

Chesapeake Bay Bridge Reconstruction Advisory Group (BBRAG)

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Regular Meeting
OPEN SESSION
Tracy Schulz, Chair

At 6:00 p.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
Nicholas Deoudes
Barbara Hitchings
Jim Moran
Jim Ports
Sean Powell
Donald Schloss

Tracy Schulz
Steve Wilson

Members not in Attendance

Hamilton Chaney
Kurt Riegel

Staff in Attendance

Melissa Bogdan
Jamie Cornelius
Jim Harkness
Natalie Henson
Richard Jaramillo
Charles Kenny
Kim Millender
Heather Lowe
Will Pines

Robert Rager
Mike Rice
Bradley Ryon
Joseph Sagal
Deborah Sharpless
Colin Sweetin
Melissa Williams

Others in Attendance

Pat Lynch, Broadneck
David Frey, Michael Baker
Curtis Coates, Skidmore
Aysia Rodriguez, on behalf of Delegate Sid Saab, District 33
Delegate Heather Bagnall, District 33
Todd Mohn (County Administrator, Queen Anne's Co.)
Christopher Bartlett (QATV)
Steve Cohoon (Public Facilities Planner, Queen Anne's Co.)

Introductions

Chair Schulz thanked Pat Lynch for her years of service to the BBRAG and welcomed Donald Schloss to the Advisory Group as her replacement. Members then introduced themselves and the communities or organizations they represent. Chair Schulz provided details of membership changes that took place on July 1 that included the addition of Mr. Schloss as well as the renewal of terms for Members Deoudes, Moran, and Wilson for a further three years. Mike Lord resigned from the BBRAG in June 2021 and a replacement was not nominated by the Governor prior to this BBRAG meeting.

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Outgoing BBRAG Chair Schulz stated that per the BBRAG By-Laws, the BBRAG must elect a Chair and Vice-Chair for the upcoming year.

Member Broderick motioned to nominate Member Schulz for re-election with a second from Members Moran & Hitchings. Member Schulz was elected Chair with a unanimous vote.

Member Schulz motioned to nominate Member Hitchings for re-election with a second from Members Moran and Deoudes. Member Hitchings was elected Vice-Chair with a unanimous vote.

Approval – Minutes of April 7, 2021 Meeting

Chair Schulz asked if there were any amendments to the draft minutes of the April 7, 2021 meeting that were distributed to members with none being put forward.

Member Hitchings motioned to approve the minutes of the January 6 meeting with second from Member Broderick. The minutes were approved with a unanimous vote.

BBRAG 2021 Annual Report

Chair Schulz stated that the annual report that was distributed to members for comment previously was submitted to the Governor and General Assembly on July 1. Member Broderick stated that the report was very well done and encapsulated what the BBRAG had done over the previous year. Member Powell acknowledged the effort that was undertaken within MDTA and MDOT to prepare the report for submission.

Report – Quarterly BBRAG Activities and Recommendations

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

Member Broderick stated that he had several interactions with organizations on the Eastern Shore with the major issue being traffic on both sides of the bridge and that there are more questions than answers. He added that the local law enforcement vehicles stationed on US 50 are helping with vehicles driving on the shoulder.

Member Hitchings stated that she provided updates to her community via email in addition to providing reports to the Broadneck Council of Communities on the BBRAG meetings and activities at the bridge.

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

MDTA & MDOT SHA Updates

MDTA Acting Chief Engineer Jim Harkness provided the BBRAG a status update on the 11 active projects at the Bay Bridge in the Capital Program.

Bay Bridge Capital Projects - July 2021 Update

Pin	Contract No.	Description	AD	NTP	Budget (Thousands \$)	Anticipated Completion	Percent Complete (Construction)	Design (D), Procurement (P), or Construction (C) Phase
2329	BB-2757R	Replace 5KV Feeder on EB Span & Redundant Cable	4/16/19	10/15/19	50,229	Winter 2021/22	83	C
2369	BB-2819	Deck Rehabilitation and Miscellaneous Modifications	3/6/19	9/9/19	33,248	Winter 2021/22	86	C
2412	BB-3002	Priority Structural Repairs and Miscellaneous Modifications	7/18/16	4/17/17	28,821	Fall 2021	92	C
2459	BB-3007	Rehabilitate Maintenance Facilities of Eastbound and Westbound Spans	12/20/19	9/1/20	6,327	Winter 2021/22	68	C
2476	BB-3008	Bay Bridge Crossover Automated Lane Closure System	5/24/19	2/3/20	17,943	Fall 2022	56	C
2481	BB-3009	Police Building Generator Replacement	6/26/19	4/6/20	1,027	Summer 2021	98	C
2516	BB-3014	Bay Bridge Emergency All Electronic Toll (AET) Conversion	9/25/20	1/11/21	51,456	Fall 2022	23	C
2501	BB-3013R	On-Call Structural Repairs and Miscellaneous Modifications for Bay Bridge	1/28/21	8/1/21	14,400	Summer 2024	N/A	P
2317	BB-2726	Rehabilitate Decks of Eastbound Span - Phase I Deck Widening and Replacement of Deck Truss Spans (Eng. Only)	9/26/19	7/12/21	12,050	Fall 2022 (CMAR) Design Phase 1	N/A	D
2470	BB-3004	Construct Project Management Office and Maintenance Equipment Storage Building	12/9/21	4/5/22	4,520	Summer 2025	N/A	D
2504	BB-3012	Queue Detection System	N/A	N/A	2,045	Fall 2022	N/A	D - SHA Coord

Member Deoudes inquired if there were any graphics available showing what a future automated gates system on the Western Shore would look like. Melissa Bogdan stated that the MDTA maintains a cashless tolling webpage that contains renderings and other information. Mr. Harkness added that the video of the BB-3008 previously shared also gives an indication what future conditions would look like.

Filling in for MDOT SHA Administrator Tim Smith, MDOT SHA Deputy Administrator for Operations Joseph Sagal stated that they are in the middle of their Eastern Shore traffic operations program, which proactively patrols with its emergency response units, monitors its intelligent transportation system (ITS) for data, and works in collaboration with MDTA on called in incidents to alert motorists. Mr. Sagal stated that changes in travel patterns prompted MDOT SHA to begin patrols on Thursdays at noon. He added that MDOT SHA maintains numerous portable variable message signs (VMS) to assist in providing travel information to the public and encouraging through traffic to stay on US 50. Mr. Sagal stated that MDOT SHA continues to utilize data to improve its activities and responses to changes in traffic.

Member Moran commended MDOT SHA for the accuracy of the travel times posted on the Western Shore and requested that variable message signs on the Eastern Shore display travel times for westbound travelers in a similar way to those currently on the eastern shore. Mr. Sagal stated that travel times on the Eastern Shore would be considered by MDOT SHA.

Member Moran requested that a message be added to the 1-800-BAY-SPAN service encouraging travelers to stay on US 50. MDTA Chief Operating Officer, Will Pines stated that an upgrade to the system is currently in progress and will include such a message. Jim Ports added that the MDTA also promotes the message on social media and through its email service.

Member Moran requested that greater efforts be undertaken to keep tractor trailers out of the contra-flow lane where they are already prohibited. Jim Ports added that MDTA will review existing signage at the bridge and will discuss the matter with the Chief of the MDTA Police, Colonel Anderson.

Member Moran commended the MDTA for the speed and quality of their communications regarding the Bay Bridge and added that the situation is much improved in recent years. Member Ports thanked Member Moran and added that efforts continue to improve on this with greater collaboration between the operations and communications teams within the MDTA. Member Powell commended the MDTA for the quality of their communications in addition to their diligence in communicating delays through email and text alerts while reminding travelers to stay on US 50 and keep roadways clear for first responders and local residents. Member Moran stated “we are leaps and bounds ahead of where we were eighteen months ago” and that the MDTA’s effort is appreciated. Member Broderick also expressed thanks for the continually improving communication efforts. Colin Sweeting of MDTA communications expressed thanks for the commendations from the BBRAG.

Bay Crossing Study Tier 1 DEIS Public Hearing Update

Beginning on February 23 the Bay Crossing Study (BCS) Tier 1 NEPA Draft Environmental Impact Statement, or DEIS, was made available for public review and comment through the BCS website. The Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on March 5, 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the facilities that would normally host the document for public viewing were initially closed. After the document was released, facilities gradually opened, and the DEIS was made available for public viewing at 13 locations throughout five counties in the study area.

The public was able to view and comment on the document for a period of 84 days, from February 23 through May 17. Comments were accepted in numerous ways including via email, a comment form on the project website, an old-fashioned letter, through live public testimony at one of the six public hearing testimony sessions in April and through private testimony during all testimony sessions.

Over 880 public comments were received during the comment period. The public comments included both support and opposition to the project and covered a range of topics including general project support or opposition, process and schedule, corridor alternatives, traffic concerns, environmental impact concerns, and specific engineering questions including pedestrian and bicycle access. You can view all public comments received throughout the life of the project including those received during the comment period.

The last formal step in the Tier 1 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, the combined Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision, is anticipated to be completed in Winter 2021/2022. This document will take into consideration all comments received through the Public Hearing comment period, summarize and respond to public and agency comments and identify the selected two-mile-wide corridor alternative. Completion of

the Tier 1 study does not presume the initiation of a Tier 2 NEPA study, since no funding has been identified.

If funding were to become available, a Tier 2 study would identify specific alignment alternatives within the two-mile-wide Selected Corridor Alternative identified during Tier 1. A Tier 2 NEPA Study could take three to five years to:

- identify and evaluate a No-Build Alternative and various crossing alignments within the two-mile-wide Tier 1 Selected Corridor Alternative,
- evaluate how buses, ferries, transportation system management, and demand management could be used in conjunction with these crossing alignments,
- review potential environmental impact,
- determine project delivery methods, such as design-bid-build or design-build, to organize and finance design, construction, operations, and maintenance, and
- FHWA ultimately approving one alignment with a Tier 2 ROD.

The process would need a Tier 2 study ROD before proceeding to final design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction if a build alignment alternative is selected.

Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business brought before the BBRAG.

New Business

MDTA Response to Community Inquiries

Will Pines presented information on recent traffic volumes and the 2015 Life Cycle Cost Analysis study conducted by MDTA in order to address some community concerns and to provide an indication on where traffic volumes may head in the future.

Chair Schulz queried that given the limited lifespan of the existing bridge structures, is it even feasible to construct a third span of the Chesapeake Bay? Member Ports stated that as MDTA is currently engaged in a Tier I NEPA study, the location or form of any new crossing of the Chesapeake Bay will not be determined until the completion of the entire NEPA process of which only the current Tier I study is funded.

Member Wilson inquired about projecting future growth and specifically how long queues need to be before they limit future growth. Will Pines responded that the NEPA process uses land use and regional growth as a basis for projecting future growth. Jim Harkness responded that previous studies utilized historic growth in addition to the Integrated Bay-Nice traffic model while the current TIER I NEPA study was required to utilize the accepted Statewide Traffic Model. Heather Lowe added that they also coordinate with the regional metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to use their models for projections based on population and employment growth data provided by, and coordinated with, their member counties. She added that these are approved forecasts that MDTA is required to use as part of the federal NEPA process. Jim Ports stated that the MDTA often receives criticism regarding projections but that they source data from others; including local governments tasked with creating it.

Jim Harkness presented some information on current traffic volumes on the Bay Bridge. Will Pines added that present increased traffic volumes are impacting the ability of the MDTA to perform maintenance during non-peak daytime periods.

511/Traffic Camera Operations Questions

Will Pines stated that when updates are provided by the MDOT Coordinated Highway Response Team (CHART) they are also entered into the 511 system. Other services such as 1-800-BAY-SPAN, social, and Facebook are also updated with the same information.

Jim Harkness provided an overview of the BB-2819 project to replace the overhead gantries on the westbound bridge. He added that the work necessitates turning off the traffic cameras to install new ones which explains why outages sometimes occur.

Community Member Tolling Recommendation

Member Hitchings shared an inquiry she received from a member of her community regarding current tolls on the Bay Bridge and whether the BBRAG could provide a recommendation on the matter. Will Pines stated that MDTA has done some brief investigation into different tolling methods but a potential Tier II NEPA study would undertake a more comprehensive study of tolls. He added that bi-directional tolling incurs some concerns with operational cost to MDTA, and separate jurisdictions on either side of the bay but would also not reduce traffic volumes.

Member Hitchings asked if increased tolls would be a possible solution. Member Ports responded that tolls are set through a public process, adding that if BBRAG would like to see if current Bay Bridge tolls can be increased, they should start at the local level and build support with elected officials, local government, and the public on both sides of the bridge. He cited the I-495 P3 project as one where elected officials, local government, and local communities are successfully engaging with the toll-setting process. Member Ports stated that dynamic tolling would impact local traffic as alternative toll-free route options for local communities do not exist at the Bay Bridge.

Member Deoudes stated that changes to tolls alone would not solve the traffic congestion problem.

Head-On Incidents

Member Deoudes asked if collision data is being monitored and if other steps could be taken to reduce the causes of crashes on the bridge. Member Ports stated that the MDTA does track crashes as shown below.

Reportable crashes on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge while either span was in two-way operations:

Year	Total Crashes during two-way operations	Rear end crashes	Head on crashes	Other
2016	16	14	1	1
2017	18	14	1	3
2018	21	19	1	1
2019	17	12	2	3
2020	29	24	2	3
2021 (Through 6/8)	7	5	2	0
Total	108	88 (82%)	9 (8%)	11 (10%)

He provided some statistics for crashes in recent years and stated that the removal of the toll booths should assist with rear-end collisions that most frequently occurred at that location.

He added that distracted driving is a behavioral issue that is challenging to prevent.

- The overwhelming majority of crashes during two-way operations are rear end crashes. Causes for these crashes include distracted driving, following too closely and excessive speeds. The MDTA Police urge drivers to devote their full time and attention while crossing the Bay Bridge and during all travels.
- Of the 9 head on crashes between 2016 and 6/8/2021, 4 were caused by drivers under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Other causes include distracted driving and drivers changing lanes while attempting to avoid a rear end crash.
- The MDTA Police remind motorists of these tips from our partners at the MDOT MVA Highway Safety Office:
 - Be the MAKE A PLAN Driver and Be the SOBER Driver: One-third of fatalities and serious injuries on Maryland roadways involve an impaired driver. Designate a sober driver, be the sober driver or make a plan for a safe and sober ride home through a taxi, a rideshare service or public transportation.
 - Be the SLOW DOWN Driver: Many crashes occur when drivers exceed the speed limit or drive too fast for the conditions. Leave a few minutes early and take some extra time to get to your destination.
 - Be the FOCUSED Driver: Maryland law forbids talking or texting on a handheld phone while driving, including while stopped at a traffic light. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for five seconds. At a speed of 55 mph, that equates to traveling the length of a football field blindfolded.

Public Comments

Delegate Bagnall stated that she has received feedback regarding signs that remind travelers to stay on US 50 and that she has not seen those signs in place yet for the summer season this year.

Ms. Pat Lynch stated that her community's requests to close local roads to Bay Bridge traffic were denied as the roads are federally funded. The funding is contingent on full access by all road users regardless of their journey or travel intent.

Mr. Curtis Coates, a citizen of the Skidmore community, inquired about the presence of cones on Skidmore Drive near the intersection with Oceanic Road that he says are restricting vehicle movements and affecting his commute.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting of the BBRAG was made by Member Moran at 8:42 p.m.

The next meeting will be held on October 6, 2021 at 6:00p.m.

ATTACHMENTS: Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) Study Limits presentation, Gantry/camera replacement information, Automated Lane Closure System Project flyer.