

## **Open Work Session**

### **Letter of Support for Construction of Replacing the Chesapeake Bay Bridge**

**February 15, 2022**

Mr. Holloway asked if it is true that Mr. Cannon's father tried to talk them into building a four-lane bridge when they built that bridge originally back in the 1950s because he heard that story, to which Mr. Cannon responded, he heard that same thing, but, surprisingly, he never had that conversation with his father. Mr. Holloway said he heard somewhere that he tried to convince them, and it would have been a lot simpler if they had done it then.

Mr. Todd Mohn, Queen Anne's County Administrator, and Jim Moran, Queen Anne's County Commissioner, came before Council. Mr. William Pines with the Maryland Transportation Authority and Mr. Steve Cahoon with the Queen Anne's County Department of Public Works participated in the meeting via Zoom videoconference.

Mr. Mohn explained, they are here today simply to request mutual support from Wicomico for a replacement Bay Bridge situation at the current location of the existing spans of the Bay Bridge within the I-97 to 404 corridor. He said they want to emphasize that they want to see this project move forward through the NEPA phase 1, which is coming to a conclusion next month, and then the funding for the NEPA phase 2 would follow that, which would provide the planning and design attributes that would provide for the next phase, which would be construction thereafter. He said they have partnered with their friends from Anne Arundel County, in large part due to County Commissioner Jim Moran, who has been working with his colleagues over there and they have done a joint Resolution to support a replacement Bay Bridge at that location connecting Anne Arundel to Queen Anne's County. He said they are asking for the support of all the Maryland jurisdictions, and they have a few others so far.

Mr. Mohn said, in addition, they would also urge all of their fellow Councils and Commissioners throughout the State to put this project as one of their top priorities in their annual MDOT CTP priority letter, which is due April 1. He said the key thing is that they want to see the NEPA funding put into the transportation budget approved by the Governor so the project continues going forward.

Mr. Moran said this is a larger than all of us type project and he believes would be the largest project the State has ever taken on transportation-wise with this corridor project from I-97 to 404. He said, of the existing structures, one was opened in 1951 and the other in 1973, and the 1951 bridge has passed its natural 50-year life cycle and the second bridge is coming up on it, and he believes it is going to cost another \$2.3 billion dollars to maintain them for the next 30 to 40 years. He said the price of this project is a high one, but for their commerce, beach traffic, and their citizens, that is the only crossing they have, so it makes sense to put it there. He said the State already owns the right-of-way, the environmental impact will be minimal there, and all roads lead to that location, so that is why they support the replacement bridge as an eight-lane minimum bridge to get this for now and for the future to come. He clarified, even if everything goes well, he thinks they are still 12 to 14 years away from driving over it. He said anybody who watches the news sees what kinds of issues they have during the summer months and it is going to get exponentially worse, and that is why they are here to get support from everybody who feels the same way and sees this as a priority for their commerce and their citizens. He then thanked the Council for considering this letter of support.

Mr. Dodd thanked them for coming here. He said he has been going to MACo meetings for many years now and there has been a lot of discussion from members of the Councils and Commissioners on the Upper Shore and it seemed like some of those members were against a replacement bridge or a wider bridge, or even a new span. He then asked what changed, to which Mr. Moran responded, Anne Arundel County was totally opposed to it. Mr. Dodd said it seemed like some of the Eastern Shore people were against it as well, to which Mr. Mohn responded, they were opposed because they did not want it landing in their County. He said, now that they have supported having a replacement bridge at the current location in the current corridor along with Anne Arundel, others are fine with that. Mr. Moran said Kent County did not want it cutting through their County and Talbot definitely did not want it coming through St. Michaels. He said those two have the corridors, so they have already joined on and sent a letter of support for this location. Mr. Dodd said he thinks some of them believed it would bring more people to the Eastern Shore, to which Mr. Moran responded, that is correct, and that is one of the fights they had. He said they are just trying to manage the situation that has already been given to them with the explosion that has gone on at the Delaware and Maryland beaches. He explained, with the amount of tourism that comes across, he thinks it is up to 8 million every summer, so they need the infrastructure to handle that capacity. He said everybody goes to the Shore on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday, but they all come home Sunday night. He said last year there was a record 17-mile backup.

Mr. McCain asked if this is the recommendation the State made when they did their study and their recommendation was to pick this corridor and they abandoned all the other options, to which Mr. Moran responded, that is correct. He said the decision will come around March 14. Mr. Pines clarified, they are saying March or April, and it is approved first by Federal Highway and then Maryland Transportation Authority would sign off on it after they receive their approval.

Mr. Cannon said, for the public, please briefly explain exactly what is being proposed, to which Mr. Moran responded, that is a little bit tricky because what is being proposed is a replacement bridge or structure with a minimum of eight lanes and hopefully with shoulders. He said phase 2 of NEPA will determine if it is going to be a bridge and a tunnel, or if it is going to be two bridges or one bridge, so all of that will be decided in phase 2 of the study.

Mr. Pines added, essentially, the phase 1 study that is ongoing needed to primarily determine the location for the crossing, and they evaluated 14 separate corridors up and down the Bay. He said phase 2 will really focus on a two-mile wide swath along that corridor 7 preferred alternative to find the specific alignment for the new highway and bridge. He said the proposal the County is recommending is a replacement structure where the existing bridges would be removed, and the phase 2 study will evaluate that option along with other options, as Mr. Moran mentioned. He said it will also look at things like ferry crossings, using traffic management systems, etc. to see if there is any opportunity to better manage the traffic to meet the purpose and need of the study.

Mr. Cannon said, for the public, please tell them the location, to which Mr. Moran responded, it is a two-mile wide swath they have chosen, but they are hoping it will be the same location because, again, the roads are there, the right-of-way is there, and it would be less of an impact on the environment putting it right exactly where it is now.

Mr. Pines said he would like to explain what is meant by a two-mile swath. He said today there are two bridges spaced apart, and technically they could put a new bridge right up the middle, for example, but they have not done investigations underwater to know if there is submerged aquatic vegetation or

things that would be an environmental impact. He said, likewise, they could put it to the north up the Bay, but that would have impacts to Sandy Point Park. He said each one of these impacts from different alignments would be fully evaluated to come up with the preferred alternative recommended alignment for the crossing. He clarified, they do not have the analysis done to say exactly where it is going to be within the existing corridor.

Mr. Hastings said he remembers hearing that if they were going to choose any of those other locations or even the current location, there was some sort of law that the majority of the Eastern Shore Counties had to be in agreement. He then asked if that is part of why they are here, or just to try to accelerate funding, to which Mr. Moran responded, that is correct.

Mr. McCain said he might be the only Council person who has run across the Bridge because he always does the annual run every year, and Ms. Sande has too, to which Mr. Moran responded, they have not missed one yet. Mr. Mohn said they are planning the next Bay Bridge run on November 13 of this year, so they can all join them for that. Mr. Cannon said he has never done it, but would really like to.

Ms. Acle asked if the environmental impact study on this is on their website, to which Mr. Mohn responded, the County does not do the study, the State does the study. Mr. Pines responded, if she goes to [baycrossingstudy.com](http://baycrossingstudy.com), all of the environmental documentation is publicly available on the website.


Mr. Cannon asked for a Council consensus to send the letter, to which there was unanimous consensus.

There was no further discussion.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
John T. Cannon, President, At-Large


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ernest F. Davis, Vice President, District 1

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
William R. McCain, At-Large

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Nicole Acle, District 2

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Larry W. Dodd, District 3

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Josh Hastings, District 4

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joe Holloway, District 5

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Laura Hurley, Council Administrator