

Monmouth County Oceanic Bridge (S-31)
Bingham Avenue – Locust Point Road (CR 8A) Over the Navesink River
Local Concept Development Study

Borough of Rumson and Township of Middletown

Public Involvement Action Plan



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1. Introduction

Engaging the local community as part of the Local Concept Development Study phase will enable problems and solutions to be assessed and developed with community input. Coordination of community outreach early-on in the study will provide an opportunity to obtain input on project needs and deficiencies, and begin laying the groundwork for alternatives that will be well received by the local community.

The Public Involvement Action Plan (PIAP) for the Oceanic Bridge Concept Development Study in the Borough of Rumson (Rumson) and Township of Middletown (Middletown) includes strategies for communicating project information to the community and soliciting project feedback. The purpose is to solicit public involvement as early as possible within the project development process and continue that involvement throughout the design process. The PIAP maintains a database of known stakeholders and outlines anticipated meetings with local officials, stakeholders, and the general public. The PIAP is an active document and will be updated as the project advances from the Concept Development Study phase and into future phases.

Outreach efforts, including meeting summaries, presentation materials, written and oral comments, recommendations, correspondence, and resolutions of support will be documented for the duration of the project. For the Local Concept Development Study phase, a public outreach summary will be provided as part of the Concept Development Report. Public meetings procedures, advertisements and notices overseen by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) will comply with Federal standards.

1.1 Public Outreach Goals & Objectives

The goals of public outreach during concept development are:

- Provide clear, concise information on how the public will be involved in the project process and where they can learn about its progress.
- Consider public concerns and interest from project inception throughout project development.
- Obtain public input and feedback during the concept development process.

The main objectives of the public outreach during concept development are:

- Provide clear and consistent information about the project and concept development process.
- Provide an effective mechanism for input and feedback from the general public.
- Obtain resolutions of support for a preliminary preferred alternative from the governing bodies of Rumson, Middletown and Monmouth County.

2. Stakeholders List

The Project Team will identify a list of key stakeholders. Stakeholders will consist of entities in proximity to the project area and special interest groups and organizations that use or have interest in the bridge. The list of stakeholders includes, but is not limited to:

- Local officials
- Local emergency responders (police, fire, first aid)
- Local residents (within 500' of the project limits)
- Local businesses (within 500' of the project limits) and business groups
- Local institutions and organizations (schools, churches, etc.)
- Hospitals and OEM provider services
- Civic and cultural groups
- Bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups
- Environmental organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Commuter advocacy groups
- Marinas, fishing and commercial vessel operators, and recreational boating clubs
- Advocacy groups for disadvantaged populations
- Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- Regulatory agencies (NJDEP, US Army Corps, US Coast Guard, etc.)

This information will be used to develop a mailing/contact list to keep stakeholders apprised of project happenings. The stakeholder list and contact database will be updated and maintained throughout the project's life as additional groups or individuals are identified. This list will be utilized to send project related information and invitations to stakeholder meetings, public meetings and/or Local Officials Briefings. The Project Team will prepare, print, and organize mailings and Monmouth County will provide envelopes. The most recent list of stakeholders is included as an attachment to this document.

2.1 Title VI and Environmental Justice

Per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice (EJ) in Minority Populations (based on race, color, national origin, and language) and Low-Income Populations in 1994, Environmental Justice efforts must be integrated into the planning phase of transportation project development. The essence of effective environmental justice practice is summarized in three fundamental principles:

- Avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations;
- Ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities, including minority and low-income communities, in the transportation decision-making process; and
- Prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

- Provide reasonable access to services for those who do not speak, write, or understand English, or are low-literacy.

Recent Environmental Justice guidance has indicated that residents within 500' from the project limits (the study limits) should be considered in the demographic analysis. A Community Profile was developed for populations within the study limits, the Borough of Rumson, and Township of Middletown. The Community Profile found that area median incomes are high, and the population consists mostly of families in single-family, owner occupied housing units. No residents within 500 feet of the bridge reported a limited knowledge of English, and a large majority of residents were identified as Non-Hispanic White.

Per research conducted in the Oceanic Bridge Community Profile, the Project Team determined that the PIAP will not require additional efforts to address any potential concerns of Environmental Justice or Title VI in the Local Concept Development Study phase.

3. Public Outreach Meetings

Public outreach events will be advertised to the public using methods described in Section 4 of this plan. Dates, times, and locations for each event will be determined in advance to provide the public with ample notification (generally 2 weeks). The Project Team will coordinate, arrange, prepare for, facilitate, and document outreach events. Agendas, sign-in sheets, project information handouts, public comment forms, meeting summary minutes, and presentation materials will be prepared as appropriate for each meeting. Information regarding anticipated meeting formats is provided in the following sections.

3.1 Initial Contact Letters

The initial list of property owners will be compiled, and initial notification letters will be sent to local officials from Rumson, Middletown, and Monmouth County. The initial notification letters will serve to inform local officials of the project and provide introductory information about the project. Initial notification letters with appropriate introductory information on the project will be sent to residences and businesses located within 500' of the project limits as determined by the Project Team.

3.2 Survey

The Community Input Survey is an information gathering tool used to identify individuals and organizations interested in becoming stakeholders. The survey will address basic demographic information, local travel behavior, maritime activity on the Navesink River, and personal opinions on bridge condition and improvement as they see it. The survey will help the Project Team to address public needs by gaining a foundational knowledge of community concerns and is not intended as a substitute for an initial Community Stakeholders Meeting.

3.3 Local Officials Briefings and Meetings

Project Team will hold separate Local Officials Briefings (LOB) with Rumson and Middletown officials, and local municipal representatives. The purpose of these meetings will be to discuss project status, obtain input, and solicit any additional information during each phase of the project. The following Local Officials Briefings Meetings are anticipated to be held during the Local Concept Development Study phase:

- Initial Local Officials Briefing to introduce the project, provide an overview of the local project delivery process and the Local Concept Development Study phase and the public outreach strategy, and identify additional project stakeholders.
- Local Officials Meeting to present Draft Purpose & Need and proposed range of Conceptual Alternatives and obtain feedback.
- Local Officials Meeting to present the Alternatives Evaluation Matrix, Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA), and next steps.
- Additional Local Officials meetings to be held as needed.

3.4 Community Stakeholders Meetings

The Project Team will hold Community Stakeholders Meetings with local community residents, businesses, and organizations who have a vested interest in the project. The first Community Stakeholders Meeting will be used to present the project and to determine stakeholders' interests and concerns related to developing the project Purpose & Need. The Project Team will determine the logistics and scheduling of the meeting. The location of Community Stakeholders Meetings will alternate between Rumson and Middletown. The following Community Stakeholders Meetings are anticipated to be held during the Local Concept Development Study phase:

- The Community Input Survey is an information gathering tool and is not intended as a substitute for an initial Community Stakeholders Meeting. The Project Team will distribute a survey to stakeholders and community members in order to collect preliminary data and gauge public opinion.
- Community Stakeholders Meeting to present Existing Conditions and Draft Purpose & Need.
- Community Stakeholder Meeting to present final Purpose & Need and Goals & Objectives, proposed range of Conceptual Alternatives, and the proposed Alternatives Evaluation Matrix.
- Community Stakeholders meeting for the presentation of the Alternatives Evaluation Matrix, the PPA, and next steps.
- Additional Community Stakeholders meetings to be held as needed.

The need for further community stakeholder meetings during the alternatives development phase will be discussed and determined with NJTPA and the Project Team. The initial PIAP will be reassessed to verify the effectiveness of the outreach effort to date and to determine if modifications are warranted.

3.5 Public Information Centers

The Project Team will coordinate, arrange, prepare, facilitate and document Public Information Center (PIC) meetings. The layout of the PIC meetings will be designed with an open house format for the exchange of information, beginning with a brief presentation followed by public comments and input. To maximize attendance, PIC meetings will be held in Rumson and Middletown on the same day, with one held in the late afternoon and one in the evening. The meeting times will alternate between the two municipalities to ensure accessibility.

The PIC meetings will include project information in presentations, handouts, and visual displays. Presentations may include project information, photos, graphics and visual imagery as appropriate. The use of 3-D simulations of conceptual bridge alternatives may be presented to assist in visualization of options to obtain public feedback.

3.6 Public Presentation Meetings for Resolution of Support

Near the conclusion of the Local Concept Development Study phase, after the PPA has been determined, the Project Team may present to municipal councils for Rumson and Middletown upon request and with approval of the County and NJTPA. These presentation meetings would be organized to obtain a resolution of support for the PPA from the municipalities and the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

3.7 Virtual Public Meetings

To ensure continuity of government operations while maintaining the necessary social distance to avoid the spread of COVID-19, the final PIC will be held as a web-based presentation that can be joined via computer, tablet or phone. Notification of the meeting will be performed via current database email blast, county chamber of commerce email blast, newspaper legal posting, municipal and county websites posting, and NJTPA twitter feed. Attendees of the presentation will be allowed to submit questions during the presentation which will then be answered by the Project Team. The means and method of asking questions and the software to be used during the PIC will be agreed upon by the Project Team prior holding the presentation. A recording of the presentation will be posted on the project website within 24 hours of the end of the PIC for public record. Additionally, the typical 30 day comment period will be extended to a total duration of 6 weeks.

4. Outreach Methods

It is important to use clear and accessible communications and a variety of media to reach all segments of the community.

4.1 Traditional Outreach Methods

The Project Team will notify and coordinate communications with Monmouth County and NJTPA prior to contacting community stakeholders and the general public. As some local newspapers are published weekly, advanced approval will be required to meet press deadlines for public notices. Mailings of the meeting notices, email blasts, and web postings will be utilized to maximize awareness and attendance.

The Project Team will coordinate with Rumson and Middletown to post meeting notice information and/or establish links with the respective municipal websites. The Project Team will coordinate with Monmouth County to inquire as to whether Rumson and Middletown would like to use their ‘municipal alert’ automated phone systems to provide mass phone calls for public notification. Online tools may be used to publicize the project to the largest possible audience in Rumson, Middletown, and surrounding areas of the Oceanic Bridge.

Mailings will be sent to various segments of the community, including all property owners within 500’ of the project limits. The Project Team will prepare, print, and post mailings in Monmouth County envelopes. Flyers describing the project, as well as the location, date, and time of each PIC meeting will be posted in municipal buildings, on municipal websites, libraries, and other public areas that allow public postings. E-mail blasts will be sent out to notify the public of announcements, upcoming meetings and events with links to the public project website. Variable message boards provided by Monmouth County may be utilized near the Oceanic Bridge to provide notice about upcoming meetings.

4.2 Project Website

A project specific Monmouth County Oceanic Bridge (S-31) website will be developed and maintained by the Project Team. The website will be available to the general public, and will contain project related items, such as announcements, document downloads, contact information, and a project outline of the Local Concept Development Study phase. The website will also be used to provide the public access to online surveys and survey results, as well as project information, including fact sheets, presentations, and upcoming meeting notices. The Project Team will monitor the website’s usage and traffic utilizing Google Analytics. The project website will be approved by Monmouth County and NJTPA. The website will go online following the first Community Stakeholder Meeting and prior to the first PIC meeting.