

# New Jersey Department of Transportation

## Route 36 Highlands Bridge Questions and Answers

### What is the condition of the existing bridge?

The existing 35' movable bridge was constructed in 1932. It has exceeded anticipated service life. It is in very poor condition and deteriorating rapidly. It is rated the worst movable bridge in the state, and is rated one of the worst 5 bridges in the state overall. It is anticipated that given the current rate of deterioration, load restrictions would be imposed within 2 years.

### Is the bridge currently safe?

Yes, safety is the Department's highest priority. We have increased the inspection schedule from a normal two-year cycle to once every three months. Any unsafe condition would result in a restriction of traffic.

### Does the existing bridge really need to be replaced?

Yes. Route 36 is coastal evacuation route for the majority of residents of Sea Bright and all visitors to the Gateway National Park and a detour is not a viable option. Any major rehabilitation would require an extended closure of the bridge and only provide a 20 year life span. In addition, rehabilitation would cost nearly as much as a replacement. This would not be a prudent expenditure of public funds.

### Were other replacement alternatives besides a high-level fixed bridge considered?

Yes, detailed alternative analyses were conducted. Construction of a new movable bridge was not deemed the most prudent and fiscally responsible alternative. A new movable bridge would not eliminate vehicular and marine traffic conflicts or drawbridge operating and maintenance costs. It would also cost significantly more to construct. The current proposal minimizes Right-of-Way takings to avoid major impacts to the community and adjacent businesses.

### If construction is being funded with State dollars why are Coast Guard mandates still in place?

The United States Coast Guard has jurisdiction over all navigable waterways in the United States. This includes establishing height requirements for any new bridges crossing these waterways regardless of the type of funding utilized for the project. The Coast Guard determined that 65' was the minimum height for a fixed bridge at this location.

### What is the total cost of the proposed new bridge?

The total cost of the 65' fixed bridge is \$124 million. The costs are broken down as follows: Construction - \$100 million, Design - \$14 million, Right-of-Way - \$200 thousand, Construction Inspection - \$9 Million, Utilities - \$800 thousand.

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### Will Route 36 be closed during construction?

No, traffic will be moved from the existing bridge to the first half of the new structure 18 months after the start of construction. Route 36 will remain open to traffic at all times during construction. Total construction duration will be approximately three years.

### Why have other movable bridges been rehabilitated or replaced with another movable bridge?

It is a general policy of both the New Jersey Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration to eliminate a movable bridge wherever practicable. When feasible and cost effective, rehabilitation is the preferred option over replacement. The number of movable bridges on State Highways has been reduced from 28 to 23 over the past 5 years, and another 6 movable bridges are scheduled to be replaced with a fixed bridge in the near future. Only 3 movable bridges have been built by the NJDOT on state highways in the last 20 years. In each case, a fixed bridge was not built due to major socioeconomic and environmental impacts.

### Is this part of a plan to widen Ocean Avenue into a highway through Sea Bright?

NO - The Department does not have plans in any stage of development to widen Ocean Avenue (also known as Route 36).

### Is this project being done to facilitate any potential development of Fort Hancock?

ABSOLUTELY NOT – This project has been under study since 1988 and being advanced solely to address the deteriorating condition of the existing bridge.

### Will the grade of the proposed bridge be unsafe and create black ice conditions?

The maximum grade of the proposed bridge approach is 6.5% which is within acceptable design criteria. It is similar to grades on other bridges recently constructed in coastal environments and no such conditions have been reported.