

The update on the Oregon Inlet Bridge has been an agenda item at every meeting of the Dare County Board of Commissioners since 2002. This has been the case because this Board as well as past Boards recognizes the urgency of the need for the replacement bridge as it is a clear and present threat to the live, safety and welfare of every child, parent, grandparent friend, neighbor, visitor who lives, works, attends school, or visits Hatteras Island.

I would like to thank Senator Marc Basnight for his efforts over the last several decades in trying to secure the replacement for the Bonner Bridge. More specifically for his efforts over the last 2 years as this project has been mired down in the Bureaucratic mud of Governments. I also wish to thank Senator Richard Burr for his efforts for more than a year now in doing everything possible to bring a successful conclusion to the need for a replacement for the Bonner Bridge. I would like to thank Senator Dole and Congressman Jones, who respond to our calls and visits with their support and ask that they continue to fight for what is right for the live safety and welfare of all who live work attend school and travel to Hatteras Island. I would like to thank Lt. Governor Beverly Purdue, who on August 19th said ‘we must replace the Oregon Inlet Bridge, it is no less important then an interchange or freeway around the Triangle” Finally, I would like to thank all of the Dare County residents who have worked on this project tirelessly to bring this issue to the forefront of the Publics’ attention and to the attention of our elected leaders from Raleigh & the Governor’s mansion to Washington DC, Congress & the White House.

There was a brief period of excitement and relief when news reached us Monday, August 27 in the early evening that

Four agency representatives meeting Monday, August 27 as the Dispute Resolution Board for the Bonner Bridge Replacement Project concurred that the Phased Approach/Short Bridge Alternative is the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) and that

Phase I of the project should be to construct a short parallel replacement structure adjacent to the existing Bonner Bridge as soon as possible.

However, less than 24 hours later we received the news that

The Southern Environmental Law Center and Audubon North Carolina have asked the federal Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to investigate whether or not the Bonner Bridge project, as laid out by yesterday's review board decision

I would like to direct several comments to the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Audubon North Carolina. How dare you sit in your homes and offices in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and dictate an issue of health and safety for the residents of Hatteras Island and Dare County. How dare you put the lives, safety, health & welfare of our men, women and children who live, work and travel across the Bonner Bridge to Hatteras Island in risk every minute of every hour of every day until this bridge is replace. How dare you oppose a replacement project, which Secretary Kempthorne has said "a delay could constitute a clear and present safety issue for all concern"? You advocate more study and delay for a project that is 16 years overdue. We have had children enter kindergarten and graduate from Colleges and Universities during this same period of time.

Why does this matter so much to you? It certainly can not be about the environment. Last year when hundreds of geese were killed by the United States Fish and Wildlife service, on Pea Island, where were you? No where, we heard no protests, there were no calls to stop the murder of these innocent geese, there were no calls for a "study" and there was no letter written to the Council on Environmental Quality. It is time for the Southern Environmental Law Center and Audubon North Carolina to stop the obstruction of a life safety issue for the people of Dare County, North Carolina and the United States of America. One last question, are your organizations so arrogant that you feel you can bully your way with the Council on Environmental Quality. I

would argue that you have enough lawyers on your staff that you know that the Council Environmental Quality resolves disputes between Federal Agencies. What is your standing as a Federal Agency to request such action? Aren't you really just trying to delay the bridge replacement and endanger the lives of hundreds, thousands, millions of people?

On Thursday of this past week, there was an editorial in the News and Observer. We do not know the author of the editorial. This writer calls the Bonner Bridge a Bridge to Nowhere. Well, I would like to take this writer on and tell him about the Bonner Bridge. Not with standing the fact that the writer knows nothing about North Carolina Geography, and obviously does not have access to or can not read a map, but the Bonner Bridge is not a bridge to “No Where”.

The Bonner Bridge is a bridge to the Cape Hatteras National Recreational Seashore Park, it is a bridge to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, it is a bridge to the Villages of Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo, Avon, Buxton, Frisco, Hatteras Village, it is a bridge to the most “goodliest land under the Cope of Heaven” it is a bridge to bird watching, sea shelling, fishing, beach walking, surfing, windsurfing, kite surfing, Hollywood film locations, it is a bridge to America's lighthouse to history & families that goes back over 300 years with families that still live & work on this island, it is a bridge that takes people to work in the morning and home to their families at night. It is a bridge that was built to connect us, not divide us. How ironic bridges are meant to connect, yet there are those in this great Country of ours that want to use the bridge to divide us. The Bonner Bridge is a bridge to Americas' beaches and the best beach in America. The Bonner Bridge is a bridge to; it is certainly not a bridge to nowhere.

To those of you who argue, do not build the Parallel Bridge for fear that sometime in the future there may be a problem with

highway 12, I would like to ask the following question. There is no greater threat of ocean over wash than north Rodanthe, yet this is where the 17+ mile bridge will have its terminus. Why would you propose a bridge to end, in the same area that you argue is a reason not to build the Parallel Bridge? Folks I will answer that question for them. They do not care, these people want to delay the process, everyday that goes by and the bridge is not under construction these organizations and agencies claim a victory. Everyday that your children, wife or husband, loved one or friend is kept in ever present danger to their lives, health and welfare these organizations and agencies claim a victory.

There are those who argue over the expense of maintaining and repairing Highway 12 on Hatteras Island. I ask you to investigate what the State of North Carolina spends on other weather related problems around the State. Let's look at the ice storms that gripped and immobilized Raleigh and the triangle several years ago. Have any of you investigated that expense? Furthermore, why did you not practice your position of retreat and let nature take its course? Why not ask the State and NCDOT to let the weather warm up and melt the ice, no need to put down caustic damaging chemicals, which will poison our streams with contaminated water runoff? Why remove fallen trees from the roadway, let nature naturally decay those trees and several decades from now, the wind will have blown away the final remains of the decaying tree?

The tragedy that happened last month in Minneapolis is unforgettable and we offer our most sincere sympathy and prayers to all those who suffered the death of loved ones, family and friends. And we wish a successful recovery to those injured. We also want to praise and thank all the hundreds of emergency rescue personnel who put their lives in danger to save others in the aftermath of this bridge collapse.

The images of this tragedy haunt me everyday. I ask all of you here today and all of you who will watch this meeting; Are you not haunted by the images of tangled steel and concrete incasing vehicles? Are you not haunted by the images of cars and trucks that were crushed under the weight of the falling bridge materials? Are you not haunted thinking about the panic of the people in those vehicles, first trying to survive the fall, then the falling debris and then the water of the river? Are you not haunted by the image, of that school bus, carrying our most precious children wedge between debris and a burning truck? What a horror.

I do not mean to upset any of you, but just for a moment image a tragedy such as that on the Bonner Bridge. Now imagine if you survive the fall, you survive falling debris, you survive escaping from your vehicle, you fight and survive the currents of the inlet and somehow get to shore, with the injuries you have suffered. If you reach the shore on Pea Island, you will have to be air vac out as there would be no bridge for emergency response to take you out by vehicle. Everyone will have to wait on helicopters.

The time is now to act. We would like to ask any and all agencies and organizations that have issues sit down and be a part of the solution; quit being a part of the problem. We are not asking you to sit down to study and stall the project any longer. We are asking you to sit down and work with NCDOT and together make plans to repair anything that is hurt or damaged in the process. We ask that everyone join together and protect the lives, health and safety of our men, women & children. Let's be builders and not obstructionists.

To the people of Dare County, to the people of North Carolina, to people of America, we need your help. We need you to start calling, faxing and emailing your Congressmen and Congresswomen and your Senators. Remember the Preamble to

the Constitution of the United States begins “We the people. It is going to take all of us working together for what is right. We the people who care about the life, safety and welfare of millions of people who use the bridge every year: We the people who have endured the agony and frustration of delay after delay, We the people who have watch Our Government agencies and more particularly non governmental agencies, recklessly delay a project creating a clear and present safety issue for all concern: We the people who have been victimized by organizations and agencies, as they discriminately choose to stall some projects but not others: We the people must stand up and be heard, we must say enough is enough, the time to act is NOWREPLACE THE BRIDGE NOW

To my colleagues on the Board I would like to propose the following.

1. We ask our Attorney to investigate any and all grounds on which we can bring legal action against any agency or organization who continues to endanger the lives, health and safety of our men, women & children by stalling and delaying this project even for one more day.
2. We ask our Attorney to draft a letter to the Attorney General of the State of North Carolina, Mr. Roy Cooper and ask AG Cooper to investigate if the delay tactics and calls for additional studies are criminal acts intended or not as these acts endanger the life, health & welfare of men, women and children, residents & visitors alike.
3. Once again, we ask everyone here today and who will watch this on the television replay to contact their US Senators and Congressman, and any other elected representatives they know and ask them to assist in obtaining the necessary permits to proceed with the Least Environmentally Damaging Practical Alternative LEDPA. And if you have the time and patience to do this everyday as often as you can. You can log on to www.darenc.com

and click through the links to a program which will help expedite you email campaign. Let me remind you that decisions are made by those who show up and those who speak up.

4. And let us also ask you same fine people to call or email any organization such as the SELC and Audubon North Carolina and any other organization or agency which stands in the way of the live safety and health issue every day as often as you can to tell them of your disgust in the actions that they choose to take to delay a project so desperately needed for the live, safety and welfare of all who live and travel to and from Hatteras Island.

In closing, to Our Elected representatives in Washington DC, please join together and enact legislation authorizing NCDOT to construct the bridge alternative selected by the Dispute Resolution Board as the LEDPA. To all governmental, regulatory and permitting agencies, stop the bureaucratic delay, stop endangering our lives any longer and work with NCDOT to construct the bridge, and to all the other organizations that choose to stall and delay this project, stop it! You have had 16 years it is now time that our men, women and children who live, work, travel to and visit Hatteras Island, can rest in the comfort that help is on the way.

Today we call on all of us who live and call Dare County home and all our friends, & visitors to Dare County to join us to tell all those in charge and in the way, that we will not accept anything less than the immediate commitment to construct the replacement alternative choice of the Dispute Resolution Board.

We can argue about cost, location, sand & ocean over wash. We can argue about location of the roadbed, pollutants, what might happen 10 years, 20 years, and 50 years from now. But all of that is nothing compared to one human life or one human injury.

Whether you live in Hatteras Village or Duck, whether you live in Frisco and Buxton, or Stumpy Point or East Lake, Manns Harbor, Wanchese, Manteo, or Roanoke Island, whether you live in Avon or Colington, or Rodanthe, Waves or Salvo or Southern Shores, Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills, or Nags Head, it is now time for all of us to speak with one voice; Support our hard working elected leaders in Washington DC and tell those who are working to delay and obstruct the construction of a replacement bridge to STOP IT.

Thank you all for listening and thank you for the effort you will extend in the days ahead as we seek protection for our lives for all who travel this bridge.