

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### **What is a PD&E Study?**

A Project Development and Environmental (PD&E) study is the process that ensures early coordination and communication for FDOT transportation improvement projects while considering engineering design, project costs, and environmental and social impacts. With input from the public, governmental agencies, and governmental officials, this process helps analyze impacts to the surrounding area. This process has been developed to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the environmental, traffic, engineering, and social impacts for the replacement of Brooks Bridge. Various roadway improvements and alignment options will be considered focusing on the current bridge location. Improvements at the Perry Avenue/U.S. 98 and in the vicinity of Santa Rosa Boulevard/U.S. 98 intersections will also be considered.

### **When will the PD&E Study be complete?**

The Brooks Bridge Replacement Study is in the second of four years. It is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2018.

### **Who makes the decision?**

Because FDOT anticipates federal funding for replacement of the bridge, we must follow the federal environmental process of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). FDOT complies with NEPA through the PD&E Study process. An Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared along with engineering and other technical reports to evaluate and consider a wide range of issues. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) ultimately approves the EA document if the analysis indicates the project will not have a significant adverse environmental effect. However, the FHWA will make the decision that considers all public input and the recommendation of the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization, local and county government, the project's Stakeholder Advisory Group, and regulatory and resources agencies.

### **When will construction begin on the bridge replacement?**

A construction start date has not been established and construction funding has not yet been identified in the FDOT Five-Year Plan, or in the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization Long-Range Transportation Plan Cost Feasible Plan.

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### **Why is the project needed?**

Replacement of Brooks Bridge is needed in order to solve the structural deficiencies of the existing bridge. Brooks Bridge was constructed in 1964 with an expected 50-year design life. The existing bridge does not meet current design standards, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, or navigational clearance requirements for this portion of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. Previous studies have been undertaken, but none were prepared in accordance with the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. This PD&E Study is required to fulfill the NEPA process.

### **What will the new bridge look like?**

The new bridge will be higher than the current bridge in order to meet navigational clearance requirements on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. The current bridge has a vertical height clearance of 50 feet and the new bridge will have a vertical height clearance of 65 feet. The existing bridge has two travel lanes in each direction. The proposed bridge will have three lanes in each direction, along with a shared use path for bicycles and pedestrians separated and protected from the vehicular travel lanes. The additional third lane in each direction is designed to help with turning movements on and off the bridge at the two intersections at the end of the bridge. Various options (known as the Typical Section) are being considered.

### **Will the bridge replacement solve the traffic congestion in downtown Fort Walton Beach?**

No. The bridge replacement is intended to address the need to replace the structurally deficient bridge. Additional roadway capacity is not proposed to be added through downtown Fort Walton Beach because federal bridge replacement funds cannot be used for capacity improvement projects.

### **What intersection improvements are being considered?**

On the Fort Walton Beach side, improvements are being considered at Perry Avenue to help traffic flow on and off the bridge and to improve conditions at the intersection while working with access to local businesses such as the grocery store and the future development planned at that location.

On the Okaloosa Island side, improvements are being considered in the vicinity of Santa Rosa Boulevard. Because of the increased height of the bridge, the replacement bridge and roadway cannot touch down where the intersection is today. A substantial reconfiguration will be needed. Various options are being considered to improve traffic flow on and off the bridge, and to provide for local connections including bicycle and pedestrian movements.

### **How much will the project cost and who pays for it?**

The PD&E process will develop conceptual costs for the design and construction including any costs associated with new right-of-way acquisition that would be required. Those costs are under development. FDOT anticipates seeking federal bridge replacement funding for the project.

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### **Will this be a toll bridge?**

FDOT does not envision tolling will be required for the replacement bridge.

### **What are the environmental impacts of replacing the bridge?**

Santa Rosa Sound is designated as Critical Habitat for the Atlantic sturgeon, Gulf subspecies (generally known as the Gulf sturgeon) and is protected and regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species. Twice a year, sturgeons pass through the Sound migrating upriver. Construction methods will be required to follow certain mitigation commitments to minimize the effect of bridge construction on the sturgeon. Specifically, sturgeon can be physically injured or killed by sharp sound waves associated with driving new piles for the replacement bridge. Underwater noise attenuation methods will be required to minimize this potential effect along with scheduling construction times to avoid the migration periods. Other species such as manatees and sea turtles use Santa Rosa Sound. Mitigation commitments will be required to protect these species.

Additionally, areas of submerged aquatic vegetation are present around the bridge. This seagrass provides what is known as an Essential Fish Habitat. Okaloosa Island also has wetland areas that provide habitat for shorebirds and protected plant species. Mitigation commitments will be developed to off-set impacts to these resources.

### **What's next?**

Following the May 2016 public meeting, FDOT will use the public input received to help analyze the various options for intersection improvements and whether the replacement bridge needs to be shifted to the north or south of the existing bridge. Various technical studies and reports will be developed to study traffic, engineering, social, and environmental issues. These studies will be summarized in an Environmental Assessment (EA) document. The EA will be made available for public review at a Public Hearing tentatively scheduled for early 2018. FDOT will continue to work with the project's Stakeholder Advisory Group and both the City of Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa County and the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization to develop the best possible solution.

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### **Who is the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization and what do they do?**

The Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization (O-W TPO) is the local decision-making body for transportation decisions affecting the two counties. The TPO is composed of elected officials from the municipalities and counties. Only elected officials sit on the TPO. There are two committees that support the TPO: a Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The TCC is composed of staff and management from the local cities and counties. The CAC is composed of citizen representatives confirmed through the TPO.

One of the primary functions of the TPO is to develop the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). In order for FDOT to allocate state and federal funding to a roadway or bridge project, the TPO incorporates the project into the LRTP and then prioritizes the project for FDOT consideration.

For more information on this and other TPOs in northwest Florida, go to the West Florida Regional Planning Council website [www.wfrpc.org](http://www.wfrpc.org) and look under "Program Areas" and then "Transportation Planning."

### **How is it possible to construct the replacement bridge at the existing location without affecting the marinas, parks, or shopping?**

The PD&E process will develop conceptual engineering plans for construction including maintenance of traffic, including vehicles, vessels, and pedestrians. One scenario for construction phasing could be to utilize the existing right-of-way over the water that exists on the northerly side of the bridge to construct a new bridge deck. All four lanes of traffic would then be shifted over to the new bridge structure while the existing bridge is removed. A second structure would then be built in its place. Traffic would then be distributed to both bridge structures. Provisions would be made to maintain traffic (including vehicles, vessels, and pedestrians) during all phases of construction. While construction impacts are inevitable, the end result will ensure a structurally safe bridge for years to come.

### **Where is this second bridge I keep hearing about?**

There is currently no proposal for a second bridge. FDOT intends to replace Brooks Bridge in the current location because it is structurally deficient and must be replaced.

As a separate study, FDOT is also studying the *feasibility* of an alternate crossing in a project known as the Santa Rosa Sound Alternate Crossing Study. The Alternate Crossing Study is not a PD&E Study like the Brooks Bridge Replacement Study project; it is a high-level planning and Feasibility Study to determine whether a more detailed PD&E study is needed. The project is currently in the Planning phase and is considering possible corridors through a rigorous and defined process known as an Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE). The ACE process has been developed by FDOT and the Federal Highway Administration to methodically study potential corridors and to screen the potential environmental impacts with the regulatory and resource agencies. The screening is currently underway. A separate public meeting will be held later in 2016 to review the results. FDOT will make a recommendation to the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization if there are any possible alignments that should be advanced to the PD&E study phase.