

Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG)

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 6, 2021

Regular Meeting
OPEN SESSION
Tracy Schulz, Chair

At 6:00p.m. Chair Tracy Schulz called the meeting of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG) to order. With this open meeting being done via conference call, a roll call of participants was taken by Ms. Melissa Bogdan to ensure the minutes accurately reflected those persons on the call and to ensure a quorum of the BBRAG was present.

Members in Attendance

Jack Broderick
Barbara Hitchings
Michael Lord
Jim Moran
Jim Ports
Sean Powell
Kurt Riegel
Tim Smith
Tracy Schulz

Members not in Attendance

Hamilton Chaney
Nicholas Deoudes
Pat Lynch
Steve Wilson

Staff in Attendance

Melissa Bogdan
Jamie Cornelius
Ken Fender
Courtney Highsmith
Jim Harkness
Richard Jaramillo
Charles Kenny
Heather Lowe
Kelly Melhem

Kim Millender
Mary O’Keeffe
Will Pines
Robert Rager
Mike Rice
Brad Ryon
Joseph Sagal
Colin Sweetin
Kaleigh Leager

Others in Attendance

Senator Ed Reilly (District 33)
Delegate Sid Saab (District 33, represented by Aysia)
Delegate Mike Malone (District 33, represented by Kathy O’Donovan)
Councilman Nathan Volke (AA Co. District 3, represented by Sara Gannon)
Steve Cohoon, Queen Anne’s County DPW
Ramond Robinson (Anne Arundel Co. DOT)
Todd Mohn (Queen Anne’s Co.)
George Harvey (QATV)

Minutes of October 7, 2020 Meeting

On a motion by Member Riegel with second from Member Broderick, the minutes of the October 7 meeting were approved.

MDTA & MDOT SHA Updates

MDTA Acting Chief Engineer Jim Harkness provided the BBRAG a status update on the 14 active projects at the Bay Bridges in the Capital Program.

Bay Bridge Capital Projects - January 2021 Update

Pin	Contract No.	Description	AD	NTP	Budget (Thousands \$)	Ant. Completion	Design (D), Procurement (P), or Construction (C) Phases
2260	BB-2805R	Clean and Paint Structural Steel of Westbound Bay Bridge - Phase IV	9/15/15	6/1/17	24,686	Summer 2021	C
2329	BB-2757R	Replace 5KV Feeder on EB Span & Redundant Cable	4/16/19	10/15/19	39,593	Fall 2021	C
2342	BB-2754	Rehabilitate Suspension Spans on Westbound Span	3/13/15	7/11/16	46,055	Winter 2020/21	C
2369	BB-2819	Deck Rehabilitation and Miscellaneous Modifications	3/6/19	9/9/19	33,248	Fall 2021	C
2412	BB-3002	Priority Structural Repairs and Miscellaneous Modifications	7/18/16	4/17/17	28,821	Summer 2021	C
2459	BB-3007	Rehabilitate Maintenance Facilities of Eastbound and Westbound Spans	12/20/19	9/1/20	6,327	Fall 2021	C
2469	BB-3005	Miscellaneous Rehabilitation of the Bay Bridge	10/25/17	7/2/18	9,452	Winter 2020/21	C
2476	BB-3008	Bay Bridge Crossover Automated Lane Closure System	5/24/19	2/3/20	17,943	Fall 2022	C
2481	BB-3009	Police Building Generator Replacement	6/26/19	4/6/20	827	Summer 2021	C
2317	BB-3014	Bay Bridge Emergency All Electronic Toll (AET) Conversion	9/25/20	1/11/21	48,500	Fall 2022	C
2501	BB-2726	Rehabilitate Decks of Eastbound Span - Phase I Deck Widening and Replacement of Deck Truss Spans (Eng. Only)	9/26/19	5/2/21	12,050	Fall 2022 (CMAR) Design Phase	P
2470	BB-3013R	On-Call Structural Repairs and Miscellaneous Modifications for Bay Bridge	1/28/21	7/1/21	15,824	Summer 2024	P
2504	BB-3004	Construct Project Management Office and Maintenance Equipment Storage Building	8/11/21	11/29/21	4,520	Summer 2025	D
	BB-3012	Queue Detection System	N/A	N/A	2,045	N/A	D - SHA Coord

Mr. Harkness stated that per the BBRAG Member's request letter the BB-3014 project has been expedited and initiated as an emergency contract by MDTA.

Member Schulz asked for clarification on project BB-2726 and the deck widening mentioned in the description. Mr. Harkness responded that since this project will involve significant work on the bridge deck, it was decided to undertake limited widening along portions of the bridge where it is feasible. He added that the widening is not an additional lane but is intended to improve bridge operations and safety. There may be some slight improvement in traffic capacity only in the limited area of widening.

Responding to a question from Member Moran, Mr. Harkness stated that MDTA's preference is not to do lane closures during peak periods at any time unless necessary but use of peak period closures may shorten the duration of the project (reducing the overall impacts). Furthermore, BB-2726 is still in the design and procurement stage, so lane closures during peak periods cannot be precluded at this time.

Responding to a question from Member Moran, Mr. Harkness stated that the BB-3008 project is about 35% complete and directional boring has been completed.

Responding to a question from Member Riegel, Mr. Harkness stated that the high voltage power lines currently being replaced under project BB-2757R are for various equipment on the bridge such as the lane use gantries, congestion warning signs, aircraft and navigation beacons as well as the dehumidification system for the suspension cables.

Mr. Harkness concurred with a request from Member Moran to add the percentage complete details for each project to the update table.

Mr. Harkness shared and read the text of a Maryland State Senate resolution sponsored by Senator Ed Reilly praising the “compassion, courage, and professionalism” of the MDTA Police in carrying out their duties on the Bay Bridge. Senator Reilly commented that while a lot of people were inconvenienced as a result of the recent shutdown of lanes to manage the incident, human life is precious, and the outcome was favorable. He thanked the BBRAG for recognizing the citation.

MDOT SHA Administrator Tim Smith provided an update on the continued coordination efforts with MDTA and stated that in 2020, MDOT SHA responded to 620 disabled motorist and responded to 1,800 events. Member Schulz thanked MDOT SHA for making additional resources available and for their proactive monitoring for disabled vehicles and other incidents which greatly help the safety of the fire and EMS teams out on the road.

Bay Crossing Tier I NEPA Study Update

Project Manager Heather Lowe provided an update on the study stating that the MDTA is working with their federal, State and local partners to develop a plan that will allow equal access to Bay Crossing Study hearings and associated materials while protecting the safety of the public during the unprecedented health crisis. MDTA anticipates providing more information on the Bay Crossing Study schedule in early 2021.

Responding to a request from Member Moran, Ms. Lowe stated that the draft Environmental Impact Statement must be available for public review before the next phase can begin. Member Ports added that the project is following a federal process and that federal guidance requires in-person public hearings which are not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is causing a holdup but MDTA is working with the Federal Highway Administration to try to find an acceptable solution.

Unfinished Business

Maryland State Ethics Commission Response

BBRAG Chair Schulz stated that at its October 22, 2020 meeting, the State Ethics Commission considered the financial disclosure exemption request for the Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group.

The State Ethics Commission approved the request for an exemption in accordance with the provisions of Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 19A.03.01.04) as it concluded that the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group functions in an advisory capacity only and there was no other compelling reason that would require disclosures.

The Advisory Group remains subject to other requirements of the Ethics Law, including the conflicts of interest provisions found in Subtitle 5 of the General Provisions Article of the Maryland Annotated Code.

BB-3014 Expedition and Board of Public Works letter of support

Member Broderick expressed thanks for the opportunity for the BBRAG to assist with expediting the BB-3014 project as an emergency contract. Responding to a question from Member Broderick, Member Ports stated that MDTA has the delegated authority to approve projects as emergencies but must follow procedures afterward to notify the Board of Public Works (BPW) which the BBRAG's letter will be part of.

New Business

BBRAG Reporting Schedule

MDTA Manager of Government Relations Mr. Bradley Ryon stated that the current construction of the BBRAG was set up by HB56, a bill that was introduced by Delegate Arentz during the 2020 General Session and became law later that year. In addition to the makeup of the group and other provisions, the law sets up a few reporting requirements:

(1) THE ADVISORY GROUP SHALL REPORT ITS ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS QUARTERLY TO THE AUTHORITY.

(2) ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2021, AND EACH JULY 1 THEREAFTER, THE ADVISORY GROUP SHALL REPORT ITS ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The reports need to generally summarize the BBRAG's activities.

Member Powell suggested combining the meeting minutes with a cover letter for the annual report. Member Ports suggested adding links to the materials presented and available on the web.

Incident Management Discussion

Member Moran began the discussion by asking what the BBRAG and other stakeholders such as the counties can do to facilitate the lower frequency of incidents and backups.

Member Ports stated that the Bay Bridge is open to any member of the public and access cannot be restricted since anyone can drive on the bridge. He mentioned that most of these incidents have some aspect of mental health and the courts determine the treatment or other resolution for these individuals. MDTA worked with Queen Anne's County's lobbyist to explain the challenges of emergency/incident management as related to mental health and the court system and based on that information the county can pursue legislation if they want to criminalize this behavior.

Tolling Options Discussion

Member Moran began the discussion by noting the importance of advancing the NEPA study given the BBRAG's acknowledgement that the traffic issues at the Bay Bridge are caused by capacity limitations and asking about the funding status of the Tier II NEPA study which is not contained in the current Consolidated Transportation Plan (CTP), with a follow-up question on implementing dynamic tolling for westbound travelers on the Bay Bridge on Sundays.

Member Ports responded that a Tier II NEPA study will not be funded prior to a Record of Decision (ROD) from the relevant federal agency and therefore will not appear in the CTP.

Member Riegel raised the issue of unexploited strategies for flattening the user demand curve, easing peak demand responsible for long backups and delays during certain seasons and times of day. For example, dynamic pricing is well-known to economists as a useful tool. Price-driven demand need not be large, maybe only 10-15 percent, to have a large effect on demand and backups. While some users are price-insensitive, for example those with fixed beach rental turnover times, it takes only a small percentage of users who possess flexibility to respond to price signals, for significant improvement.

Referring to dynamic pricing and demand management, Mr. Ports stated that it is not strictly a Sunday problem and that such a system would be necessary on other days as well. He added that local government could help ease the pressure on the capacity limitation by placing a moratorium on new developments that create additional traffic and add to the already congested bridge. Mr. Ports also concurred with Member Moran that development in Ocean City in conjunction with several decades of the long-running 'Reach the Beach' campaign and infrastructure improvements (such as the drawbridges removed by Governor Schaefer) exacerbate congestion caused by the capacity constraint.

MDTA's Chief Operating Officer Will Pines added that the scope of a dynamic tolling evaluation is significant and is also not contained in the CTP, and therefore not funded. Implementation of a dynamic pricing scenario would also require public toll hearings, thus necessitating a robust study.

Public Comments

No public comments were received.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting of the BBRAG was made by Member Broderick at 7:35p.m.

The next meeting will be held on April 7, 2021 at 6:00p.m. via Open Meeting Conference Call.

ATTACHMENTS: BBRAG letter of support for BB-3014 to BPW, State Ethics Commission Exemption Approval, State Senate MTA Police Resolution