



Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge Improvement Project

Focus Group Meeting #1
Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School
Newburg, Maryland
Tuesday, December 5, 2006
6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Meeting Summary and Action Items

Name **Organization**

Focus Group Members:

Linda Crandell	Colonial Beach Town Council
Alma Gaddis	Roseland Road Community
Jean Graham	King George County Historical Society
Jack Green	King George County Office of Community Development
Ed Huber	Mirant Morgantown
Joe Martin	Cobb Neck Citizens Alliance
Regina Mundy	One Stop Travel Plaza
John Reardon	Charles County Department of Economic Development
Joe Schumacher	Rep. Jo Ann Davis' Office
Dale Sisson	King George County Board of Supervisors
Jerry Volman	Bryans Road Corporation

Project Team Members:

Brian Bernstein	McCormick Taylor, Inc.
Wayne Boarman	MdTA Police Department
Shawn Burnett	Wilson T. Ballard Co.
Gary Jackson	MdTA
Ivan Marrero	Federal Highway Administration
Teri Moss	MdTA
Kerri Sacchet	McCormick Taylor
Glen Smith	MdTA
Simela Triandos	MdTA

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Glen Smith, Project Manager of the Nice Bridge Improvement Project, welcomed everyone to the first Focus Group meeting. The participants introduced themselves and noted the organization or agency that they were representing. Each participant received a packet of information including the meeting agenda and a summary of the background on and process for conducting the Nice Bridge Improvement Project.

Introduction to the Maryland Transportation Authority

Ms. Sam Triandos, Director of the Capital Planning Division of the Maryland Transportation Authority, provided an introduction to the Maryland Transportation Authority (Authority). Ms. Triandos explained that the Authority operates and manages seven toll facilities throughout the state of Maryland, including the Nice Bridge. She noted that all funding for the Authority is generated from the revenue of the toll facilities.

Role and Responsibilities of the Focus Group

Mr. Smith reviewed the role and responsibilities of the Focus Group. He explained that the project team values the input provided by the Focus Group members. Mr. Smith noted that each Focus Group member's role is to provide information on the Nice Bridge Improvement Project to the organizations, associations and communities that they represent. Additionally, the project team hopes to learn more from the Focus Group members about the current issues in the communities surrounding the Nice Bridge. Mr. Smith noted that while the Focus Group does not issue formal recommendations or decisions, it does serve as a sounding board for information that will later be presented to the public. The goal is that the Focus Group will provide the project team with a local perspective as alternatives are developed.

Introduction to the National Environmental Policy Act Process

Mr. Brian Bernstein, consultant for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project, introduced the Focus Group to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process. Mr. Bernstein explained that NEPA is federal legislation that includes a series of steps that comprise the project planning process. He noted that the Nice Bridge Improvement Project is currently in Stage I of three planning stages. Stage I includes studying the environment that surrounds the Nice Bridge facility. The project team takes an inventory of the natural environmental, cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the study area. Stage I also includes developing preliminary alternatives for the improvements to the Nice Bridge that will be presented at the Spring 2007 Alternatives Public Workshop. He noted that the project team continues to coordinate with the environmental resource and regulatory agencies regarding the different environmental resources within the Nice Bridge study area.

Ms. Kerri Sacchet, consultant for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project, provided a brief introduction to the public involvement activities that are on-going for the project. Ms. Sacchet explained that public involvement is a key part of the project planning process. She noted that the project team provides information to the public in a variety of ways including newspaper announcements, newsletters, brochures, and a project webpage (www.mdtransportationauthority.com; go to Capital Projects link). Equally as important, she noted, is the feedback to the project team from the communities. Ms. Sacchet explained that public meetings are held to provide the public with an opportunity to review information on the project and provide comments back to the project team. It was noted that the Spring 2007 Alternatives Public Workshop is an upcoming public meeting for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project.

Purpose and Need of the Nice Bridge Improvement Project

Mr. Shawn Burnett, consultant for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project, described the study's Purpose and Need. He identified the project purpose as the basis for conducting a study and selecting a solution. The purpose of the Nice Bridge Improvement Project is to:

- Upgrade bridge roadway to conform with existing roadway approaches on both the Maryland and Virginia sides;
- Improve traffic operations and safety across the bridge; and
- Reduce impacts to traffic flow during anticipated significant bridge maintenance and rehabilitation operations.

The project is needed to address the following current conditions at the Nice Bridge that impact traffic operations and safety:

- Bridge roadway features including the lack of median barrier and shoulder area, narrow roadway widths and inconsistent number of travel lanes as compared to approach roadways.
- Steep vertical grade on the bridge.
- Projected peak-hour traffic demand approaches current bridge roadway capacity.
- Extensive weekend and holiday vehicle queues at the bridge.
- Long-term single-lane closures or complete nighttime bridge closures due to scheduled deck rehabilitation in near future, resulting in substantial travel delays.
- Congestion contributes to substantial number of rear-end crashes.

The Focus Group had several questions and comments regarding the Purpose and Need of the Nice Bridge Improvement Project. These included:

- Questions regarding whether or not the project team has taken into consideration the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) activities at the Dahlgren, AP Hill and Indian Head military installations.
- Dahlgren is a major employer for the area. There are security concerns with limited access due to the congestion of current bridge and construction of a new structure.
- There is concern for the current back-ups at the bridge.
- People use the Nice Bridge on holidays to bypass Washington, D.C.
- Were National security needs factored into the purpose and need? Route 301 is the southern backdoor out of the Nations capital. It also serves multiple military bases. Is that being considered? What about the movement of troops and heavy equipment to A.P. Hill and Dahlgren?

The project team noted a range of alternatives would be shown in the future to address the purpose and need and socio-economic issues. Additionally, in response to a question, it was noted that the current vehicle weight limit is 120,000 lbs, and that permits are required for vehicles over this limit.

Levels of Service Discussion

Mr. Burnett explained that the study also examines the level of service at the Nice Bridge. A participant asked what the level of service would be in 2010 for the existing structure. It was noted that the study will include measuring the hours of delay and how often that delay occurs. That would most likely be the best way to approximate the level of service at the bridge in the future.

Project Schedule

Mr. Smith reviewed the Major Milestones Schedule with the Focus Group participants. A participant asked if it was possible to compress the project planning schedule to take less than three years. It was also suggested that a funding timeline be added to the schedule. Concern was noted in regard to the funding commitment for the design and construction project phases. A suggestion made was to develop a funding model.