to mention regional air quality. Chris Cross offered that there were elements of Alternative 12 that are preferable to Newington. He then asked for further public comments. There were none. He thanked all for their attendance and input. He reminded all of the next ATF meeting scheduled for March 30, 2005 at 6:30PM in Dover City Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM.