

2.4 Summary of Public Involvement Activities

2.4.1 Phase I – April 2001

The objective of the first phase of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Toll Impact Study was to gather information, including public comments, pertaining to the benefits and impacts related to the possibility of reducing the toll. This Public Involvement Report provides details about the comments received through facilitated workshop discussions conducted during two public meetings held in April 2001, and from telephone calls, e-mail messages, and correspondence received between April 19, 2001 and May 8, 2001. The comments recorded at the public meetings and received via e-mail, first-class mail, or comment sheets are the opinions expressed by members of the public. Additional public input, specifically pertaining to the desire to reduce the tolls or maintain the existing toll structure, will be solicited during the second phase of the study. At that point, members of the public will be able to consider the three toll reduction scenarios that are being analyzed by the consulting team and provide input on which of the scenarios they prefer.

2.4.1.1 Common Themes

The various methods for conveying comments yielded slightly different priorities, however, several common themes emerged from the comments received. A majority of the comments received during the first phase of the study included the concern that a lower toll would have negative consequences. Alternatively, a number of comments recommended that the toll should be reduced or eliminated, that the toll should be tiered to offer a lower rate for residents, that the toll should be maintained and the revenue shared, and/or that a reduced toll would have positive consequences.

In the largest workshop, Quality of Life and Livable Communities, the most important theme was the strong desire of the citizens to maintain the values that they cherish. These values include the rural nature of the Eastern Shore, the serenity of the communities, the diverse and natural beauty of the Shore, including the varied wildlife, their heritage and roots, their unique family lifestyles, friendly atmosphere, and the close-knit communities. There is a strong concern that any changes precipitated by a change in the toll structure would be detrimental to the characteristics that make the Eastern Shore such a unique place to live. The potential impacts of growth on the natural resources, such as water quality and adequacy of the water supply, were cited many times. These quality of life issues were also raised in the other workshop sessions.

Another common concern was that the government might not take sufficient actions to protect the interests of the local residents. Citizens cited the perceived lack of adequate zoning tools, the need for the implementation and enforcement of zoning and other land use regulations that already exist, and the desire for increased use of conservation easements, trusts, and comprehensive plans.

In general, workshop participants supported economic growth, in terms of ecotourism and soft-tourism, but not of the “theme park” variety. There is a desire to increase economic development to the extent that the young people in both counties can find satisfying, skilled employment at home, without having to leave the Shore. Residents want better paying jobs with benefits, such as hospitalization insurance, but acknowledged that the small businesses on the Shore would probably not be able to pay for these benefits. Concerns that increased employment opportunities and the influx of new residents could mean higher taxes and be detrimental to the economically disadvantaged were expressed.

In addition, some participants expressed the desire to extend the tourist season and offer more facilities for biking and kayaking, or anything related to the water and beaches. They cited Chincoteague’s active encouragement of events, such as the Oyster Festival, decoy shows, craft shows, etc., as desirable activities. In the Tourism workshop, participants noted that activities, such as bird watching, the CBBT bike/walk, etc., deserve more attention. Another common theme for all workshop sessions was the fear that the Shore would become another Hampton Roads or Virginia Beach.

Residents also expressed concerns regarding Route 13, increased traffic, and safety issues, which could result from lowering the tolls. Comments received regarding the positive aspects of a toll reduction include the possibility of improved/easier access to medical facilities located on the mainland. Prior to any toll reduction, some people believe that a new, deeper bay bridge-tunnel should be built. Issues related to congestion and delays in getting through the two-way tunnels were raised. Other participants suggested using excess toll revenues to improve Route 13 or to provide relief for people who cannot afford the current tolls.

2.4.1.2 Public Meetings

The study team conducted two public meetings with facilitated workshops, first in Accomack County (Nandua High School, April 19, 2001) and then in Northampton County (Northampton High School, April 25, 2001). The purpose of these meetings was to provide an overview of the study, undertake facilitated discussions with the public about related topics, and to receive oral and written comments. A total of two hundred and sixteen (216) citizens attended both meetings, including members of the Accomack County and Northampton County Boards of Supervisors, the Bi-County Commuter Toll Impact Study Committee, and the study’s Citizen Advisory Committee. Sixty-five (65) people attended the meeting in Accomack County. One hundred and fifty-one (151) citizens attended the Northampton County meeting.

Each individual workshop included the following introduction:

There is the potential for a toll reduction for the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. Currently, there is no agreement regarding what the possible scenarios will be. The study is trying to develop the benefits and impacts to the people on the Eastern Shore depending on the scenarios. We are assuming that there will be a second phase of this

study and that a strategic plan will be developed. The information that you provide will be very helpful during the preparation of the strategic plan. Thank you for coming to the public meeting and workshops and for participating in this study.

The facilitated workshops conducted during both meetings included Agriculture and Aquaculture, Economic Development, Environmental Resources and Habitat Preservation, Quality of Life and Livable Communities, Tourism, and Transportation. The facilitators asked topic-specific questions to elicit comments from the workshop participants.

Most of the workshops utilized colored dots to determine the top four or five topics that each group wanted to report when the general meeting session reconvened. The remaining items under each topic are listed in the order in which they were discussed during the workshops (see Topic Session Reports in the Appendix).

ORAL COMMENTS: Of those who participated in the facilitated discussions in Accomack County, most citizens (25) attended the Quality of Life workshop and twelve (12) attended the session for Environmental Resources. Eleven (11) participated in Transportation. Of the remaining sessions, seven (7) participated in Economic Development, six (6) in Tourism, and five (5) in Agriculture.

The rural environment was mentioned in the Quality of Life discussion, along with a concern for sustainable economic development, educational quality, recreational opportunities, and public access to the waterfront. In the Environmental discussion, sentiment focused on the area's beautiful natural scenery and socioeconomic diversity. Environmental education and conflicting land uses were also repeatedly raised. Transportation issues revolved around safety, traffic, preservation of a viable Route 13 corridor, user-financed road improvements, zoning, and tolls.

In the facilitated discussions in Northampton County, most people, (43) attended Quality of Life. Twenty-three (23) participated in Agriculture. Twenty-one (21) citizens attended the Environmental Resources session, and twenty (20) participated in Transportation. Of the remaining sessions in Northampton County, fifteen (15) people participated in the Economic Development discussion, and ten (10) in Tourism.

The area's rural character, development clustering, zoning, and population diversity were mentioned in the Quality of Life session in Northampton County. The unique rural environment, a tax structure not conducive to farming, and out-of-balance development were highlighted in Agriculture discussions. In Environmental Resources, the area's rural attributes were again mentioned, along with water, the enforcement of existing zoning laws and regulations, and better cooperation between the two counties and various towns. The Eastern Shore's unique nature, and current lifestyle, as well as the prospect of a second tunnel and no adjustment to the tolls, were raised in the Transportation workshop.

WRITTEN COMMENTS: Written public input was received by **comment sheets** submitted to the study team and in **correspondence** sent by mail.

Comment sheets addressed several topics. In both localities, individuals who submitted comment sheets supported maintaining, lowering, and/or eliminating the toll.

In Accomack County, comments also addressed land use, taxation and zoning, impacts associated with increased traffic, protection of aquaculture and other local industries, water resources, sustainable economic development, job training, environmental conservation, discouraging sprawl development, and maintaining the area's rural character.

In Northampton County, land use taxation, concerns about increased taxation, the possibility of water quality degradation as a result of increased development density, encouraging eco-friendly businesses, implementation and enforcement of zoning ordinances, potential damage to the natural habitat and environment caused by development, and a decline in traffic safety incidental to increased through traffic were among the themes raised in written comment sheets.

Between April 19, 2001 and May 8, 2001, the study team received seven (7) pieces of **correspondence** conveying public comments. Most of the comments pertained to the environment, quality of life, or transportation. Environmental points emphasized the unique character of the Eastern Shore. Quality of life correspondents argued against over-development, while transportation comments addressed myriad aspects, including tolls, new or improved tunnels, and limited highway access. Some correspondents also included articles or supplementary materials with their letters.

2.4.1.3 Comments Received by Telephone

Ten (10) telephone calls were received on the toll-free telephone hotline. Callers expressed concern about increased traffic on the Eastern Shore and the water supply. They also supported and opposed lowering and/or eliminating the toll.

2.4.1.4 Comments Received by E-mail

Members of the public transmitted four (4) e-mail messages to the study team. E-mail correspondents conveyed concern about the effect on the Eastern Shore of constructing another tunnel and/or a seaside interstate highway. They also discussed promoting entrepreneurial ventures with the goal of attracting investment to the Eastern Shore.

2.4.1.5 Summary of Impacts Identified by Northampton and Accomack County Residents

Residents of the Eastern Shore expressed their concerns through several public forums regarding the potential impacts that could occur due to a toll reduction of the Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel. Most of these impacts are addressed in their corresponding sections in Chapter 4. Community concerns are summarized in this report and are organized by topic area:

- Agriculture and Aquaculture
- Economic Development

- Environmental Resources
- Quality of Life
- Tourism
- Transportation

Agriculture and Aquaculture

The primary concerns included the threat to clam growers that are dependent on clean waters, which may be jeopardized due to increased growth. Increased traffic and safety impacts due to growth on the Eastern Shore, posing a danger for farmers and slow-moving equipment is another concern, while, increased air emissions and runoff from agricultural uses, impacting the aquaculture industry were other concerns.

There are also concerns of the acquisition of farmlands to developers and there may be threat of corporate farming, thereby reducing the number of private farmers. Residents posed a solution to implement land use taxation to encourage and preserve agriculture.

Economic Development

Residents were increasingly concerned that those with advanced degrees may leave the Shore to find better employment opportunities, leaving behind lower-skilled and lower paying jobs. There needs to be better employment opportunities and job training offered to encourage those residents to look for employment opportunities on the Shore. There is a concern that with a decrease in toll, Eastern Shore residents would migrate towards the Hampton Roads area for better employment opportunities. Encouraging sustainable economic development was one of the solutions expressed by residents as well as tax incentives for new businesses such as those that are ecologically friendly. In addition, larger businesses may find the Eastern Shore more attractive, thereby, pushing out or ultimately eliminating “mom and pop” shops.

Environmental Resources

The majority of the concerns were centered on impacts to and degradation of forests, woodlands, waterways, farms, critical habitats and endangered species as well the drinking water supply. Increased air emissions and pollution due to increased traffic and population were also of concern which would impact the fragile, natural resources and scenic vistas on the Eastern Shore. Solutions expressed included compensation for conservation easements and the protection of environmental resources through zoning regulations. Impacts to the groundwater and wastewater treatment operations were a concern. There is a also concern of conflicting land uses where increased residential development and densities would compete for water and other natural resources critical to the sustainability of agricultural and forestal lands.

Quality of Life

Potential impacts to quality of life include the loss of community character and cohesion, the loss of the unique rural, open space and lifestyle and the loss of the natural beauty and fragile resources characteristic of the Eastern Shore. There is a concern about residential displacements and lack of affordable housing with increased growth. Septic problems may occur due to increased development and conflicting land uses. Increased accidents

may occur with increased growth, infringing upon the safety of residents on the Shore due to increased traffic. There is a concern about the impacts to water quality and resources as well as the historic and cultural resources unique to the Shore. Tax relief is a request for those who cannot afford high taxes that accompany increased development.

Tourism

With a potential toll reduction, more visitors may be impacting the Shore. Light and noise pollution may result as well as increased air emissions with increased traffic and accidents on the Shore. Impacts to water sources, landfill use and energy usage would occur. Increased advertising along the Route 13 corridor promoting tourism may become an eyesore again impacting the rural image of the region. Implementing and promoting “soft tourism” or ecotourism, recreational opportunities and heritage tourism may diminish the impacts to the natural resources unique to the Shore.

Transportation

With increased growth on the Eastern Shore, a substantial increase in traffic could occur resulting in impacts to safety and a greater number of accidents may occur. More people may be crossing the bridge for better health care services and with increased growth, there may be an increase of heavy trucks impacting the Shore resulting in increased air emissions and pollution.

2.4.2 Phase II – October 2001

Two rounds of public meetings were held during the course of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Commuter Toll Impact Study. The first round of meetings was designed to elicit input from the community about the impact that a possible reduction of the toll on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (CBBT) would have on the Eastern Shore community. These meetings were held on April 19 and April 25, 2001 and were conducted as a series of topical workshops that corresponded to the subject matter of the draft report. As a result of those meetings, the study team developed a list of impacts to the residents of the Eastern Shore. This information was then analyzed and potential strategies to ameliorate the impacts were developed.

The second round of public meetings was held on October 16, 2001 at Nandua High School in Accomack County, and on October 17, 2001 at Northampton High School in Northampton County. This second round of public meetings brought the community together to discuss the potential strategies and to determine which ones they wanted to pursue through their elected officials in their respective counties and with the CBBT Commission.

After viewing a formal presentation, attendees participated in concurrent workshops. In these facilitated sessions, citizens discussed the potential impacts affecting the Eastern Shore, as well as potential strategies/actions they wanted pursued. Study team members also distributed a public involvement survey, which asked respondents to rate the

potential impacts and prioritize potential actions/initiatives that could be taken in response.

There was overwhelming support among the community members attending the meetings, to have both counties take actions to urge the CBBT Commission to study the need for infrastructure improvements, that would include a second set of tunnels, and to postpone any possible toll reduction until these and other improvements were completed. There is also great support for a restructuring of the CBBT Commission that would ensure more representation for the Eastern Shore.

The community also feels strongly that the counties should adopt growth management and related strategies to deal with increased development that would come about as a result of continued growth to the shore, and particularly the accelerated threat of development if there were a toll reduction. Specifically, there was a great deal of support for the establishment of a “Greenline/Resource Protection District,” to set a boundary for the most intense development on the southern end of Northampton County. “Land Use Taxation,” to aid farmers and forest owners to withstand the expected increased pressure on property taxes, also garnered a lot of support.

Other strategies called for more involvement in the political process, increasing affordable housing and formation of citizen advisory groups. The results of the workshop sessions, public involvement surveys, and related statistical analysis can be found in Appendices A through E of this report.

2.4.2.1 ACCOMACK COUNTY

Workshop Session Results

One hundred twenty-three members of the community and elected officials attended the October 16, 2001 meeting at Nandua High School. After a formal presentation, attendees participated in one of six concurrent workshops and prioritized strategies they wanted to pursue.

Workshop participants identified seven top strategies they wished to be pursued to mitigate potential adverse effects of a toll change. Of the top seven strategies, most of the votes resulted in strategies in which the County would take a formal position on CBBT proposals. Twenty five percent voted to ask the CBBT Commission to make tunnel infrastructure improvements before reducing the toll, 13% voted to postpone the toll reduction until it was more feasible, 15% voted to further study the structure of the CBBT Commission, and 10% voted to increase the level of Eastern Shore representation on the CBBT Commission.

Relative to land use strategies, 12% identified growth management and related strategies as a priority to pursue and 18% of the vote was cast to pursue a Greenline/Resource Protection District. Seven percent of the vote identified a new potential strategy for improving the political process.

Public Involvement Survey Results

Participants from the meeting in Accomack County returned 96 survey forms. With respect to *Potential Impacts*, respondents indicated that surface/groundwater and natural habitat impacts, changes to the rural quality of life, and traffic congestion would have the most adverse effects to the Eastern Shore, if the CBBT toll were changed. Increased pressure on property taxes and increased residential activity were also cited as having very adverse impacts.

In identifying *Potential Actions/Initiatives for the Eastern Shore*, survey respondents indicated that their highest priority lies with the County taking formal policy positions on the CBBT tunnel infrastructure improvements, which includes the addition of a second set of tunnels. Further study into the composition of the CBBT Commission, which includes increasing representation for the Eastern Shore counties, the CBBT public hearing/public comment process, and the use of any toll revenue surplus was also indicated as a highest priority.

Two additional actions relating to land use strategies---the enactment of a Greenline/Protection District (providing for special development/habitat protection in the area south of Cape Charles/Cheriton) and the pursuit of use regulations, which would limit residential uses in agricultural zones and create Agricultural and Forestal Districts---received highest priority ratings in identifying strategies that should be pursued.

Many survey respondents provided additional comments, suggestions, ideas or strategies for action on page two of the survey form. A summary of these comments is available in Appendix D.

Please refer to Appendices A and D to view the results of the workshop sessions and surveys received from the meeting in Accomack County.

2.4.2.2 NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

Workshop Session Results

One hundred fifty-nine community members and elected officials attended the October 17, 2001 meeting at Northampton High School. After the consultant's formal presentation, citizens participated in one of five concurrent workshops and prioritized strategies they wished to pursue.

The top seven strategies in this session were almost evenly divided between those strategies pertaining to County policy positions on CBBT proposals and those associated with land use. Twenty four percent voted to ask the CBBT Commission to make tunnel infrastructure improvements prior to reducing the toll, 8% voted for postponement of a toll reduction until other actions had taken place, 11% voted to increase the level of Eastern Shore representation on the CBBT Commission, and 8% voted to have no toll change.

Twenty two percent voted to have their elected officials address growth management and related strategies, 12% voted for implementation of a Greenline/Resource Protection District for the southern tip of the County, and 15% of the vote was cast to implement a land use taxation policy.

Public Involvement Survey Results

As indicated above, the public involvement survey offered respondents the opportunity to rate the potential impacts of a CBBT toll change and assign a priority to potential actions/initiatives that could be taken to mitigate the impacts. Participants at the Northampton meeting returned 116 survey forms. With respect to *Potential Impacts*, natural habitat and surface/ground water, as well as increased pressure on property taxes, were identified as having the most adverse effects on the Eastern Shore. Changes to the rural quality of life and traffic congestion were also cited as being adverse effects on the Eastern Shore.

In identifying *Potential Actions/Initiatives for the Eastern Shore*, Northampton County survey respondents agreed with Accomack County respondents in indicating their highest priority lies with the County taking formal policy positions on the CBBT tunnel infrastructure improvements and further study into the structure of the CBBT Commission. Two growth management and related strategies—land use taxation and the enactment of a Greenline/Resource Protection District--were also identified as high priorities for elected officials to pursue.

Many survey respondents provided additional comments, suggestions, ideas or strategies for action on page two of the survey form. A summary of these comments is available in Appendix E.

Please refer to Appendices A and E to view the results of the workshop sessions and surveys received from the meeting in Northampton County.