



WALK BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

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PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

The public comment period on the proposed replacement for the Walk Bridge runs through October 21, 2016. A hearing will take place October 6, 2016 at Norwalk City Hall.

ISSUE

Status of the Walk Bridge Replacement Project

SUMMARY

The Department of Transportation (DOT) is seeking public comment on plans to replace the aging Walk Railroad Bridge in Norwalk with a new structure. The plans, released September 6, call for a four-track movable bridge estimated to cost between \$425 million and \$460 million (in 2020 dollars) and take 40 months to complete.

The 120-year old Walk Bridge, a vital rail link in the northeast corridor, is at the end of its useful life. Several failures of the swing bridge in recent years have stopped train traffic for hours, inconveniencing thousands of passengers. DOT says it expects the number of failures to increase.

DOT is recommending replacing the existing bridge with a Long Span Vertical Lift Bridge, one of a number of alternatives the department considered. Depending on the availability of funding, DOT says work on the new bridge could begin in 2018. One advantage of proceeding with this type of bridge, it says, is that it would allow the current bridge to remain operational longer than would other designs.

DOT is seeking public comment on its proposal through October 21, 2016. A public hearing will be held October 6, 2016 at the Norwalk City Hall.

REPLACING THE WALK BRIDGE

The Walk Bridge, a swing bridge that spans the Norwalk River, carries the New Haven Line, used by Metro North and Amtrak for passenger rail service and by the Providence & Worcester Railroad for freight rail service. In 2013, the New Haven Line was the busiest single commuter rail line in the U.S. Metro North alone operates 113 daily trains between East Norwalk and New York City.



But the bridge, built in 1896, has been failing noticeably in recent years. A 2005 analysis indicated that major portions of the bridge had exceeded their lifespan and needed to be replaced. Its electrical systems are generally obsolete. DOT reports that the bridge failed 12 times out of 138 openings in 2011 and 16 times out of 271 in 2012. Without rehabilitation or replacement, the number of failures is expected to increase.

The bridge's operation is crucial to rail passengers and marine traffic. If the bridge fails in the open position, trains cannot cross; a failure when closed means that boats taller than the bridge's 16-foot vertical clearance cannot pass. A failure when partially open means neither rail nor boat traffic can move. In 2014, two widely publicized failures within weeks of each other stopped all train traffic and inconvenienced thousands of train passengers.

Figure 1 shows the Walk Bridge, which pivots open to allow boat traffic to move up and down the Norwalk River.

Figure 1: Walk Bridge, Closed Position



Source: Environmental Assessment/Section 4(f) Evaluation Environmental Impact Evaluation, Walk Bridge Replacement Project, Norwalk, Connecticut, August 2016.

DOT RECOMMENDATION

DOT received federal funding to study alternatives to the existing bridge. After examining more than 70 designs, it is recommending construction of a Long Span Vertical Lift Bridge.

The proposed bridge would have two side-by-side spans that, when fully raised, will allow 60 feet of clearance for boat traffic. When lowered to allow train traffic to cross, the bridge would provide approximately 27 feet of vertical clearance, about

11 feet more than the Walk Bridge now allows. The bridge's two towers would each be between 100 and 150 feet tall. Figure 2 shows the proposed replacement bridge in the closed (for rail traffic) and open (for boat traffic) positions, respectively.

Figure 2: Proposed Long Span Vertical Lift Bridge in Closed and Open Positions



Source: Environmental Assessment/Section 4(f) Evaluation Environmental Impact Evaluation, Walk Bridge Replacement Project, Norwalk, Connecticut, August 2016

In proposing construction of the Long Span Vertical Lift Bridge, DOT said it compared such factors as construction time; impacts on navigation, local roads, and the environment; cost; appearance; and long term performance.

DOT estimates it would cost between \$425 and \$460 million (in 2020 dollars) to build the bridge. It said that while these costs are higher than the estimated costs for some other designs it considered, the benefits of the Long Span Vertical Lift Bridge, such as shorter construction time, reduced disruption to rail and navigation traffic, and fewer environmental impacts, outweigh its additional costs.

One of the advantages of the Long Span Vertical Lift Bridge, compared to a similar bridge with a shorter span, is that the piers supporting the vertical lift towers would be placed beyond the limits of Walk Bridge's swing span, allowing the Walk Bridge to remain in operation for a longer period of time while the new bridge is built.

Depending on the availability of funding, DOT said work on the new structure could begin in 2018. Construction would take about 40 months from start of construction to restoration of four-track service and full operation capability for shipping.

DOT and the Federal Transit Administration published the environmental assessment for the Walk Railroad Bridge on September 6, 2016, triggering a 45-day public comment period that runs through October 21, 2016. A public hearing will be held October 6, 2016 at Norwalk City Hall. There will be an open forum for informal discussions with DOT officials starting at 6 p.m.; the formal presentation will take place at 7 p.m.

The environmental assessment may be reviewed at DOT, the Western Connecticut Council of Governments, Norwalk City Hall, and Norwalk public libraries, as well as at <http://www.walkbridgect.com/environmental/>. More information about the Walk Bridge Replacement Project is also available at: <http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?A=1373&Q=585340>.

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