

Summary of the March 31, 2015 Kick-Off Open House for the Dunedin Causeway Bridges PD&E Study and Comments Received in Response to the Options Presented

Pinellas County conducted a Kick-Off Open House for the Dunedin Causeway Bridges PD&E Study on March 31, 2015 from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm at the Hale Community Center, 330 Douglas Avenue, Dunedin, Florida. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the project to the community and to provide an opportunity for them to comment on the project early in the planning process. The kick-off open house was advertised in the Tampa Bay Times, Suncoast News, and Florida Administrative Register. Meeting notifications were mailed to elected officials, agencies, property owners near the proposed improvements, and other interested parties.

Two hundred thirty-nine (239) persons signed in at the meeting. Attendees were given a project fact sheet, a general questionnaire and a project comment form at the sign-in table. An informative project video was shown continuously in the Small Activity Room during the open house. At the bridge aesthetics display, attendees were given the opportunity to complete a visual preferences survey. Project aerials as well as environmental, engineering, and aesthetic boards were on display at the meeting. Project team members were available to answer questions and take comments. All forms could be completed at the meeting and dropped in the comment boxes or completed later and mailed to the project manager. All materials on display were uploaded to the project website, www.pinellascounty.org/dunedincauseway, following the meeting.

Comments received from the public as a result of the kick-off open house are summarized below. Eighty-eight (88) comments were received between March 31, and April 21, 2015.

Specific details of alternatives, including potential impacts, were not presented at the Kick-Off Open House. However, a general discussion of options to be considered was presented. Touchdowns for replacement alternatives for the Main Bridge were shown. Some comments specifically stated a preference for a particular option or an aesthetic treatment. Please note that these preferences will not be tallied as “votes”, but will be considered as preferences as the project study progresses.

Alternatives to be evaluated for the Main (Bascule) Bridge

Alternative	In Favor of	Opposed to
No Build	4	
Rehabilitation of the Existing Bridge	17	1
Replacement with a new Two-Lane Fixed or Bascule Bridge	29	

Vertical Alignment Options for Replacement Main Bridge

Option	In Favor of	Opposed to
Low-Level Bascule Bridge (21 ft)	13	
Mid-Level Bascule Bridge (TBD)	10	
High-Level Fixed Bridge (65 ft)	7	21

Alternatives to be evaluated for the Tide Relief Bridge

Alternative	In Favor of	Opposed to
No Build	3	
Rehabilitation of the Existing Bridge	8	
Replacement with a new Two-Lane Fixed Bridge	4	

Many individuals commented on specific concerns and issues. A summary of their issues by topic follows:

Recreation

- Maintain safe and continued recreation access during and after construction
- High-level bridge would be detrimental to, and discourage older walkers, cyclists and in-line skaters
- Provide full pedestrian and vehicular access to current land areas / beaches
- Causeway should remain open to fishing, walking, biking, swimming, kayaks, etc
- Need for more boat access to the Intracoastal Waterway, including boat ramps and parking similar to the facility at Belleair Causeway
- Dredge area so sailboats can go around the island instead of having a drawbridge with paid bridge tenders
- If high-level bridge is recommended, it should incorporate a boat ramp and not result in loss of existing beach or recreational areas
- Build more facilities for boats – docks, launch, marina; other – restrooms, fitness park, dog park
- Preserve as much of existing beach area as possible
- Eliminate fishing from bridges; build a fishing pier under new bridge
- Need wider bike lanes to keep cyclists off roads
- One sidewalk on south side
- Provide sidewalks and water fountains on both sides of bridges
- Wider sidewalks for multiple uses
- Dunedin Sailing Center added to causeway would be very beneficial
- Improve parking
- Charge a fee for use of causeway facilities by non-residents

Safety

- High level bridge would be a significant barrier to handicapped persons. Many handicapped persons use the causeway every day, many with walkers
- Turnarounds at bridge ends at Intracoastal Waterway will eliminate left turns when entering and exiting causeway – safety improvement to current access system are needed
- Safety of bridges is most important
- During construction, speed limits should be lowered, sewer and water and other city services (fire / ambulance) must be maintained

- Widen current causeway to include a middle lane for emergency vehicles only
- Use medical helicopter to transport seriously injured from park
- Main concern is height of bridge and wind velocity (during storm events); evacuations would have to happen early so residents would not be trapped; a plan needs to be in place
- Stormwater runoff on off-road entry to beaches causes pot holes and needs to be addressed

Traffic

- A mid-level bridge may reduce traffic delays (due to bridge openings) by 85%. A survey would be needed to quantify this estimate
- Boat traffic requiring bridge openings is very minimal
- Restrict speed to protect wildlife
- Not enough boat traffic to require any drastic changes to bridge
- High-level bridge will improve boat and car traffic
- Restrict bridge openings – 20 minutes before and 20 minutes after the hour
- Currently, there are traffic jams near Honeymoon Island (RSA) that can last several hours. What will happen when the bridge project is underway? Is this project going to slow down this frequent weekend traffic jam?
- Traffic studies should be done in order to determine width of bridge needed and if lanes should be added to roads approaching the bridge
- Include alert boards (ITS) at nearby connector roads to warn travelers when park/causeway is full
- Traffic waiting when bridge opens pollute air and water

Bridges

- Any change to the tide relief bridge location should be restricted to a southerly location
- If available, install an electronic low maintenance opener or an electric eye for draw bridge
- A mid-level bascule bridge will maintain the environmental and recreational integrity of the area
- Building on the north side of the main bascule bridge makes more sense
- High-level bridge will allow maximum access to land below the bridge
- High – level bridge would save money on maintenance and bridge tender, provide easy passage for sailboats, emergency vehicles would have continual access
- New bascule would be a waste of money
- Roadway approach portions will be the most destructive to the causeway; need to know the lengths of the approaches
- Any changes to existing tidal bridge would downgrade our lifestyle on the island by impaired view, increased noise, and loss of animals and plant life
- Please consider an alternative on a new alignment (north of the existing) which connects Ward Island to the middle of the causeway, rather than to the east end of the causeway

where the existing bridge touches down. Include a boat ramp at the east end near Ward Island, and construct the Dunedin Sailing Center on the eastern end of the causeway.

Environmental

- The alternative constructed should be one that has the least environmental impact and least impact to new beautification program by the Dunedin Causeway Civic Organization
- Building a new bridge, preceded by a temporary bridge, will impact wildlife in the area
- Bird sanctuary on north side of bridge is overgrown and breeding rats, snakes and possums
- Minimize lighting because of negative effects on wildlife and people
- Please consider sound quality, not just decibel level
- Do as little disturbance to existing environment as possible and protect the marine/wildlife
- Preserve seagrasses
- Insure adequate tidal flow past bridge
- Historic preservation of any sunken ships or other remnants of the past

Quality of Life / Aesthetics

- A restaurant owner expressed concern about the impact of a new high level bridge on water and sunset views that are important to his customers.
- Keep small town quaintness and aesthetic appearance for Dunedin
- Because of its exposed location, the bridge should be aesthetically pleasing
- Minimize changes to the existing causeway
- Existing bascule bridge promotes a calmer, slower drive and provides time to enjoy the scenery
- Raising the Tide Relief Bridge is undesirable if it will block the view or change access for Royal Stewart Arms (RSA) residents
- High-level bridge would change character of the causeway in a negative way
- This bridge could make this area, or completely ruin it. Be careful
- Maintain view shed; no wall piers
- Consider quality of life of residents living on both ends of causeway – access, property values, view, noise, traffic

Other

- Visual preference survey – cost is always a factor in choice, was disappointed that the survey didn't include costs
- As a lay person, some of the terms may not be understood and it was hard to tell by the street lighting pictures what it would look like
- Poster showing structural deficiencies was unclear, photos of rusted areas did not disclose amount of damaged areas
- Please provide an explanation of bridge inventory condition ratings
- Target construction to take no more than 18 months; start in the month of April
- Price – give best value to tax payers

General Questionnaire

Each attendee was given a general questionnaire when they signed in at the open house. A total of one hundred nine (109) questionnaires were completed and returned at the meeting or during comment period following the meeting. A table summarizing the results of the questionnaire is attached to this summary. Responses to questions that required a written response are included in the summary of issues by topic above. The questionnaire also asked responders to list what they thought was the most important issue regarding the bridge project. The responses to that question (in no particular order) are summarized below. An indication of the number of individuals expressing a particular concern is also provided.

In your opinion what is the most important issue that should be addressed as part of this study?

- Add additional features such as boat ramp, marina, docks, restrooms, park benches, vegetation, more beach, wide bike lanes (4)
- Aesthetics – preserve the character and charm of the causeway (16)
- Ban jet skis(1)
- Restrict (schedule) bascule bridge openings (1)
- Environmental impacts (5)
- Consideration for all residents living at both ends of causeway regarding matters such as access, property values, view, noise, traffic (16)
- Project Cost (6)
- Utilities – provide underground utilities and solar powered lighting (1)
- No impacts to Honeymoon Island (1)
- Improve parking (1)
- Preserve all recreational uses and access on causeway/No Change to Causeway (28)
- Safety (6)
- Traffic volumes (8)
- Object to High Level Fixed Bridge (2)
- Keep project small and similar to existing bridge (25)
- Maintain and repair existing bridges (9)
- Add more collector booths at state park (9)
- Add U-Turn Option to improve access/traffic (1)

Visual Preferences Survey

Meeting attendees were also given the opportunity to provide their preferences regarding bridge aesthetics on a visual preferences survey. Responses to that survey are attached to this summary.