Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG)

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

Regular Meeting
OPEN SESSION
Tracy Schulz, Chair

Members in Attendance
David Arthur
Jack Broderick
Peter Bradley
Barbara Hitchings
Lynn Farrow
Pat Lynch
Jim Moran
Will Pines*
Jospeh Sagal
Donald Schloss
Tracy Schulz
Steve Wilson

Members Not in Attendance
Nicholas Deoudes

*Member Pines was represented at the meeting by MDOT SHA Deputy Administrator / Chief Engineer of Operations Teri Soos.

Staff in Attendance
Melissa Bogdan
Kellie Boulware
Richard Jaramillo
Charles Kenny
James Kittleman
Kim Millender
Mary O'Keeffe
Robert Rager
Mike Rice
John Sales
Teri Soos
James Turner
Melissa Williams

Others in Attendance
Heather Bagnall, Anne Arundel County District 33
Steve Cohoon, Queen Anne's County
Daniel Allen
Maureen Dixson
Carlie Fournier
Spencer Dixon
Tim Ryan, AECOM

At 6:00p.m. Chair Tracy Schulz called the meeting of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG) to order.

Chair Schulz welcomed Delegate Heather Bagnall, representing Anne Arundel County District 33, to the meeting.

Approval – Minutes of July 12, 2023 Meeting

Chair Schulz asked if there were any amendments to the draft minutes of the July 12, 2023 meeting that were distributed to the members with none being put forward.

Member Broderick motioned to approve the minutes of the July 12 meeting with a second from Member Hitchings. The minutes were approved with a unanimous vote.

Report – Quarterly Group Activities and Recommendations

Chair Schulz stated that per House Bill 56, the BBRAG must report on the group's activities since the last meeting and provide any recommendations they have based on those activities.

Chair Schulz reminded BBRAG members to submit their quarterly activity report to Melissa Bogdan for tracking and use in next year's annual report.

Member Hitchings stated that she shared a brief synopsis of BBRAG meetings to her distribution groups in addition to a briefing of other activities in the area.

Chair Schulz stated that as part of the Queen Anne's fire department, and in conjunction with the Anne Arundel fire department, he visited the site of the eastbound deck replacement project to learn about operating procedures on the bridge while the project is in progress. He added that he also attended the Tier 2 NEPA study open house held at the Kent Island American Legion.

Member Broderick stated he met with Richard Jaramillo to discuss traffic issues and expressed thanks to Richard and Bay Bridge Administrator, James Turner for their efforts to share information and ensure people are informed about operating conditions. Member Broderick stated that he also attended the recent Bay Crossing Study meeting and noted that there is much interest in the community on how the alignment will cross Kent Island.

Member Moran stated that Queen Anne's County awaits further discussion with MDOT SHA regarding pilot studies on the western shore.

Member Schloss stated that he shared the minutes of recent meetings with his neighbors.

Member Arthur stated that he received an inquiry from a community member who suffers from vertigo and who encounters issues with the difference in barrier types on the bridge structures. MDTA Chief Engineer Jim Harkness stated the barrier inconsistency is due to the differing eras in which the bridges were built, and design considerations related to barrier weight. Member Farrow inquired about the driver service for people who do not wish to drive themselves across the bridge and Member Sagal responded that the free service was discontinued a few years ago with a paid service that must be booked in advance in place today.

Member Lynch stated she disseminates information from BBRAG meetings to the Broadneck Council of Communities (BCCC). She stated that she has spoken with property owners near Skidmore who have received notification about MDOT personnel on their property and are looking for information on whether their properties will be impacted. She added that she also witnessed vehicles travelling under lane use signals marked as do not travel. Member Sagal stated that enforcement is taking place.

MDTA & MDOT SHA Updates

MDTA Chief Engineer, Jim Harkness, provided the BBRAG a status update on the five active projects at the Bay Bridge in the Capital Program.

Bay Bridge Capital Projects - October 2023 Update

Pin	Contract No.	Description	AD	NTP	Budget (Thousands $)	Anticipated Completion	Percent Complete (Construction)	Construction (C), Procurement (P) or Design (D) Phase
2501	BB-3013R	On-Call Structural Repairs and Miscellaneous Modifications for Bay Bridge	1/28/21	8/15/21	18,415	Summer 2024	77	C
2504	BB-3012	Queue Detection System	N/A	N/A	1,216	Summer 2023	95	C
2317	BB-3017	Eastbound Bay Bridge Deck Replacement - Phase 1—Package 1	N/A	1/9/23	140,000	Winter 2025/2026 (Phase 1)	13	C
New	New	On-Call Structural Repairs and Miscellaneous Modifications for Bay Bridge	3/1/24	8/1/24	20,000	Summer 2027	N/A	D
2470	BB-3004	Construct Maintenance Equipment Storage Building (Phase 1)	8/1/2025	3/1/2026	9,660	Spring 2028	N/A	D

Member Broderick asked if there was a possibility for BBRAG members to visit the deck replacement worksite as they had done for the westbound span. Mr. Harkness said a site visit for BBRAG members would be considered.

Member Moran inquired if work would be ongoing continuously. Member Sagal responded that work would occur nightly during off-peak hours with lanes reponed by 5:30am. He added that the construction method will differ from the method used for the westbound span as panels will be barged to site and then lifted up to the deck. Responding to a question from Member Moran, Mr. Harkness stated that concerns about steel plates causing traffic slowdowns were considered during design and that measures are in place to minimize impacts. Responding to a question from Member Lynch, Mr. Harkness stated that construction should be compete for Package 1 in early summer of 2025. He added that Package 2 is anticipated to follow immediately afterward and take approximately a year and a half to complete.

Mr. Harkness then shared the following information:

- With the implementation of the Automated Lane Closure System (ALCS), the MDTA has removed 550 control devices (drums and cones) from use on both shores. About 250 control devices remain on both shores to allow for safety in scenarios that the ALCS system is not designed to accommodate.
- Cracking or spalling of the existing bridge deck is repaired with a patch. The patching procedure involves investigating the issue and performing a full or partial depth repair depending on how deep the defect is.

- Current Maryland law does not permit the MDTA to implement automated enforcement of the lane use control signals. Member Moran stated that Queen Anne's County intends to introduce legislation to allow such automated enforcement to be implemented.
- Summer travel pattern data indicates that traffic volumes were the highest since 2019 with the Bay Bridge carrying nearly 250,000 additional vehicles this summer than last summer. The most popular days were Fridays and Saturdays with an average of 95 thousand on Friday and 92 thousand on Sundays.

Responding to a question from Member Lynch, Mr. Harkness stated that there has been a reduction of crashes in the area where the toll booths used to be since they were removed. Mr. Harkness will provide details of the crash data at the next BBRAG meeting.

Member Sagal reiterated that the MDTA works with MDOT SHA on the Lt. Governor's work zone safety program; adding that accidents are now referred to as crashes.

MDTA Director of Planning and Program Development, Melissa Williams stated that field verification is being performed with property owners receiving letters stating that non-invasive studies are being done. The purpose for the visits is to verify the presence of environmental features contained in acquired data. Responding to a question from Member Moran, Ms. Williams stated that the study area is two miles wide and that features still need to be verified even if they are not adjacent to a possible roadway alignment. She added that the letters also allow people with pets to plan accordingly.

Ms. Williams then provided an update for the Bay Crossing Tier 2 NEPA study.

Two in-person and one Virtual Open Houses were held between September 7th and September 14th. The Open Houses were advertised on the project website, through social media, in newspapers, postcards to the project mailing list, e-blasts and press releases. Open House materials featured a brief overview video of the Bay Crossing Study along with over 40 Display Boards providing information on the study.

More than 370 people attended the in-person Open Houses with 223 at the September 7th Open House held at Broadneck High School on 9/7/23; and 153 at the September 12th Open House held at Kent Island American Legion Post 278 on 9/12/23.

The Virtual Open House was held on September 14th had more than 120 attendees tuned in throughout the evening with a maximum of nearly 90 tuning in at any one time. More than 65 questions were entered through the Q&A chat line. The MDTA answered as many as possible during the one-hour dedicated Q&A period, and for questions that the MDTA couldn't get to attendees were encouraged to submit their questions via the on-line comment survey form on the Study website.

The MDTA anticipates the next public meetings to take place in the summer of 2024 when alternatives will be presented for public comment. Responding to a question from Member Moran, Ms. Williams stated that the alternatives will include the form of crossing. She added that in the summer of 2025, the MDTA's recommended preferred alternative will be presented for public input with subsequent coordination with the Federal Highway Administration

(FHWA). Agency agreement on the preferred alternative is expected in 2026. Responding to a question from Member Moran, Ms. Williams stated that a funding plan does need to be developed but the funding does not need to be allocated for the final agreement to be made.

Ms. Williams stated that a total of 125 hand-written comment survey forms were completed at the two in-person Open Houses and, as of 9/18/23, more than 400 survey forms have been filled out via the on-line survey form.

Ms. Williams stated that in addition to the Public Open House Survey Form, an on-line Equity Survey Form was posted on the study website. To date, more than 1,540 forms have been completed. The goals of the Equity Survey are to identify and learn the needs of minority, low income and typically underserved communities and to consider these needs in the development of Bay Crossing and US 50/301 transportation improvement alternatives.

MDOT SHA Deputy Administrator / Chief Engineer of Operations Teri Soos, representing MDTA SHA Administrator Will Pines, provided an update on local projects. She stated that the western ramp management pilot program on the western shore operated from July 18th to Sept. 2nd. Ramps were closed from Thursdays at 10am until 6pm on Sundays. Ms. Soos stated that based on preliminary findings and community input, SHA believes that the pilot did result in travelers staying on US 50 with subsequent less congestion and greater route availability for EMS response. She added that SHA received positive feedback from community members although there were some concerns from Northrop Grumman employees, particularly regarding the Thursday closures. Ms. Soos stated that another community meeting is planned for later this fall for another pilot program next year with considerations for adjusting the hours and not implementing on Thursdays. She added that there were no reported crashes on service or county roads during the pilot.

Ms. Soos stated that in Queen Anne's County, there were two weekend closures on Sept 16th and 17th, and September 30th and October 1st. The pilot involved closing the onramps to westbound US 50 at Exits 39A, 38A, and 37. She added that SHA is still working through data but that there was reduced congestion on MD 18 west of Castle Marina Rd. However, numerous complaints were received from residents on MD 8 who did not like being detoured east to come back west. On September 17th, one crash resulted in 2-lanes being closed on US 50 westbound and a 16-mile backup which caused deteriorated traffic conditions on that day. Member Moran thanked Ms. Soos for her efforts to get the pilot implemented and noted that the 17th was a difficult day for traffic travelling westbound. Her added that the community is looking forward to similar measures next year. Ms. Soos stated that the town hall meetings to be held with the community will be beneficial.

Unfinished Business

Chair Schulz stated that there was no unfinished business outstanding and opened the floor to the group.

New Business

Bay Bridge Run

Bay Bridge Administrator James Turner stated that the run will take place on Sunday, November 12. Coordination is ongoing with both counties and agencies for a safe event. The organizers are predicting 15,000 participants with 14 thousand currently registered to run; an increase of 6% from last year. As in past years, the eastbound span will be closed the night before with one lane eastbound and two lanes westbound with delays possible. More information can be found at baybridgerun.com.

Public Comments

Ms. Maureen Dixson of Annapolis, a volunteer and policy advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, pleaded for greater suicide prevention measures on the Bay Bridge. She shared some resources on barriers that have been added to bridges in other areas: https://afsp.org/bridge-barriers/

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at 6:00p.m.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting of the BBRAG was made by Member Hitchings at 7:30p.m.

ATTACHMENTS: None.