

ITEM #10: PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Members of the public are invited to address the HRTPO Board. Each speaker is limited to three minutes.

ITEM #11: SUBMITTED PUBLIC COMMENTS

One public comment has been submitted. Any new written public comments will be distributed as a handout at the meeting.

Attachment 11

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**HRTPO Public Comment**  
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RE: Patriots Crossing/Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel

Name: Mr. John R. Gergely, PE

Date: June 6, 2013

Subject: Request for Cost Comparison Study of Patriots Crossing/HRBT; Traffic Congestion Study and Cost Estimate for an Alternative HRBT

Public Comment Input (Via E-Mail)

Dear Mayor Ward and Mr. Farmer,

I am requesting that the HRTPO perform, or commission a new cost comparison study between the competing concepts of Patriots Crossing and of the concepts that are intended to increase the capacity of the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel.

I am also requesting a traffic congestion study and cost estimate for an alternative HRBT concept that should dramatically reduce construction cost and intrusion on neighboring communities.

I realize that this letter is long and detailed, but I feel it is necessary to explain the logic behind my request. Three minutes a month allotted to public input to the HRTPO does not allow for much detail to be disseminated. Directly after this cover are four detailed sections, briefly explained below:

Cost Comparison Inconsistencies:

My research indicates that the elected members of the HRTPO do not have access to adequate cost data to fairly evaluate the projects that they are being asked to vote upon in the very near future. Cost estimates presented to HRTPO membership do not compare the competing concepts equally or fairly.

Traffic Congestion and HB2313:

At the May 2013 HRTPO meeting several discussions ensued about leveraging HB2313 funds to finance part of the construction of Patriots Crossing, and even the entire Third Crossing concept. Leveraging HB 2313 funds for these projects will remove available funding for local projects in all HRTPO communities. Additionally, Patriots Crossing does not meet the congestion relief requirements of HB2313.

Requested HRBT Congestion Study:

The congestion study I am requesting is intended to level the playing field between the two competing long-term projects. This concept is similar in nature to a request made by then

Delegate, Glenn Oder commenting on the extravagance of the VDOT HRBT feasibility studies of 2008. Similar requests to study practical solutions to add capacity to the HRBT have been made by Senator John Miller and Delegate John Cosgrove. Those studies to determine the minimum necessary combination to relieve HRBT congestion have never been performed.

Hampton Roads Crossing Studies:

Adding capacity to the HRBT was not given a fair representation in the May 2013 HRTPO presentations or in most HRTPO presentations of studies performed during the past decade. This information section delineates pertinent conclusions that have been largely downplayed from several of those studies.

I am not challenging anyone's veracity or intentions. I am only pointing out that the elected members of the HRTPO need much more information than has been presented to them before they make such a long-term commitment of their constituent's local tax dollars.

I am not a traffic engineer, but I have been active in Hampton Roads crossing congestion issues since participating in a multi-disciplined Hampton Roads traffic congestion study during my engineering studies at Old Dominion University. I am a Licensed Professional Engineer, a long-term member of the Society of Automotive Engineers and currently serve as vice chairman of the Newport News Transportation Safety Commission.

I retired as an Engineering Manager from Newport News Shipbuilding. I have been intimately involved in several cost estimating programs, including the most complicated construction projects ever undertaken by man - the multi-billion dollar US Aircraft Carriers. I thoroughly understand data acquisition and the cost estimating processes from conceptual, through detail design and construction. Additionally, I have no financial interests in any transportation issues.

I respectfully request that the HRTPO staff, or one or more elected HRTPO members insist that studies be performed to honestly find the most effective way to relieve congestion at the HRBT. This letter should make it clear that the answer is not Patriots Crossing or the Third Crossing.

I am copying this letter to the governing boards of the membership communities of the HRTPO, other elected officials and interested citizens.

Please place this letter in the "Submitted Public Comments" section of the next HRTPO Board Meeting agenda.

Respectfully,

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Cost Comparison Inconsistencies:

The HRTPO membership cannot make an educated decision about which long-term projects to pursue without consistent cost analysis data.

The most recently presented cost data is from the March 2013 HRTPO meeting:

Patriot's Crossing	3.1 to 4.2 billion	Source: VDOT
HRBT	4.4 to 6.7 billion	Source: 2012 HRBT EIS Draft

The most prominent cost data that has been available to HRTPO membership prior to the March presentation is that published in the December 2010 HRTPO Prioritization Study:

Third Crossing	5.4 billion	Source: VDOT
HRBT to 8-lanes	3.5 to 4.5 billion (note 1)	Source: unsolicited proposal
HRBT to 6-lanes	3 billion	Source: HRTPO "planning level estimate"
Patriots Crossing	2.9 billion (note 2)	Source: VDOT

Notes:

- (1) 4 billion dollars was used in the actual Prioritization Study input data for the 8-lane HRBT.
- (2) Patriots Crossing was referred to in the Prioritization Study as, "Third Crossing: East-West Bridge-Tunnel Connector & Craney island Connector". Although slides show 2.9 billion cost, only 2.13 billion dollars cost was used in the study input data.

The cost estimates above are from several vastly different sources whose assumptions, methods, and goals may have varied widely and cannot be considered as valid for any side-by-side comparison, particularly one so important to the future of Hampton Roads.

The estimates also contain several invalidating inconsistencies. For example, the cost estimate of 3.5 to 4.5 billion in the Prioritization Study for increasing the HRBT to eight-lanes is credited to estimates from unsolicited proposals. These proposals by private, for-profit companies were well publicized in the press when first offered.

An April 11, 2011 article by Debbie Messina in the Virginian-Pilot states that this 3.5 to 4.5 billion in the proposal to add capacity to the HRBT would also include improvements to the Monitor Merrimac Bridge-Tunnel and the James River Bridge. Hardly a minor expense, and certainly not appropriate as a cost comparison.

The six-lane HRBT option cost of 3 billion is credited to an HRTPO staff "planning level estimate". This is only a 25% cost reduction from the input data used in the Prioritization Study for the 8-lane option. A 25% reduction for an option that deletes half of the additional tunnel lanes, eliminates miles of right-of-way acquisition, and deletes improvements to the M&M and JRB hardly seems believable.

When comparing the cost estimate performed by HRTPO staff for the six-lane HRBT option to the Patriots Crossing estimate prepared by VDOT, it is hard to accept that the two concepts are so similar in estimated cost, 3 billion versus 2.9 billion.

The tunnels for both Patriots Crossing and the HRBT concepts must clear the same channel depth, which should put actual tunnel cost into the same order of magnitude. The validity of the comparison falls apart when one considers the extensive bridge construction required for the two multiple overlapping crossovers required by Patriots Crossing. These multiple overlapping crossovers at the M&MBT and at the intersection to Craney Island will be expensive engineering marvels in their own right.

There are also inconsistencies in December 2010 Prioritization Study scores beyond the total cost estimates discussed above.

The eight-lane HRBT expansion had the overall highest prioritization score of 208. The concept, then named “Third Crossing: East-West Bridge-Tunnel Connector & Craney island Connector” scored only 190, which placed it in 4th place.

Mysteriously in early 2011, an almost identical concept started appearing named Patriots Crossing, with a score of 221. I first saw it at a public meeting in Newport News City Center. When I questioned the HRTPO Deputy Executive Director at the Newport News forum, her reply was that it wasn’t official.

My next introduction to Patriots Crossing was at a presentation the HRTPO Executive Director made to the Isle of Wight County Board. Over and over, I kept hearing that it wasn’t an official scoring. But, it sure was being shopped around as if it were.

The only significant difference I can determine from the descriptions of the Patriots Crossing concept and the original Prioritization Study concept is that Patriots Crossing is missing a reference to “multimodal” service, and a newly added statement at the bottom of the page in light print stating - “assumes 80% funding”.

From where did this mysteriously assumed 80% funding come? Why doesn’t any other concept assume the same funding?

In addition to the assumed 80% funding, this Patriots Crossing concept scoring also included an assumed funding donation from the Virginia Port Authority in the 200 million dollar range. But, at the May 2013 HRTPO meeting the VPA representative said that the promised money had gone to the Route 460 project and the VPA would be hard pressed to supply any more money.

More so, Patriots Crossing was touted as only requiring tolls in the 2-dollar range versus the 4 to 6 dollar tolls expected for the privately funded HRBT expansion. 80% funding goes a long way!

Other inconsistencies in the Prioritization Study involve input data, other than cost estimates. For example, page E46 of the Prioritization Study Appendix E, Input Data penalizes the HRBT for its age, giving it a penalty of 9.68 versus 4.13 for the Third Crossing concepts. This penalty appears to be to discount necessary repairs in the out years.

But, repairs to an aging bridge-tunnel will be required whether capacity is added or not, so shouldn’t be included in the scoring process. That is unless there is an intention to let the HRBT

deteriorate into an unusable state and eventually require all traffic to use the M&M / Third Crossing route.

Traffic Congestion and HB2313:

Hampton and Norfolk mayors have expressed concern that the right-of-way acquisition required for an added capacity HRBT would impact neighborhoods in their communities.

The eight-lane HRBT concept of the Prioritization Study and VDOT estimates involves adding lanes from the Hampton Coliseum in Hampton all the way to Wards Corner in Norfolk. This would involve serious impact to neighboring communities and expense. The six-lane tunnel doesn't impact as much property, but doesn't relieve congestion as much as the eight-lane tunnel concept.

The study I am requesting is to evaluate and find an option to significantly increase HRBT capacity that is lower in cost and be less intrusive to surrounding communities than previous and current studies. An outline of my request is delineated below, but first I would like to present my reasoning for the study.

Section 33.1-23.5:3 Hampton Roads Transportation Fund Established of HB2313 clearly states that the: *"Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization shall give priority to those projects that are expected to provide the greatest impact on reducing congestion"*

The ability for traffic to readily cross Hampton Roads is the lifeblood of the Hampton Roads region's commerce and livability. Adding capacity to the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel is the only project that has been shown to clearly relieve congestion in the crossings of Hampton Roads. It is incomprehensible that the HRTPO is even remotely considering using HB2313 funds to finance Patriots Crossing.

Patriots Crossing would have negligible impact on congestion relief, certainly not the *"greatest impact"* that HB2313 requires. The only possible way that Patriots Crossing can show substantial congestion relief is to toll the HRBT to force traffic onto Patriot's Crossing without making any improvements to the HRBT. This was suggested in presentations at the May HRTPO meeting.

Tolling the HRBT without improving the HRBT would force commuters to seek other crossings or to not cross at all, negatively impacting area commerce and the regional quality of life. Tolling the HRBT without adding to its capacity would create a citizen's political uproar that would make previous tolling controversies pale by comparison.

Patriots Crossing does not qualify for HB2313 regionally generated funds because it does not *"have the greatest impact on reducing congestion"*. Using HB2313 funds for Patriots Crossing may not even withstand a legal challenge. Any attempt to suggest that by tolling the HRBT in order to make Patriots Crossing appear to be a congestion relief project is ingenuous.

Presentations were made at the May 2013 HRTPO meeting, titled "Bonding Capacity to fund the Patriots Crossing" and "Programming Options for HB2313 "Regional" Funds". The first

presentation was specifically dedicated to an economic analysis of tolling all Hampton Roads crossings to finance Patriots Crossing. The second presentation discussed every possible highway improvement project in Hampton Roads, including the long debunked Third Crossing, except the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel.

In light of the congestion relief requirements of HB2313, I cannot understand why so much emphasis has been so recently placed upon the Patriots Crossing, and its ultimate extension, the Third Crossing.

All studies dating from the 1990s thru the most recent presentation at the March 2013 HRTPO meeting by Dr. Camelia Ravanbakht, clearly show that Patriots Crossing does not clear congestion at the area's most congested artery, the HRBT. At the end of this letter, I have included excerpts and conclusions from those studies that document my assertions.

HRTPO member mayors from Norfolk and Hampton have expressed trepidation to adding capacity to the HRBT, because of the potential impact to their communities. Addition of a full eight-lane or larger highway from the Hampton Coliseum to Wards Corner would certainly impact their communities.

Improving the capacity of the HRBT can be accomplished without adversely impacting either Hampton or Norfolk. Their opposition to improving the HRBT is based on an elaborate VDOT study of an eight-lane expansion from the Coliseum to Wards Corner, which is extremely expensive and unnecessary.

The true bottleneck results from only two lanes in each direction at the underwater HRBT tunnels. The tunnels are the bottlenecks, not the adjoining roadways. A driver's natural reflex to slow when facing a tunnel entrance causes the bottleneck. The incoming and outgoing roadways are adequate. Otherwise the mayors from those communities would be clamoring for improvements to those roadways.

It appears that one, or possibly two additional lanes can be added to the four lane portions of Interstate 64 on either side of the HRBT using existing right-of-way with a minimum of impact to the communities and historic landmarks like the Emancipation Oak at Hampton University and the Veterans Cemetery.

I want to emphasize that the studies I request do not represent an ideal solution, but rather a solution that will relieve a significant amount of congestion, and be more affordable.

Tolling of the HTBT should, as all tolling should, be based on economic return to pay for only that roadway. Tolling should not be used to pay for other roadways, or to punish commuters for using roads that they have funded with their tax dollars.

Requested HBRT Congestion Study:

Unlike previous studies, the study should evaluate an eight-lane tunnel, but no new lanes approaching the bridge-tunnel complex and only one additional lane exiting the complex.

A significant addition of lanes prior to the actual bridges approaching the HRBT is not necessary. Traffic gets to the tunnels. As Delegate Oder commented, the HRBT now acts as the center of an hourglass, and that we need to find the minimum way to increase the capacity of the HRBT. Diverging lanes can be added on the bridges approaching the tunnels to smoothly allow traffic to blend from the existing roadways into the four tunnel tubes.

After exiting the tunnels, only one additional lane should be considered in the study, using existing right-of-way. A smooth merge can be constructed on the HRBT bridges to allow the necessary merge from the four lanes exiting the tunnels onto the three lanes. The merge from four lanes exiting the tunnels to three lanes would occur significantly after exiting the tunnels, but well before impacting surrounding communities.

The additional lane exiting eastbound should extend in the median, the length of Willoughby Bay to the 4th View Street Exit, allowing some traffic to disperse to the Naval Base and to the Norfolk Boulevard System. This will dramatically minimize impact to Norfolk residential communities. The additional exiting lane on the Hampton side need only go a few hundred yards to the already existing three lanes of westbound Interstate 64 with virtually no impact to Hampton.

I will discuss further details of my request with any HRTPO member or staff who wishes.

Hampton Roads Crossing Studies:

March 21, 2013 - Hampton Roads Crossings: Patriots Crossing & I-64 Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel - Presented by Camelia Ravanbakht, PhD, Deputy Executive Director, HRTPO

Referring to adding capacity at the HRBT - ***“Project will result in uncongested conditions (Level-of-Service C) at the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel through the year 2040.”***

Referring to building Patriots Crossing – ***“The Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel will remain severely congested, with a volume/capacity ratio = 1.48 The Monitor Merrimac Bridge-Tunnel will be severely congested, with a volume/capacity ratio = 1.93 (Level-of-Service F) in 2034.”***

December 2012 - Hampton Roads Prioritization of Transportation Projects, Project Evaluation and Scoring - prepared by HRTPO staff with support of VDOT and Kimberly-Horn and Associates

Increasing capacity of the HRBT was the highest scoring Bridge and Tunnel Project of this study. Patriots crossing ranked only fourth.

February 17, 2011 - Hampton Roads Transportation Alternatives Study Phase 2) - Old Dominion University's Virginia Modeling Analysis and Simulation Center (VMASC)

“Expanded HRBT provides the most improvement in congestion at the HRBT”

June 2010 - The Present and Future of Transportation in Hampton Roads – Focus group study of Hampton Roads residents by Christopher Newport University for the HRTPO

“For Peninsula study participants, the HRBT is the major regional dividing point and obstacle to greater cross-regional activity. For South Hampton Roads residents, the HRBT is the gateway into and out of the region. For either group, its congestion, and the perceived inability of the region’s leaders to do nothing about its congestion, make the HRBT the most visible representation of transportation headaches.”

December 2010 Hampton Roads Transportation Alternatives: Assessing Impacts on Intraregional Travel and Congestion in 2034 – ODU’s VMASC for Virginia General Assembly Joint Subcommittee to Study the Transportation Network of Hampton Roads, HJR 711, 2009

“Only the direct addition of lanes to the HRBT will significantly improve both recurrent and incident-induced congestion”

January 21, 2009 - Analysis of Proposed Transportation Alternatives on the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel in 2030 - Old Dominion University's Virginia Modeling Analysis and Simulation Center (VMASC)

“Only expanding the HRBT can relieve both recurrent and incident-induced conditions at the HRBT”

December 15, 2004 - Review of Hampton Roads Crossing Study, a step in the Development of the Hampton Roads 2030 Regional Transportation Plan – Presented by Dwight L. Farmer, PE to Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and Metropolitan Planning Organization

Note: Alternate 1 is increasing the capacity of HRBT, which was compared to Alternate 9, the Third Crossing.

“Alt. 1 provides the highest reduction in HRBT congestion – (the only alternative which does not leave HRBT over capacity)”

This presentation also showed cost estimates from the 1999 Hampton Roads Crossing Environmental Impact Study of 1.2 billion dollars for the HRBT and 2.7 billion dollars for the Third Crossing. The actual dollar value quoted has naturally been overcome by inflation, but the 1999 HRBT cost estimate of less than half of the Third Crossing’s estimate does not correlate at all with the cost estimates currently being presented to the HRTPO.

HRTPO Staff Response (Via E-Mail – June 12, 2013)

Dear Mr. Gergely,

The HRTPO is in receipt of your letter dated June 6, 2013. Your comments will be included in the June 20, 2013 HRTPO Board Meeting Agenda as an attachment to Agenda Item #11 – Submitted Public Comments.