

Chapter 9:

Comments and Coordination

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COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

This chapter includes copies of the pertinent correspondence received from agencies, organizations and individuals. The scoping and community outreach meetings are summarized, as well as the key issues identified by the public and agencies during the coordination process.

The Final EIS will include comments from agencies and the public on the DEIS, and responses addressing substantive issues or concerns.

9.1 SCOPING MEETING

The project scoping meeting was held on October 6, 1999, to obtain comments from agencies and the public regarding the scope of the DEIS. The discussion and comments received are summarized as follows:

Edmund T. Parker, Jr., RIDOT

1. A summary of the Sakonnet River Bridge project was presented, and a video was shown to describe the history of the bridge, its current status, and potential alternatives. A summary of the EIS process was presented.
2. A new alternative that was generated from input at public meetings in the affected communities is the construction of a new bridge on the existing alignment. The potential impacts of this alternative, such as increases in traffic on the Mt. Hope and Newport bridges and the potential need for a temporary bridge on the railroad bridge alignment, will be studied in the EIS.
3. The demolition of the existing bridge (and associated costs) will be included in alternatives to construct a new bridge.
4. Interim repairs that are required to address structural problems during the study and design period will be commenced in the spring of 2000.
5. The Route 24 / Route 138 ramp reconstruction project is needed to address safety concerns, and will be completed as a separate project with construction beginning in 2001. The configuration of the new ramps will be compatible with all of the potential bridge alternatives.
6. Two Phase 1 studies have been started which will be needed for the EIS in any event - the historical/archaeological study (PAL); and the hazardous materials/debris study (Rizzo Associates).
7. Comments on the scope of the EIS will be received for 45 days following this session.

Daniel J. Berman, FHWA

1. FHWA has stringent criteria for seismic design of bridge structures. The FHWA is concerned about the structural integrity of the existing Sakonnet River Bridge during an earthquake, due to the fracture-critical nature of the main elements. This concern remains if the bridge is rehabilitated rather than replaced.
2. A toll study will be included in the financial impact analysis of the EIS.
3. A study of potential temporary use of the existing railroad bridge during construction, and the impacted marinas and waterways traffic, will be included in the EIS.

Peter Holmes, USEPA Region 1

1. EPA will be a Cooperating Agency.
2. EPA will be reviewing all potential impacts to the environment from the project including freshwater and coastal water quality, wetlands, air quality, hazardous materials, and traffic.
3. Potential environmental impacts from the demolition of the existing bridge are of particular concern.

Stephen D. DiLorenzo, US Army Corps of Engineers

1. The extent of Corps involvement is not known at this time; however, it appears from the scope of the project that the US Coast Guard would be the primary agency with jurisdiction for waterways issues.
2. It is uncertain at this time whether a Corps permit (Section 404 for fill, or Section 10 for removal of material) will be needed. A decision will be made after the construction impacts of the alternatives are more defined.
3. The Corps will remain involved during the initial stages of the EIS, including a coordination meeting with Fisheries and Fish and Wildlife agencies.

Gary Kassof, US Coast Guard, First District

1. The Coast Guard will be a Cooperating Agency.
2. The horizontal and vertical (65-feet) waterway clearances of the existing bridge are the minimum to be provided with a new bridge.
3. The existing bridge must be removed if a new bridge is constructed, regardless of chosen alignment.
4. The existing railroad bridge must also be removed. If this is to be accomplished as part of the Sakonnet River Bridge project it may be proceed according to the overall project schedule. If the railroad bridge removal is a separate project, then it must be implemented on an accelerated schedule.

5. It appears that the waterway impacts during construction can be addressed. There are two marinas (one upstream and one downstream of the bridge) potentially affected.
6. If the railroad bridge alignment is used for a temporary bridge, the impacts to marinas and the clearance requirements for the type of craft using the waterway would need to be studied. The Coast Guard prefers that the channel remain open to vessels during construction of a new bridge; however, a temporary fixed bridge with limited clearance may be considered.

Richard Greenwood, RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission

1. The HPHC will be a Cooperating Agency.
2. Since the bridge is nearing 50 years in age, it will need to be evaluated for National Register eligibility. This evaluation has a high priority for the HPHC.
3. The HPHC has not previously dealt with historic bridges; therefore, contacts will need to be established in the national office to review this project.
4. There are no other known resources in the project area that would be eligible for the National Register. However, several historic properties near the site have been inventoried and need to be evaluated.
5. Resources in the project area may include Native American, early colonial, or 18th and 19th century structures or artifacts.

George Johnson, RI Statewide Planning

1. State Planning Office will be a Cooperating Agency.
2. Bicycle and pedestrian access will be an important factor and must be included in the EIS. The state greenways map indicates the bridge as a link between Portsmouth and Tiverton.
3. The financing study will be a major consideration in the evaluation of the project implementation.
4. The socioeconomic impacts of the project need to be reviewed, particularly the impacts of traffic disruption and increased traffic on alternate routes.
5. The Planning Office is completing a railways study that will include evaluation of the future use of the rail line adjacent to the bridge.
6. The Planning Office is completing a traffic study with the US Navy in Newport, and the results may be available in time for use in the EIS.

Kevin Nelson, RI Statewide Planning

1. The land use impacts of the project need to be reviewed, including how the affected communities will be developing in the project area over the lifetime of the project.
2. The potential for unnecessary increases in growth patterns should be addressed.

Timothy Timmermann, USEPA Region 1

1. The potential impacts to marine traffic must be included in the EIS.

Carolyn Weymouth, RI Department of Environmental Management

1. The RIDEM will be a Cooperating Agency. Contact should be initiated through the Office of Technical and Customer Assistance.
2. The rehabilitation of the existing bridge may require RIDEM permitting.
3. Potential impacts to wildlife and recreational resources must be addressed in the EIS.

Matthew J. Vanderhoop, Wampanoag Tribe of Gayhead (Aquinnah)

1. The Aquinnah Wampanoags are interested in the archaeological review to be completed by the Public Archaeological Laboratory as part of the EIS. They will provide input regarding potential resources in the project area.
2. The Aquinnah will also coordinate with the other Wampanoag sections that may have interest in the project area.

Robert Driscoll, Town of Portsmouth, RI

1. The User Costs due to traffic disruptions projected with the bridge rehabilitation option appear to be understated, and should be addressed in the EIS.

Joseph Parella, Town of Bristol, RI

1. The potential negative traffic impacts associated with the option for a new bridge on the existing alignment need to be thoroughly addressed.
2. If this option were implemented it appears that a heavy influx of traffic would occur in Bristol, which could not be handled by the road system and would create a public safety problem.
3. It is recommended that a traffic circulation study be included in the EIS to address potential impacts to the Sakonnet and Mount Hope bridges and additional traffic in Bristol. Potential economic impacts due to traffic problems also need to be addressed.

Roy Anderson, City of Newport

1. The City of Newport will be a Cooperating Agency.
2. The City is concerned about the potential traffic impacts in Newport and on the Pell Bridge if disruptions occur on the Sakonnet Bridge.
3. The City recommends that the transportation planning for all of Aquidneck Island as well as Newport be included in the EIS.

Mark Savard, FHWA Bridge Division

1. Scour in the waterway may be a problem. A study evaluating the 500-year scour, particularly relative to the railroad bridge embankments, should be completed for the EIS.

9.2 OUTREACH MEETINGS

RIDOT held several public outreach meetings in the affected communities, to explain and discuss the need for the project and potential alternative solutions. Meetings were held as follows:

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| June 29, 1999 - | Tiverton, RI |
| July 26, 1999 - | Bristol, RI |
| January 9, 2001 - | Portsmouth, RI |

9.3 INTERNET ACCESS

A summary of the Sakonnet River Bridge project, and progress updates, were posted on the RIDOT internet site during the development of the DEIS. Comments were also received via e-mail, as summarized in Appendix E.

This DEIS is also available for review on the RIDOT internet site, www.dot.state.ri.us.

9.4 KEY COMMENTS

The key comments received from both agencies and the public to date include the following:

1. *Existing Bridge Safety and Reliability*: concern over the safety of the existing bridge structure and its reliability to provide the RI 24 transportation link.
2. *Traffic Impacts*: concern over potential adverse impacts to traffic during construction of alternatives, and after construction due to unbalanced tolling.
3. *Relocation Impacts*: concern over potential property acquisitions required for new bridge alternatives.