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Concurrence Point (CP) 2 and 2A Meeting Summary Detailed Study Alternatives Carried Forward and Bridging Decisions and Alignment Review

Replacement of Bridge Number 640013 (Cape Fear Memorial Bridge) over
the Cape Fear River

New Hanover and Brunswick Counties

STIP No. HB-0039

Thursday April 11, 2024 / 10:00 AM

Meeting Attendees

Name	Organization	E-mail Address
Tom Steffens*	US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Thomas.A.Steffens@usace.army.mil
Gary Jordan*	US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	gary_jordan@fws.gov
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*Attended via phone/Teams

On April 11, 2024, NCDOT hosted a combined Concurrence Point (CP) 2 and 2A meeting to gain concurrence on Detailed Study Alternatives (CP 2) and Bridging Decisions and Alignment Review (CP2A) for the STIP Project HB-0039, replacement of Bridge Number 640013 (Cape Fear Memorial Bridge) over the Cape Fear River. NCDOT distributed the meeting packet to the participating agencies and team members for their review prior to the meeting on March 28, 2024.

NCDOT EPU began the meeting with introductions made by each member of the group present or participating via telephone. USACE gave a brief summary of the purpose of the meeting. Following introductions, the CP 2 and 2A Packet was reviewed and discussed. The following summarizes the main topics discussed.

- HDR noted one alternative was added after the CP 1 meeting, Alternative C a fixed span 65' vertical clearance.
 - NCDOT Hydraulics clarified the existing bridge has 65' minimum vertical clearance (when in the closed position) and 135' maximum vertical clearance (when in the open position).
- USEPA inquired whether relocations had been determined at this time.
 - HDR noted they had not but would be prior to CP3.
 - USEPA requested the relocation report identify whether relocations occur predominately in Environmental Justice (EJ) areas.
 - Division 3 confirmed.
- HDR noted the packet included that the Cape Fear River is identified as a sturgeon spawning water by NMFS, and therefore an in-water construction moratorium is in effect from February 1 through June 30 for these waters. Additionally, the Cape Fear River is a Primary Nursery Area (PNA) which includes an in-water construction moratorium through September 30.
 - NOAA Fisheries clarified the Cape Fear River is designated Critical Habitat for Atlantic Sturgeon by NMFS, not sturgeon spawning water.
 - *Post meeting note: Via e-mail to the merger team, DMF noted they and NMFS concur on the moratorium period of February 15 through June 30 for the project.*
 - Division 3 noted the project team would make those corrections moving forward.
- USEPA inquired whether the merger team could hold an update meeting prior to CP3 as there were a lot of moving parts.
 - Division 3 inquired whether this could be handled via e-mail.
 - USEPA noted that would be fine.
 - Division 3 inquired whether there were any specific updates the project team should provide.
 - USEPA noted any decisions made regarding vertical clearance.
- NCHPO inquired what the USCG's role in the project was and whether they would make the final determination on vertical clearance.
 - Division 3 stated the project team was currently working on a Navigational Impact Report (NIR) which will be submitted to the USCG, who will then provide the project team with a

preliminary determination on vertical clearance. The Wilmington Harbor is also a USACE Section 408 project and the USACE Section 408 team will also provide guidance on vertical clearance requirements.

- HDR noted the Draft NIR would be ready to submit in late May/early June.
- USACE noted they received an e-mail from their Section 408 representative (Ronnie Smith) morning and read the e-mail to the merger team, as summarized here, and to be sent to the merger team following the meeting. The e-mail noted the authorized depth of the federal project in this location is 38 feet and believe the minimal vertical clearance is 125 feet. The Section 408 team is working to find the class and size vessel identified when the federal navigation project was authorized. The 408 team discussed a fixed bridge with 65' clearance, and it is unlikely they would provide approval.
- USCG noted in 2021, the vertical clearance recommended for the Wilmington Rail Project was 135'. Between 2018 and 2020, there were 117 lifts of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge.
 - NOAA Fisheries inquired whether these lifts were associated with commercial or recreational traffic (sailboats).
 - USCG stated per the NIR, commercial.
- SHPO inquired whether the project team could consider a fixed alternative higher than 65' and lower than 135'.
 - Division 3 confirmed, and proposed the group consider a fixed 100' vertical clearance alternative and remove the fixed 65' vertical clearance alternative from further study.
- USCG noted once they receive the NIR, it will be sent out for public notice, and see what input is provided by the public and mariners before making a preliminary recommendation. USCG will consider whether any larger vessels are expected to travel in the study area in the next 50-100 years.
- Division 3 noted the USCG clearance guidance recommended 100 feet on the northeast river, which is assumed to refer to the northeast Cape Fear River. The Kinder Morgan facility upriver recently sold, and as a result the number of openings has greatly decreased.
- NCHPO noted the cost estimates included a note associated with Alternative C's right-of-way cost and requested additional information.
 - HDR noted when the original concepts were developed and Kinder Morgan was still in operation, it would need to be purchased if a 65' fixed vertical clearance alternative was chosen, however that has not been quantified at this time.
- NCHPO stated a major cost of the current bridge was associated with the movable components. They inquired how much money would be spent on maintenance moving forward with a movable span.
 - HDR noted the CP1 packet included information on maintenance costs.
 - Division 3 stated since 2008 NCDOT has invested \$33 million in major rehabilitation to maintain the deck, substructure, and superstructure to keep in satisfactory condition. \$15 million was spent in 2024 to replace the deck. In addition, NCDOT spends over \$500,000 on regular maintenance and operations.
 - NCHPO inquired whether NCDOT could use the existing maintenance costs to estimate future costs associated with a movable span.
 - DCM noted for other projects, life cycle costs were taken into consideration, such as access roads and utility relocation costs.
 - Division 3 noted as the project continues towards CP3 and refine the designs, additional information can be provided.

- NCHPO inquired why the multi-use path (MUP) proposed across the bridge extended to the Battleship with Alternative B, but did not with Alternative A or Alternative C.
 - Division 3 noted the multi-use path followed the limits of construction for each alternative. Alternative B's construction limits extend further on each side of the bridge due to the higher vertical clearance, therefore, the MUP extends further.
 - HDR noted Brunswick County and WMPO have several bicycle and pedestrian facility recommendations in local plans that would connect to the proposed MUP.
- Division 3 inquired whether the merger team could move forward with Alternative C to present to the public, as the Kinder Morgan property had recently been sold and there was a reduction in CFMB openings.
 - USCG noted multiple alternatives can be considered. However, it needs to accommodate existing navigation, coordination with stakeholders, and input from USACE Section 408.
- DCM noted in previous projects USCG issued the permit for the bridge and USACE issued the permit for the approaches, and inquired whether this project would also follow suit.
 - USACE confirmed.
- NCHPO stated if the replacement bridge allows for larger ships, whether the Cape Fear River north of the project would need to be dredged deeper, and associated foreseeable impacts should be assessed as part of this project (such as larger ships creating larger waves and maintaining a sea wall).
 - USEPA noted a lot of the impacts would be determined by the minimum vertical clearance.
 - FHWA noted none of the proposed alternatives include a higher vertical clearance than the existing bridge. Therefore, larger ships wouldn't pass upstream so the project did not need to that analysis.
 - Division 3 added the Wilmington Harbor USACE Section 408 Project extends up to the rail bridge upstream of the Isabel Holmes bridge. The bridge on US 74/76/421 is a fixed span 55' vertical clearance bridge. The Section 408 project is currently 25' deep but authorized to 38' deep.
 - FHWA stated they would only expect that analysis to occur if any of the alternatives had a higher vertical clearance than the existing bridge.
- NOAA Fisheries noted they heard the deed for the former Kinder Morgan property required future development be industrial.
 - Division 3 confirmed.
- DCM noted the proposed cross section is wide, and inquired whether multiple cross sections could be carried forward (such as, with a narrower MUP) for potential permitting purposes.
 - Division 3 noted NCDOT would conduct avoidance and minimization and look at minimizing the typical section if possible, but traffic studies have shown the proposed six lanes are warranted, and 11' inside shoulders are needed for emergency services pull off.
 - HDR noted the Charleston Ravenel Bridge between Mt. Pleasant and Charleston includes a 12-foot MUP and in conversations with the City they have noted they wish they had utilized a wider MUP. The Ashley River pedestrian bridge currently under construction will include an 18-foot MUP.
 - DCM inquired whether there was analysis that showed how much the MUP was projected to be used.
 - WMPO noted the long-term plan is to connect Leland and Belville to Wilmington via bicycle and pedestrian accommodations for regional connectivity.

- EPU noted NCDOT's Complete Streets Policy will also help inform multimodal accommodations and require NCDOT coordinate with local governments to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian accommodations in plans.
- DCM inquired whether the MUP would have benefits to low to moderate income families.
 - WMPO confirmed, and noted this could be quantified as part of HDR's analysis.
 - DCM note they do not typically permit improvements that cause additional impacts.
- WMPO noted their long range plan includes a 10' MUP which can be modified.
- SMU inquired whether Division 3 has received any feedback on the new Surf City Bridge which includes a 10' MUP.
 - Division 3 noted it has been very successful and had been used by communities on each side.
- DCM inquired whether NCDOT had an update on tolling which was discussed at the CP1 meeting.
 - WMPO noted their Board had approved the project to be considered for tolling. The project was submitted to NCDOT as a toll option, and statewide scores will be released in late April.
 - Division 3 noted the project will be submitted for the Bridge Investment Program Grant and the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant.
 - USEPA inquired whether the project team would analyze the impacts of a potential toll on surrounding EJ communities, and recommended this analysis occur prior to a determination being made on whether the project will be tolled.
 - Division 3 noted if the project moved forward as a tolling project, the community studies technical reports would be updated to include an assessment of tolling impacts on EJ communities.
 - DCM noted tolling would also increase impacts to other resources due to the potential need for toll booths, approach roads, etc.
 - WMPO noted the Board's resolution was explicit in noting the tolling option was submitted for scoring purposes only, to compare against the non-tolled option.
 - USEPA inquired whether the purpose and need of the project would change with a tolled facility.
 - Division 3 noted the purpose of the project was to replace a functionally obsolete structure, and the funding source shouldn't affect the purpose.
 - USEPA noted a tolling facility may affect traffic on the bridge, and the study area would need to change as traffic may be diverted.
 - HDR commented that the Turnpike Authority is preparing a traffic and revenue study.
- NCHPO inquired whether the schedule could be pushed out as there is no funding.
 - Division 3 noted in order to apply for grants, concepts and estimates have to be prepared.
- NCHPO inquired why NCDOT is considering the 65' fixed bridge alternative.
 - Division 3 suggested the 65' fixed vertical clearance bridge be removed and replaced with a 100' fixed vertical clearance bridge.
 - DCM inquired when the USCG NIR study would be complete as that may determine the vertical clearance.
 - Division 3 stated USACE Section 408 would determine the vertical clearance. Division 3 noted if 125' was recommended as the minimum vertical clearance, that could serve as a minimization of the 135' bridge.
 - DCM noted the purpose of CP2 was to select alternatives to carry forward for detailed study, not actually conduct the detailed studies.
 - USACE agreed.
 - HDR noted the project team would also like to obtain public feedback on the alternatives.

- USEPA noted it did not make sense to present alternatives that aren't permissible to the public.
 - Division 3 recommended adding a 100' fixed vertical clearance bridge as 100' vertical clearance was the recommendation from USCG on the Northeast Cape Fear River, and it may not impact the interchange to the west of the bridge like Alternative B (135' Fixed) will.
 - FHWA asked if the merger team might consider eliminating Alternative C and noting the ultimate height for Alternatives A and B will be dependent upon USACE/USCG requirements but will not exceed 135' vertical clearance.
 - USEPA noted the cost analysis should include both movable and fixed alternatives, as the movable components are more expensive and should be compared. USEPA recommended adding a 100' fixed vertical clearance for comparison.
 - Division 3 inquired whether the merger team was comfortable with moving forward with the following alternatives:
 - Alternative A: 65-135' Vertical Clearance Movable Structure
 - Alternative B: 135' Vertical Clearance Fixed Structure
 - Alternative C: 100' Vertical Clearance Fixed Structure
 - No opposition was voiced.
 - DCM noted it would be helpful to document the source of the 100' fixed vertical clearance recommendation.
 - USCG noted they believe the Northeast River recommendation was a different channel. They noted the recommendation provided to the recent Wilmington Rail Project was 135' minimum vertical clearance.
- Division 3 noted the combined CP2 and 2A concurrence form would be sent to the merger team following finalization of these minutes.
 - USACE inquired whether there would be a note that Alternative B could range from 125' to 135', and recommended a note be included on the form the vertical clearances could change based on ongoing studies and input from USACE and USCG.
 - Division 3 confirmed.

NOTE: Based on comments received from SHPO, a +/- 35' vertical clearance range was added to the Alternative C 100' fixed alternative on the CP2 signature form, to clarify that 100' fixed vertical clearance is for study comparison and the final vertical clearance will be determined by the USACE 408 Section and USCG.

Next Steps/Action Items:

- USACE to forward Section 408 e-mail correspondence read aloud to the merger team.
- The project team will send the CP2 and 2A form to the merger signatories following finalization of this meeting summary.
- The project team will provide technical study updates prior to CP3, including the NIR and any determination on vertical clearance requirements from USCG and/or USACE.
- The CP3 meeting will be scheduled in Fall 2024 following public involvement.

Please direct any comments or questions to NCDOT Project Manager Trace Howell at trhowell1@ncdot.gov, or Consultant Project Manager Jeff Dayton at jeffrey.dayton@hdrinc.com.