

Amtrak Connecticut River Bridge Replacement Project
2/15/2023 Public Information Meeting
Summary of Comments and Responses

A. Introduction

Amtrak hosted a virtual public information meeting on February 15, 2023, at 7:00 PM regarding the Connecticut River Bridge Replacement Project. The purpose of this meeting was to provide the public with an update on project status and to give the public an opportunity to comment before Amtrak submits various environmental permit applications to the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CTDEEP), United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and other regulatory agencies. The comment period remained open until March 15, 2023. Amtrak offered a variety of methods for the public to comment including during the Zoom Webinar, by email, by physical mail and by phone. A total of 32 comments were received during the public comment period. A summary of the comments submitted during the public comment period and responses are described below.

B. Comments Pertaining to Administration/Public Outreach

Comment 1: Several commenters inquired if the presentation recording would be available on Amtrak's website.

Response 1: The February 15th presentation was recorded and posted to Amtrak's website on February 21st to allow for public review for the duration of the comment period. The presentation recording is still available and can be found at <https://www.amtrak.com/connecticut-river-bridge>

Comment 2: One commenter questioned why Amtrak could not have immediate responses to the questions asked during the February 15th Zoom webinar and a longer than 15-minute Q&A period.

Response 2: The intent of the February 15th presentation was informational and to update the public on the status of the project. The purpose of the 30-day comment period was to gather all stakeholder questions and comments and respond collectively in a single, comprehensive format. In addition to receiving comments by email, physical mail, and phone, Amtrak welcomed comments in the Zoom chat function during the Zoom Webinar. The Zoom Webinar remained open until all participants had an opportunity to comment.

Comment 3: One commenter asked to what extent have local governmental boards and agencies have been involved in the project and to what extent have efforts been made to provide information to local residents.

Response 3: Amtrak has been coordinating with local government representatives and agencies since the conceptual design phase of the project began in 2008. Amtrak has also hosted several stakeholder meetings, including a public information session, a meeting with mariners, and several interagency meetings. As the project progressed through preliminary and final engineering, Amtrak continued to coordinate with government and agency stakeholders through regularly scheduled meetings with Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CTDEEP), United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), among others. More recently, Amtrak distributed information about the project and the February 15, 2023 public information session through a variety of channels including an e-blast, media advisory, distribution of flyers, and more.

C. Comments Pertaining to Procurement

Comment 4: Several commenters inquired about future project procurement details including the anticipated bidding schedule, the contract type, and whether the project will use a Project Labor Agreement.

Response 4: The project will be Design-Bid-Build and will be Firm Fixed Price. Anticipated bidding is scheduled for Spring 2023. Further details will be provided as part of the upcoming solicitation.

Comment 5: One commenter asked if the future RFPs for this project will come through the Ariba Portal.

Response 5: The RFQ for construction services will be posted on Amtrak's procurement website. The RFPs will come directly from Amtrak's Ariba Portal via an email link once firms are approved as a bidder.

Comment 6: One commenter inquired about the timeframe for RFP/Bids for fabricated structural steelwork.

Response 6: Structural steelwork and other subcontract work will be procured by the preferred General Contractor following the award of the Design-Bid-Build Contract.

D. Comments Pertaining to Project Design

Comment 7: One commenter asked if the new bridge design will provide higher train speeds.

Response 7: The Maximum Authorized Speed on the existing bridge is 45mph. The Maximum Authorized Speed on the new bridge will be 70mph.

Comment 8: One commenter suggested that the bridge be built wide enough to accommodate at least one additional track to accommodate mode shift from cars to trains. They noted that I-95 is overly congested in this area and encouraged planning ahead for an increased number of Amtrak and Shore Line East trains.

Response 8: The design of the bridge is based on railroad needs, environmental impacts, schedule, and cost. Amtrak performed a comprehensive alternatives analysis during the conceptual design phase. The alternatives were shared with the public for review and comment as part of the Environmental Assessment. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Amtrak chose the preferred alternative because it would satisfy all the project goals and objectives while minimizing impacts to the surrounding environment and conflicts with maritime traffic.

Comment 9: One commenter questioned why the new bridge design only has a six-foot height increase.

Response 9: The existing Connecticut River Bridge has a vertical clearance of 18 feet above mean high water when the bridge is in the closed position. The original design for the new bridge maintained this vertical clearance. During the public review of the Environmental Assessment, Amtrak received several requests from mariners to increase this vertical clearance. In response to this feedback, during advance design, Amtrak agreed to a six-foot height increase (24 feet of vertical clearance) to benefit mariners while minimizing impacts to railroad operations, profile, and elevation.

E. Comments Pertaining to Construction Considerations

Comment 10: One commenter questioned what the noise levels would be like for residents near the project site.

Response 10: As stated in the project's Environmental Assessment, short-term noise and vibration from construction equipment and vehicles traveling to and from the project site is expected. Amtrak will require its contractor to adhere to a noise and vibration monitoring program.

Comment 11: One commenter inquired when the construction of the new temporary bridge over the Lieutenant River would begin.

Response 11: Construction of the new temporary bridge over the Lieutenant River is anticipated to begin in early 2025, but the schedule is dependent on the contractor's final means and methods and environmental permit approvals. As required by the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the public will be given proper notice before construction begins.

Comment 12: One commenter asked how construction materials will be brought to the project site and what routes would be taken.

Response 12: Amtrak proposes to provide construction access primarily by temporary access roads or by barge. These plans will be approved through the environmental permitting process at the state and federal levels. Amtrak will continue to coordinate site access with regulatory agencies once a contractor is selected.

Comment 13: One commenter asked if Amtrak will need to get local zoning, conservation, and other impact approvals for proposed access roads and construction staging areas.

Response 13: Amtrak has proposed potential access roads and staging areas. These plans will be approved through the environmental permitting process at the state and federal levels. Amtrak has been in communication with state and federal agencies regarding proposed access roads and staging areas and will continue to coordinate once a contractor is selected. Amtrak will also keep the Towns of Old Saybrook and Old Lyme informed as the project advances.

F. Comments Pertaining to Cultural Resources

Comment 14: Several commenters asked about the protection of cultural resources including potential archaeological discoveries.

Response 14: A detailed evaluation of historic and archaeological resources was performed as part of the Environmental Assessment. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (CTSHPO), and Amtrak executed a [Memorandum of Agreement](#), which outlines the protection and mitigation measures for all cultural resources.

Comment 15: One commenter inquired if there would be documentation, including a photographic record, provided for cultural resources.

Response 15: The [Memorandum of Agreement](#) stipulates that Amtrak will mitigate for the unavoidable adverse effect to the Connecticut River Bridge through several measures, including Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation and photographs meeting archival standards.

G. Comments Pertaining to Natural Resources

Comment 16: One commenter asked if there will be any construction activities that require a Protected Species Observer.

Response 16: Yes, environmental permits and regulatory consultations will require a full time Environmental Scientist to oversee all construction activities. The Environmental Scientist will be responsible for reviewing contractor operations for compliance with protection protocols, including daily observations, for protected species which have been coordinated with State and Federal resource agencies as part of the permitting process. Construction activities will also follow protocols to avoid and minimize impacts to protected species.

Comment 17: One commenter stated that the fishing mitigation offered is unacceptable and not equivalent for fishing access. The commenter suggested that further review of access should be studied.

Response 17: Amtrak identified the need to temporarily close a portion of the boardwalk at Ferry Landing Park in the Environmental Assessment and solicited public and agency input during the comment period. As part of the environmental permitting process, Amtrak worked with Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CTDEEP) and upon their suggestion identified the rehabilitation of Eagle Landing Pier as the appropriate mitigation for the temporary partial loss of use. After completion of the project, fishers will have access to two improved fishing locations: Ferry Landing Park and Eagle Landing Pier.

Comment 18: One commenter noted that there is a year-round, striped bass population adjacent to the existing bridge and inquired about the protection measures that will be put in place during construction. The commenter suggested that more studies, such as tagging studies, should be completed before the project proceeds.

Response 18: Amtrak has worked closely with Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CTDEEP) Fisheries Division to develop measures to protect various fish species, including striped bass, during construction. These measures include time-of-year restrictions to reduce impacts during fish migration periods, the use of turbidity curtains to reduce construction-related turbidity, lighting restrictions during migration periods, barge work restrictions to prevent damage to benthic aquatic organisms, and specific measures to protect the Commercial American Shad Fishery, including a communication program with fishers.



Comment 19: Several commenters mentioned the unique natural resource habitat within the project site and asked what measures will be taken throughout the duration of the project to protect plants and wildlife, so they do not deteriorate.

Response 19: As discussed in the February 15th presentation, Amtrak has been coordinating with Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CTDEEP), United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and other regulatory agencies to provide detailed mitigation plans for impacts to plants and wildlife throughout construction. This includes full restoration of impacted areas associated with temporary construction activities, the transplanting and relocation of listed plant species, phragmites control, time-of-year restrictions to protect nesting birds, contractor training regarding protection protocols, and the daily monitoring of natural resources.

H. Conclusion

Amtrak appreciates the stakeholder participation in the recent public information meeting and subsequent public comment period. Interested parties can stay informed about the project by visiting <https://www.amtrak.com/connecticut-river-bridge>