

IV. COORDINATION AND COMMENTS

Public involvement and agency coordination are two important components since the project's study area involves portions of two states (Maryland and Virginia). This was taken into consideration when developing the project's Public Involvement Plan and Interagency Coordination Plan.

The project team uses multiple strategies to engage citizens and resource and regulatory agencies in the project, including informational publications, meetings, and a website. Valuable input has been received from the public and agencies in both states via these strategies. Additional coordination with the regulatory and resource agencies occurs at project milestones and through on-going correspondence.

Public involvement and agency coordination will continue throughout the Nice Bridge Improvement Project to ensure all stakeholders have the opportunity to share their questions and comments.

A. INTERAGENCY COORDINATION, MEETINGS, AND CORRESPONDENCE

1. Interagency Coordination

An Interagency Coordination Plan was developed to identify which resource and regulatory agencies would function as the lead, cooperating, and participating agencies for the project, in accordance with the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). The lead, cooperating, and participating agencies are identified in *Table IV-1*. The Interagency Coordination Plan also identifies the agencies' roles and responsibilities, and project milestones, including agency meetings and coordination. Please refer to the Interagency Coordination Plan in *Appendix F* for additional information.

2. Interagency Meetings

The kick-off meeting (i.e. Scoping Meeting) with agencies for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project was held on October 12, 2006. Twenty federal, state, and local participating and cooperating agency representatives met with the project team at the Charles County Department of Social Services in La Plata, Maryland. Agency representatives were presented with the Purpose and Need, background information on the Nice Bridge study area, the Public Involvement Plan, and the project schedule. Several agencies asked the team to conduct further research on certain environmental issues. Other agencies provided input on additional environmental and community resources in the Nice Bridge study area.

The Nice Bridge project team met with agency representatives for a second time in the winter of 2007. A meeting was held on January 22, 2007 with representatives from Virginia resource and regulatory agencies at the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in Richmond, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to update Virginia agencies on the project since the fall 2006 Agency Scoping Meeting. The project team presented information on the concepts for alternates, the preliminary environmental inventory, and the agency coordination and public involvement processes. On February 21, 2007, the project team presented the same information

Table IV-1: Lead, Cooperating, and Participating Agencies

Lead Agencies			
Maryland Transportation Authority		Federal Highway Administration	
Cooperating Agencies			
US Coast Guard	Maryland Department of the Environment	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - National Marine Fisheries Service
US Army Corps of Engineers	Virginia Department of Transportation	US Environmental Protection Agency	---
Participating Agencies			
National Park Service	Maryland Historical Trust	Maryland Department of Planning	Virginia Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Maryland Department of Natural Resources	Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation	Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
US Department of Agriculture - Natural Resource Conservation	Maryland Department of Natural Resources - Critical Area Commission	Virginia Department of Historic Resources	Virginia Outdoors Foundation
US Navy/ Naval Support Facility Dahlgren	Maryland Department of Transportation	Virginia Marine Resources Commission	Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy
Maryland State Highway Administration	Charles County Dept. of Planning & Growth Management	King George County Planning Commission	Virginia Dept. of Forestry

to Maryland resource and regulatory agency representatives and federal agency representatives at the Interagency Review Meeting (IRM) held at the Maryland State Highway Administration.

The project team provided an update to federal and Maryland resource and regulatory agency representatives at an IRM in November 2007. Copies of the draft *Combined Purpose and Need and Alternates Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS) Package* were distributed to the agency representatives at the IRM. The package included the project’s Purpose and Need and the ARDS report. The ARDS report describes the range of alternates considered initially for the project and descriptions and explanations for the alternates that were dropped from further consideration and those kept to be evaluated in detail. At the same time, the draft *Combined Purpose and Need and ARDS Package* was mailed to the Virginia agencies for review and comment.

In April 2008, the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published the final rule on wetland mitigation in the Federal Register (*Compensatory Mitigation for Losses of Aquatic Resources*). Coordination with environmental regulatory agencies was completed to ensure the new final rule mitigation requirements would be met for the project. On April 20, 2009, a field view was conducted with ACOE, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR)—Critical Areas to review project

impacts and potential sites for wetland mitigation. A total of five preliminary mitigation sites were reviewed. Each of these sites was included in the draft wetland Compensatory Mitigation Plan (CMP), which is included as *Appendix D* of this EA for additional agency comment and public review. The final CMP will be completed as part of the Section 404 (Clean Water Act) permit application process.

Meetings with agencies will continue to take place throughout the Nice Bridge Improvement Project to ensure that they are kept informed and up-to-date on the issues and processes of the project.

3. Interagency Correspondence

Letters were sent to agencies in September 2006 informing them the Authority had initiated a project planning study for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project. The letters requested agencies provide any information on resources within the Nice Bridge study area relevant to each agency's expertise and jurisdiction.

In March 2007, letters were sent to the project's identified regulatory and resource agencies, requesting they function as a participating agency on the project. Seven agencies were asked to be cooperating agencies (*Table IV-1*). Cooperating agencies are a subset of participating agencies, per SAFETEA-LU, and are agencies with jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to the project or its impacts.

In fall 2007, the participating and cooperating agencies, per SAFETEA-LU, were given an opportunity to comment on the draft *Combined Purpose and Need and ARDS Package*. The revised *Combined Purpose and Need and ARDS Package*, available on the project's website at www.nicebridge.maryland.gov and on the enclosed CD, was sent to cooperating agencies for concurrence in February 2008, and final agency concurrence was received in April 2008.

Agency correspondence can be found in *Appendix B*.

4. Naval Support Facility Dahlgren Community

The Authority has conducted additional ongoing coordination with the Naval Support Facility (NSF) Dahlgren. The Nice Bridge project team coordinates with NSF Dahlgren communications staff to ensure that Nice Bridge project information is relayed throughout the base. The communications methods include an electronic newsletter and emails to the residents and employees of the base.

B. FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

The focus group for this project consists of approximately 19 members, listed in *Table IV-2*, who represent businesses, communities, institutions (including local governments), and organizations in the study area.

Table IV-2: Nice Bridge Improvement Project Focus Group Members

Community/Business/Organization	
Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland	Cobb Neck Citizens Alliance
Town of Colonial Beach	One Stop Travel Plaza
King George County Planning Commission	Robertson's Crab House
Mirant Morgantown Power Plant	Oxon Hill Bike Club
Cliffton on the Potomac Community	Office of the 1 st Congressional District of Virginia
Roseland Road Community	King George County Board of Supervisors
Great Mills Trading Post	Naval Support Facility Dahlgren
King George County Office of Community Development	Bryans Road Corporation
Charles County Department of Planning & Growth Management	Naval Support Facility Dahlgren

The focus group setting involves two-way communication between the Nice Bridge project team and focus group members. The focus group members are provided with project information and, in turn, provide their local perspective. The project team also asks focus group members for input on information and materials to be shared with the public to ensure that information is disseminated as clearly and effectively as possible. Focus group members are asked to share the project information they receive with the communities, businesses, institutions, or organizations they represent, and report any feedback. There have been four Focus Group meetings to date (*Table IV-3*).

Table IV-3: Summary of Focus Group Meetings

Focus Group Meeting	Date	Location	Purpose
Focus Group Meeting #1	December 5, 2006	Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School Newburg, Maryland	Introductory meeting for the focus group where the project team presented background information on the project, the project's purpose and need, the project schedule, and the public involvement opportunities that would occur throughout the project.
Focus Group Meeting #2	May 10, 2007	Naval Support Facility Dahlgren Dahlgren, Virginia.	Discuss the preliminary alternates and the information to be presented at the May 31 st and June 7 th Alternates Public Workshops. Focus group members provided updates from their communities and organizations and offered input on the information and displays to be presented at the public workshops.
Focus Group Meeting #3	January 24, 2008	Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School Newburg, Maryland.	Presentation of the seven proposed alternates to be evaluated in detail and the related environmental studies being conducted to assess the alternates. Focus group members were also provided with a summary of comments received from the public at and following the spring 2007 Alternates Public Workshops.
Focus Group Meeting #4	February 10, 2009	Potomac Elementary School Dahlgren, Virginia	Presentation of the refined Alternates Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS) including draft provisions for a bikeway facility, information on the Draft EA, and information regarding the fall 2009 public hearings.

C. PROJECT INITIATION

In August 2006, a 3” x 10” public notice was placed in the following six regional and local newspapers in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington DC announcing the initiation of a project planning study for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project: The Baltimore Examiner, The Free-Lance Star, The Journal Press, The Maryland Independent, The Richmond Times-Dispatch, and The Washington Post. The public notice described the reasons the Authority was conducting the Nice Bridge Improvement Project and the environmental studies that would be conducted, and provided the Authority’s contact information.

In addition to publishing the notice in newspapers, a Project Initiation mailer was also mailed to the residents and businesses within the study area. The mailer included the same information as the Project Initiation public notice, but also included a perforated mail reply page with a comment form, postage included, to be sent back to the Authority. The comment form was an opportunity for members of the public to express any questions or thoughts they had on the project as well as an option to be added to the project mailing list. The Authority received 88 completed comment forms from members of the public in response to the project initiation mailer.

D. ALTERNATES PUBLIC WORKSHOP AND CITIZEN CORRESPONDENCE

The Authority held the Nice Bridge Improvement Project Alternates Public Workshops on May 31, 2007 at Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School in Newburg, Maryland, and June 7, 2007 at the Potomac Elementary School in Dahlgren, Virginia.

A 3” x 10” public notice was placed in the following nine regional and local newspapers in Maryland, Washington DC, and Virginia to announce the spring 2007 Alternates Public Workshops: The Baltimore Examiner, The Enterprise, The Free-Lance Star, The Journal Press, The Maryland Independent, The Richmond Times-Dispatch, The Westmoreland News, The Washington Hispanic, and The Washington Post. The notice included the dates, times, and locations of the workshops, and a summary of the information that would be presented at the workshops. The public notice encouraged members of the public to call, email, or mail comments to the Authority should they have any questions or need further information on the workshops. Please see *Appendix E* for copies of the public notices.

A 4” x 6” post card was also mailed to over 1,400 residents and businesses in the Nice Bridge study area announcing the spring 2007 workshops, including the dates, times, and locations of the workshops. Please see *Appendix E* for a copy of the post card.

Over 130 citizens attended the May 31st and June 7th workshops. The Authority held one workshop in Maryland and one workshop in Virginia to accommodate stakeholders in both states. Information on the preliminary alternates, the Purpose and Need, and the assessment of the surrounding natural environmental and social resources were presented. A nine-page brochure was also distributed to the public at the workshops. The brochure provided a summary of the project, a description of the preliminary alternates, the public involvement activities

conducted to date, and identification of the environmental resources in the study area. Please refer to *Appendix E* for a copy of the Alternates Public Workshop brochure.

The workshops were used to gather input from citizens. Project team members were on-hand at the workshops to answer questions and listen to and document comments from the public. Comment cards were distributed to members of the public as they entered the workshop. Attendees could either submit their comments at the workshop, or mail or email their comments to the Authority afterward.

A range of comments were received from the public during and following the workshops. The comments received were regarding the preliminary alternates, community access, natural environmental resources, community/business resources, design/aesthetics, existing bridge issues (traffic/tolls), and project schedule/funding. Please refer to the *Summary of Public Comments in Appendix E*.

All comments received from the public were taken into consideration during the development of the Alternates Retained for Detailed Study (ARDS) following the spring 2007 Alternates Public Workshops.

As a follow-up to the public workshops, a project newsletter was distributed to 1,606 residents and businesses in the study area in April 2008 (*Appendix E*). The newsletter provided project updates including a summary of the spring 2007 Alternates Public Workshops and the refined list of alternates (seven) to be assessed in detail in the planning study.

E. BRIEFINGS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY/BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

The project team has met with and presented information to a variety of stakeholders from Maryland and Virginia, including elected officials and community/business organizations (*Table IV-4*). The purpose of the meetings with elected officials and community/business organizations is to provide background information on the Nice Bridge Improvement Project, answer questions, and gather input related to the project from the individuals and organizations.

F. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE OUTREACH

In compliance with Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in the Minority and Low-Income Populations,” the team identified potential minority and/or low-income communities within the study area. One environmental justice community, the Aqua-Land Campground, was identified adjacent to the Nice Bridge. An Environmental Justice (EJ) Outreach Plan was developed to ensure people living in this community were kept informed and given the opportunity to comment on the Nice Bridge Improvement Project. Announcements for the spring 2007 Alternates Public Workshops were provided to the potential EJ community in May 2007. In the summer of 2007, copies of the brochure from the Alternates Public Workshops were also hand-delivered to the potential EJ community. On November 28, 2007, the project team conducted a community briefing to the Aqua-Land Campground to give a project update and provide an opportunity for the community to ask questions and provide feedback. The

project team will continue to coordinate and share project information with the potential EJ community throughout the planning study for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project.

Table IV-4: Briefings to Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Date
Southern Maryland Delegation, MD	January 23, 2009
Delegate John Bohanan, MD	May 6, 2008
Western Charles County Democratic Club	February 21, 2008
Southern Maryland Delegation, MD	February 1, 2008
Charles County Commissioners	December 4, 2007
Aqua-Land Community, MD	November 28, 2007
Cub Scouts Troop, La Plata, MD	October 17, 2007
King George County Board of Supervisors, VA	September 4, 2007
Western Charles County Business Association, MD	May 8, 2007
King George County Chamber of Commerce, VA	March 12, 2007
Southern Maryland Delegation, MD	February 16, 2007
Naval Support Facility Dahlgren, VA	November 14, 2007 & September 14, 2006
King George County Board of Supervisors, VA	August 15, 2006
Charles County Commissioners, MD	July 24, 2006
Charles County Chamber of Commerce	June 15, 2006

G. PROJECT WEBSITE

The website for the Nice Bridge Improvement Project can be found at www.nicebridge.maryland.gov. The website's purpose is to serve as an information hub for the public and agencies. The website was created in 2006 during project initiation. People visiting the site will find a Home Page that includes background information on the project, a map of the study area, and links to a quick facts sheet and the spring 2008 project newsletter. The site also includes sections on the project's purpose and need, alternates, public involvement activities, project schedule, agency coordination, and related projects. Digital versions of the brochure and displays from the spring 2007 Alternates Public Workshop were posted to the website to serve people who wanted more information on or were unable to attend the workshops.

The website also functions as an additional means of gathering feedback from interested members of the public. A comment/contact form is featured on the website where people can request to be added to the project mailing list and submit a comment or question to the project team. Over 80 people submitted comments and/or requests to be added to the project mailing list through the website comment/contact form.

The project team ensures the website is maintained and updated on a regular basis to provide the most pertinent and useful information to the public.