



Executive Offices
1199 Woodside Road
Yardley, PA 19067
TEL. (267) 394-6700

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**Environmental-Review-Process Contract Awarded
For Narrow, Accident-Prone Washington Crossing Bridge**

*Commission Hires Consulting Firm to Conduct Multi-Year Examination/Evaluation
Of Alternatives – Including Replacement – for Motorist-Despised River Crossing*

WASHINGTON CROSSING - The Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission (DRJTBC) today hired an international engineering firm to conduct a multi-year environmental review process that could help determine whether the 119-year-old weight-restricted operationally challenged Washington Crossing Toll-Supported Bridge should be replaced.

The Commission awarded a contract to HDR Engineering, Inc. of Philadelphia to carry out an involved process that will include preliminary engineering, environmental services, alternatives analysis, public involvement, documentation, and other services in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The contract cost is for a not-to-exceed amount of \$8,061,761.62. The Commission bears sole financial responsibility for the contract. Taxpayer money will not be used; all Commission operations and projects are ultimately paid for by the toll proceeds it collects at its eight toll bridges.

The contract award ends a professional-services procurement that began five months ago with the issuance of a request for proposals (RFP).

The underlying goal of the NEPA-process procurement is to improve mobility and provide a safe and reliable river crossing for vehicles and pedestrians while ensuring the continued viability of businesses near the current bridge.

“Today’s contract award is a step forward toward determining what approach the Commission should take with its aging, limited-capacity, safety-challenged Washington Crossing Bridge and its inherently poor customer-experience profile,” said DRJTBC Executive Director Joe Resta. “This environmental review will take years to complete. It’s a first step strictly limited to research and analysis. It does not authorize the hiring of a contractor and it certainly does not authorize design and construction of a new bridge.”

The current Washington Crossing Bridge has been a bane to generations of motorists. It is the narrowest of the Commission’s 18 vehicular bridges, with a 15-foot-wide roadway that can force motorists to a crawl in 7.5-foot-wide lanes -- one in each direction.

Motorists have frequently reported instances of breaking sideview mirrors while crossing the bridge. Also, in recent years, Commission public-safety personnel have experienced an uptick of confrontational incidents with drivers of oversized vehicles attempting to cross the narrow, weight-restricted structure.

The oversized-vehicle problem has been an issue in both directions at the bridge – not just the Pennsylvania-bound direction, which is the toll direction at the Scudder Falls Toll Bridge 2-1/2 miles downstream. One of the most notable incidents occurred in March 2023, when an Amazon tractor-trailer smashed into the bridge from the Pennsylvania side and became lodged beneath the bridge’s sign gantry. The collision forced an emergency morning-rush closure and caused considerable damage to the bridge’s walkway and sign gantry.

The bridge pre-dates mass-production of automobiles. It was constructed in 1904-05 for a locally owned cash-strapped private company that charged tolls to cross it in either direction by horse, vehicle, or on foot. The bridge’s steel predates later 20th century metallurgic advances.

The Commission’s NEPA-process RFP stated that the bridge’s steel through-truss superstructure “has experienced structural deterioration and does not meet current design standards, which creates reliability and safety concerns.” (Note: The reference to safety concerns applies to the bridge’s operation, not its state of condition. The bridge’s last federally required biennial inspection – in 2022 – determined the bridge is “capable of safely supporting the posted load,” which is limited to vehicles of three tons or less. That inspection listed the bridge’s overall condition as “fair.”)

The Commission has now reached the point where it believes a potential replacement of the bridge should be considered in addition to another rehabilitation or other possible alternatives that are “technically and economically feasible.” This examination of a possible new bridge and alternative approaches will be the crux of the NEPA-guided study and evaluation process of the next few years.

The environmental services portion of this process is tasked with land use, socioeconomic and environmental justice impacts; wetland, watercourse, and floodplain impacts; hazardous and residual waste impacts; terrestrial and aquatic habitat impacts; threatened and endangered species impacts; cultural resources impacts; air quality impacts; noise receptors impacts; and community and facilities and services impacts. The environmental review also will examine park and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites as mandated under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966.

The scope of research under the environmental review includes travel-demand forecasting; crash analysis; geotechnical analysis; hydrology and hydraulic analysis; drainage, stormwater management and water quality.

The bridge’s historically significant location -- between two state parks and where George Washington led a war-changing military crossing during harsh early-winter conditions on December 25, 1776 – also will be weighed. The NEPA-process consultant is required to evaluate and develop context-sensitive solutions in consideration of “the existing bridge site, surrounding towns, historical parks, and other impacted resources.”

A public involvement program, including a website, will be integral to the NEPA process. There are to be meetings with stakeholders, open houses, and hearings where the public at large would be afforded an opportunity to ask questions and relay comments and concerns.

A key objective in the NEPA process will be the compilation and issuance of an environmental document identifying a “preferred alternative” for the Washington Crossing Bridge location. Alternative approaches to a new bridge are expected to include – but not be limited to -- rehabilitating the current bridge, improving the bridge’s New Jersey approach roadway alignment, or doing nothing at all.

If the environmental review process were to identify a complete bridge replacement as the “preferred alternative” and that designation were to result in a favorable decision document from an applicable federal lead agency, then – and only then – could the Commission pursue possible design and construction of a prospective new bridge.

The RFP for the NEPA-process consultant estimated a 30-month timeframe to carry out the endeavor for receipt of a ruling from an applicable federal oversight agency. A 30-month time frame conceivably would take until 2027. But the process could always take longer than that.

The current steel, double-Warren-truss Washington Crossing Bridge opened to traffic April 11, 1905. It was constructed by the long defunct New Jersey Bridge Company of Manasquan, N.J. The bridge’s original owners were the Taylorsville Delaware Bridge Company, which was established in 1831, and a newer companion Washington Crossing Bridge Company, which was formed in 1904 to raise additional capital needed to build the current bridge.

The bridge replaced a former wooden covered bridge that was destroyed during the “Pumpkin Flood” of October 1903. The first wooden bridge at the location was constructed in 1833-34 and opened as a tolled crossing on January 1, 1835.

The current steel bridge has been rehabilitated multiple times over the past 12 decades. Contrary to uncorroborated statements by detractors, the Commission has not narrowed the bridge. The structure’s current 15-foot-wide roadway width is identical to what was listed for it in 1950.

The bridge carried 2,609,703 vehicles (both directions) in 2023. Its highest usage year was 2016 with 2,743,743 vehicular crossings

The bridge’s three-ton weight restriction has been in effect since 1995. It is enforced by bridge monitors stationed 24/7 at a shelter on the bridge’s New Jersey approach. More than 2,000 oversized vehicles were turned away at the bridge in 2023.

Note: A toll-supported bridge is free for the public’s use, but the cost of operating and maintaining the bridge is funded by a portion of the tolls collected at the Commission’s eight toll bridges.

What this NEPA-process contract authorizes
A more than \$8 million professional-services consulting contract to an international engineering firm, HDR Engineering, Inc. of Philadelphia

Research, studies, analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
Compilation of an environmental report – type to be determined during the process
Identification of stakeholders
Identification of stakeholders
Presentations and public hearings on the eventual environmental report
Use of DRJTBC toll-payer proceeds to fund the NEPA process
Fact-based decision making

<u>What this NEPA-process contract does not authorize</u>
Construction of anything, including a new bridge
Final design of anything, including a new bridge
Hiring of a construction contractor
Use of taxpayer money in any portion of the environmental-report-compilation process
Any changes to the current bridge while the NEPA process takes place
Intrusion of politics into this NEPA process
Superseding of the federal NEPA law
Decision making based on falsehoods, conjecture, and misinformed or malicious online postings

About the Commission

The Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission was formed statutorily by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of New Jersey in 1934 and Congress ratified the arrangement under the Compact Clause of U.S. Constitution in August 1935. The agency operates eight toll bridges and 12 toll-supported bridges, two of which are pedestrian-only spans. The Commission is a self-supporting public-service agency that receives neither federal nor state tax dollars to finance its projects or operations. Policy is set by a 10-member board of commissioners consisting of five individuals appointed by each jurisdictional state of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Funding for the operations, maintenance and upkeep of its bridges and related transportation facilities is solely derived from revenues collected at its toll bridges. The Commission's jurisdiction extends along the Delaware River from the Philadelphia-Bucks County line north to the New Jersey/New York border. More than 131.5 million cars and trucks crossed Commission bridges in 2023. For more information, please go to: www.drjtbc.org.