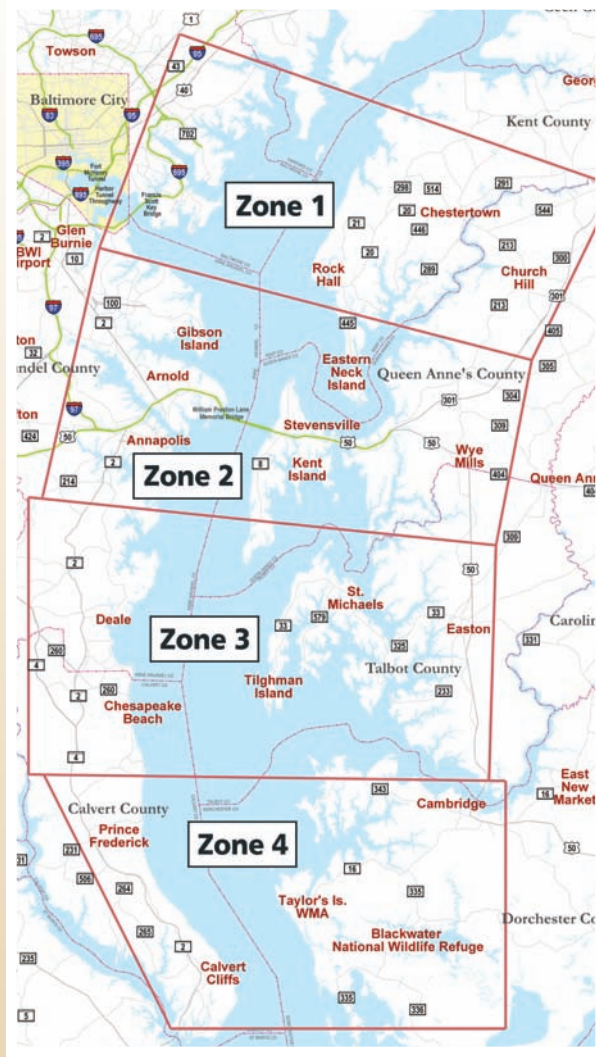




4. Task Force Discussions Meeting #5

As noted earlier in this report, the purpose of Task Force Meeting #5 was to allow the Task Force members to review and discuss the information presented to them and to the public at the workshops. Prior to the meeting each member was asked to consider the three key questions from the original charge given to the Task Force prior to Meeting #1. These three questions, shown below, were then used to facilitate the final discussions of the Task Force.



1. What are the key issues of concern associated with each zone? For example, what sensitive environmental resources could be affected? What objections have the impacted communities raised?
2. What principles should guide future decision-makers in addressing the need for providing additional capacity across the Chesapeake Bay? What procedures should be used to ensure adequate representation of all stakeholders?
3. What additional local or regional goals (besides congestion relief on the existing Bridge) should be considered when determining the location for any additional capacity across the Bay? For example, are there local land use or economic development goals that should be considered?

Task Force Discussions (Meeting #5)

Question #1: Key Issues of Concern

The Task Force, particularly those representing Eastern Shore counties, expressed concern that new capacity would negatively affect communities and other resources within all four zones and questioned the feasibility of a new crossing in any of the zones. However, some Task Force members acknowledged that if a new crossing is considered, some impacts may be unavoidable and the NEPA process should thoroughly evaluate ways to avoid and minimize impacts to communities. Secretary Flanagan acknowledged that these concerns are valid and reiterated his strong commitment to protecting communities and valuable resources in Maryland.

Task Force members from the Eastern Shore counties reiterated that residents in those counties want to maintain the rural character of the Eastern Shore, and that building a road that provides region-wide access but does not provide jobs brings no benefit to the Eastern Shore. They recommended that state and local jurisdictions focus on creating viable jobs, businesses, and industry on the Eastern Shore for its citizens so more roads are not needed. Members also noted that the cost of housing prices on the Western Shore encourages people to find housing on the Eastern Shore and beyond, and that too few economic opportunities exist on the Eastern Shore. However, members also noted that housing in Queen Anne's County is becoming expensive, and creating more roads has caused even more residential development there.

Question 2: Guiding Principles

Nearly all Task Force members agreed that a new crossing should be studied now rather than later, although many had concerns about studying a specific location.

Most felt that retaining an alternative that is infeasible could complicate the evaluation process. Given the time required for a thorough NEPA study as well as the projected worsening traffic congestion, the Task Force members generally agreed that studies should not be delayed. However, it was suggested that a NEPA study process should include other states such as Delaware and Virginia because a portion of the demand for capacity is coming from those states. Members also recommended that the study process should include input from citizens from distant Maryland counties who only use the Bay Bridge a few times a year.

Several Task Force members noted that coordination between the State and local governments is integral to balancing construction of new roads to support existing population and new growth that increases local tax bases. Many Eastern Shore representatives stated that building a new crossing that provides regional access to the Eastern Shore will not provide jobs or any benefit to the Eastern Shore. Some stated that the Eastern Shore needs viable jobs, businesses and industry so its citizens are not dependent upon the Bay Bridge or new highways through its counties.

The Task Force members strongly suggested that the State continue to educate the public about the regulations and requirements to get a project approved under NEPA. However, Task Force members had different opinions about how future studies should be carried out. Some members felt that while each zone has significant issues, all reasonable options, including the no-build, should be evaluated. Other members believed that the State should only spend money studying viable solutions and should drop alternatives or zones that would not solve the problem. Members also said that the NEPA study should not only focus on environmental impacts but also on land use and economic development issues.

Task Force members also recommended that planning is needed to accommodate future traffic demand during maintenance and possible closure of the Eastbound Bridge.

Task Force Discussions (Meeting #5)

It is anticipated that significant maintenance will be required in the next 10 to 15 years from now, which will severely impact the capacity of the Bay Bridge.

Many Task Force members stated an interest in transit as an alternative to additional highway capacity. However, one member noted that the bus service between Kent Island and Baltimore was ended because it could not support its own operating expenses. Members stated that for transit service to be successful, the State must recognize and be willing to accept the cost of supporting a transit system to reduce automobile dependence. Some members raised questions about the viability of a new bridge to support a transit line in terms of impacts to communities and environmental resources. In addition, some questioned if transit stops on the Eastern Shore would be acceptable to nearby communities.

Question #3: Local and Regional Goals

Task Force members agreed that a new crossing would be a major financial commitment for Maryland and therefore should be tied to statewide goals and long range plans. They urged decision-makers to consider where Maryland will be economically in the next 50 years. Members noted that Maryland's economic viability depends on having sufficient and reliable capacity across the Bay, but at the same time, Maryland must also consider how it will protect and manage its rural and urban areas on the Eastern Shore.

The Task Force members stressed that the NEPA study should not only focus on environmental impacts but also on land use and economic development goals. Many noted that local land use and highway construction are inextricably linked, so local land use policies should be tied to transportation solutions. Many Task Force members commented on the potential to slow growth and reduce the demand for capacity across the Bay. Some suggested that because growth follows the addition of highways

and public utilities, limiting that type of infrastructure would also limit growth and the demand for a new crossing; likewise, limiting accessibility to a new crossing and its approach roads can be accomplished by controlling the number and location of interchanges along the proposed roadways. One Task Force member noted that I-97 is an example of where new interchanges and sewer/water lines were limited to prevent sprawl.

The full summary of Meeting #5, which documents the comments of each Task Force member, is included in Appendix A of this report.

