



5. Next Steps

During the Task Force process, Task Force members and citizens attending the meetings and workshops commented about the potential for transit service, in lieu of additional highway capacity, in an effort to address these comments, in March 2006, Secretary Flanagan initiated a study of transit as an alternative to a new highway bridge. This study will be managed jointly by the Authority and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). The goal of the transit study is to determine whether a transit-only crossing is feasible and cost effective and can provide capacity similar to a highway crossing. The results of the study will help MDOT understand the possible role of transit in reducing demand for automobile travel across the Bay Bridge and its role in accommodating the projected demand for capacity across the Bay. It also will educate the wide range of potential stakeholders on the general applicability of transit-only options.



Next Steps

This study, which will be conducted prior to any formal NEPA studies, will include an evaluation of the following elements:

- **Origin and Destination Studies** - Evaluate the diverse range of origin and destination (O-D) pairs for traffic that crosses the Bay Bridge
- **Cost Effectiveness** – Based on the most highly desirable O-D patterns, which will most likely include both long distance and commuter trips, and standard and accepted cost-per-mile transit cost estimates, the team will develop cost estimates for heavy rail, light rail and busway options.
- **Estimate Transit Ridership** – Estimate the ridership that could be expected on a variety of sample transit service lines and compare them to nationally recognized thresholds for cost-effective transit service.
- **Traffic Relief at the Existing Crossing** – Estimate the congestion relief that the transit-only options would have compared to a highway crossing.
- **Development Needed to Sustain Transit-only Service** – Based on nationally accepted standards on the density and types of land uses needed to sustain a transit-only service, determine if the current land uses in the area of the existing crossing are consistent with those standards.

The results of this study, along with this Task Force Report would be used to shape the scope of a future NEPA study to evaluate potential alternatives for adding capacity across the Chesapeake Bay.

The results of the transit study would be important in evaluating the viability of transit alternatives during the project scoping phase of a future NEPA study. The NEPA process was presented to the Task Force during Meeting #2 and was summarized earlier in this report. As noted, NEPA is a national policy to “encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment, promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man, strive to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation and establish a Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).”

To begin a NEPA study, a federal lead agency must be identified. For most highway projects, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) typically

serves as the lead federal agency. For some major bridge projects, the US Coast Guard has served as the federal lead agency. Once NEPA is initiated, the initial step in the scoping stage is to develop a Purpose and Need statement that provides clear and specific support for the proposed project, and justification for the federal proposed action. This Task Force Report and the results of the transit study will be two of the key factors used to develop the Purpose and Need Statement. Other factors could include long-range statewide or regional goals and initiatives related to economic growth and development. The Purpose and Need Statement will also be used to define the project study area. For complex projects that have a statewide or regional significance, a tiered NEPA process is often an efficient way to define the scope of the project and the study area before undertaking detailed studies of a wide range of alternatives that could include different modes (highway or transit) or geographic regions (Zones 1, 2, 3, or 4).

A list of likely steps for a Bay Crossing NEPA study:

Project Scoping:

- Conduct Travel Demand Forecasting studies, based on a detailed travel model developed for the project
- Develop Project Purpose and Need with an opportunity for public input
- Define Scope of Project and Study Area
- Collect inventory of environmental resources (natural, human, and cultural)
- Develop preliminary conceptual alternatives and present to public
- Identify all reasonable alternatives
- Identify Alternatives to be Retained for Detailed Study

Detailed Studies

- Conduct detailed engineering and environmental impact analysis of the Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study
- Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- Hold Location/Design Public Hearing and receive comments on the Draft EIS

Decision Making

- Perform additional technical study as needed
- Identify a Preferred Alternative
- Publish a Final EIS
- Federal Lead Agency issues a Record of Decision.