



Task Force Report



Task Force on Traffic Capacity Across the Chesapeake Bay

July 2006

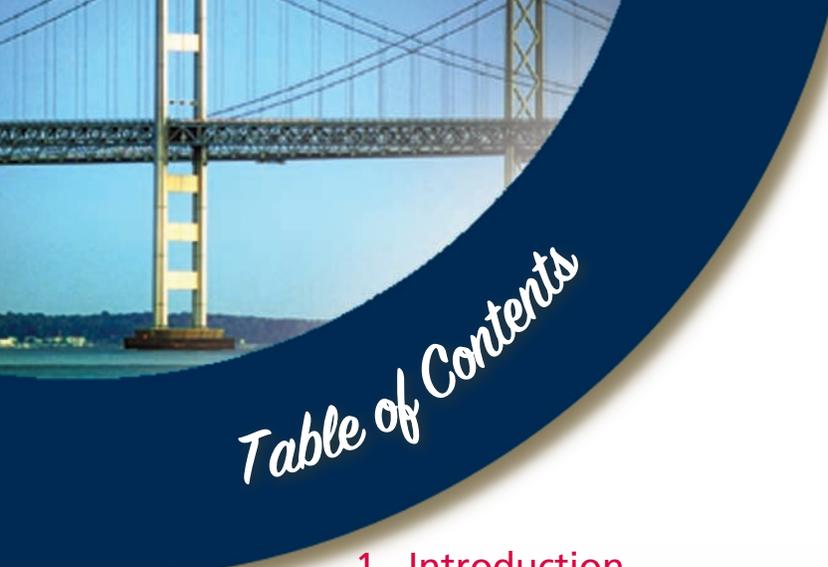


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1. Introduction



Purpose of the Task Force

Traffic across the Bay Bridge has been increasing steadily since the parallel spans were constructed; the original two-lane bridge in 1952 and the second three-lane bridge in 1973. Since 1952, population and job growth on both sides of the Bay have increased significantly, resulting in an increase in the volumes of local and regional trips, and increased congestion and its associated effects (e.g., accidents, increased truck traffic, delays, environmental concerns, and others).

The Maryland Transportation Authority (Authority) is responsible for constructing, managing, operating, and improving the State's toll facilities including the Bay Bridge. As part of the ongoing mission to provide Maryland's citizens and visitors with safe and convenient transportation facilities, the Authority is evaluating the need for additional capacity across the Chesapeake Bay.

In 2001, the Maryland Transportation Authority initiated a study of the transportation and safety needs associated with the existing Bay Bridge. The 2004 Transportation Needs Report was the result of that study and presented the assessment of existing and future operations and safety of the Bridge.

Introduction

In January 2005, recognizing that there are many complex and sensitive issues to consider to address the needs, Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Secretary and Authority Chairman Robert L. Flanagan convened a Task Force to examine the range of issues and help educate stakeholders about the needs for possible additional capacity across the Bay.

The Task Force received detailed information on the history of the existing bridges, the transportation and safety needs identified in the 2004 Transportation Needs Report, construction of major water crossings, traffic forecasts, the environmental review and regulatory process, and growth and economic development.

Two co-chairs, Senator J. Lowell Stoltzfus and O. James Lighthizer, were selected by Secretary Flanagan to lead and facilitate the Task Force meetings. In addition, 21 Task Force members and seven ex-officio members were appointed by the Secretary.

The Task Force was comprised of members of the Senate of Maryland and Maryland House of Delegates and local representatives of the travel, trucking, banking, and construction industries.

The ex-officio members included the leaders of the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Authority, Maryland Department of Planning, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Business and Economic Development, Maryland Department of the Environment, and Critical Area Commission for the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays.

The work of the Task Force is the beginning of a comprehensive planning and public involvement process. The purpose of the Task Force was to gather information and identify issues; it was not to select a specific location or a project for development. Following the Task Force process, State and Federal agencies and officials may engage in the study of a Bay crossing under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, which would include, among other things, a study of all reasonable alternatives for a Bay crossing and the impacts a new Bay crossing could have on the natural and human environment. The NEPA process would provide multiple opportunities for public involvement.

Task Force Members

1. Lon Anderson, AAA Mid-Atlantic
2. Delegate John Arnick, District 6
3. Senator John Astle, District 30
4. Andrew N. Barrow, Harbor Bank
5. Commissioner Sonny Bloxom, Worcester County
6. Chief Walter T. Coryell, Chestertown Police Department
7. Commissioner William H. Cox, Maryland Transportation Commission
8. Councilwoman Effie M. Elzey, Dorchester County
9. Jeffrey E. Frank, PhD, Patton, Harris, Rust & Associates
10. H. Victoria Goldsborough, Caroline County Board of Education
11. Senator Janet Greenip, District 33
12. Senator Rona E. Kramer, District 14
13. Delegate Mary Ann Love, District 32
14. Mayor James N. Mathias, Jr., Ocean City
15. Delegate Anthony J. O'Donnell, District 29
16. Senator Edward J. Pipkin, District 36
17. Commissioner Susan Ellsworth Shaw, Calvert County
18. Alan I. Silverstein, Talbot County Chamber of Commerce
19. Delegate Richard A. Sossi, District 36
20. Walter Thompson, Maryland Motor Truck Association
21. W. Gregory Wims, President and CEO, Hammer and Nails, Inc.

Ex-Officio Members

1. Robert L. Flanagan, MDOT Secretary and Authority Chairman
2. Trent M. Kittleman, Executive Secretary, Maryland Transportation Authority
3. C. Ronald Franks, Secretary, Department of Natural Resources
4. Audrey E. Scott, Secretary, Maryland Department of Planning
5. Kendl P. Philbrick, Secretary, Maryland Department of the Environment
6. Martin G. Madden, Chairman, Critical Area Commission for the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays
7. Aris Melissaratos, Secretary, Department of Business and Economic Development

Bay Bridge History

The location for Bay Bridge was selected in the 1930s based on a number of factors, including the growing state highway network, ship navigation, and access to the lower Eastern Shore. Since 1952, population and job growth on both sides of the Bay have increased significantly, resulting in an increase in the volumes of local and regional trips, and increased congestion and its associated effects (e.g., accidents, increased truck traffic, delays, environmental concerns, and others). For example, between 1970 and 2000, the population of Anne Arundel County increased from 299,825 to 491,383.

The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) projects the Anne Arundel County population to increase to 541,250 by 2015. For Queen Anne's County, between 1970 and 2000, the population increased from 18,506 to 41,456. MDP projects the population in Queen Anne's County to increase to 53,550 by 2015.

The Bay Bridge is the only roadway crossing of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. Trips across the Bay Bridge consist of two types of travel: local trips (such as work related and discretionary trips) with origins and destinations relatively close to the Chesapeake Bay shores, and regional travel (such as commerce and travel to beach destinations) with origins and destinations elsewhere in Maryland and beyond. Traffic associated with all types of trips across the Bay has been increasing steadily since the parallel spans were constructed. Nearly 26 million vehicles crossed the Bay Bridge in 2005.

The US 50/301 corridor is experiencing congestion today, and is projected to experience even higher levels of congestion in the future. Most significant are the constraints that cause eastbound delays between the Parole area in Anne Arundel County and the Bay Bridge. The Bay Bridge is a critical portion of the US 50/301 corridor that is the most susceptible to factors that can cause or exacerbate congestion. For example, because the bridge lacks shoulders, reconstruction and rehabilitation work takes longer and creates difficulties with maintaining traffic flow. In addition, the US 50/301 corridor serves as a regional alternate to I-95 and US 13. The lack of an alternative crossing could be a threat to homeland security.

Further, based on the current condition of the eastbound bridge deck and the projected increases in traffic volumes, it is anticipated that the deck will require rehabilitation between 2015 and 2020. Depending on the type and method of construction, the rehabilitation could require long-term single lane closures or nighttime bridge closures of the eastbound bridge. Because the bridge is projected to carry significantly higher traffic volumes by 2015-2020, the rehabilitation would likely result in substantial travel time delays.

Recognizing these facts, the Authority has begun studies to formulate a long-term improvement plan for the Bay Bridge. The purpose of the Task Force is to assist the Authority by evaluating the need for additional capacity and by identifying issues that should be considered in addressing such capacity needs. This Task Force Report is the result of efforts by the Task Force.

Task Force Report

The report is organized into five chapters, the introduction, summary of meetings, public involvement and outreach process, Task Force discussions (Meeting # 5) and next steps after the conclusion of the Task Force.

Appendix A contains a summary of Meeting # 5. Appendix B contains a summary of the Task Force process, the schedule and content of each Task Force meeting, the biographies of the Task Force members and Ex-officio members, and a summary of citizen comments at each of the five Public Information Meetings.

