



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

J.R. "JOEY" HOPKINS
SECRETARY

MEMO TO: Post Public Meeting Attendees

FROM: Krista Kimmel, PE
Project Design Engineer
Project Development Unit, Division 3

DATE: January 9, 2024

SUBJECT: Project: 50607.1.1 (HB-0040) New Hanover County
Wrightsville Beach Bridge Replacement No. 640021, 640022, & 640024

The N.C. Department of Transportation is proposing to replace the bridge on Causeway Drive (U.S. 76) over Banks Channel, the bridge on Salisbury Street (U.S. 74) over Lees Cut, and the bridge on Salisbury Street (U.S. 74) over Banks Channel. The project is currently scheduled for right-of-way acquisition in Spring 2026 and construction starting in Spring 2028. The three Wrightsville Beach bridges are aging structures that require replacement. These bridges are located on two urban collector primary routes which serve as the only access to Wrightsville Beach (West Salisbury St and Causeway Dr).

The purpose of the project is to replace aging structures thereby improving connectivity and providing a long-term, safe, and efficient multi-modal crossing of Banks Channel and Lee's Cut.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

The HB-0040 Public Meeting was held on September 26, 2023 at Wrightsville Beach Baptist Church in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. There were 137 attendees at this public meeting. Comments for HB-0040 were collected through the project handout (comment card was included), public input website, email, phone, and mail. There was a total of ten questions asked, with seven of the questions allowing for personal input as a short answer.

The comment period concluded on October 10, 2023. During the public comment period there were 427 comment entries received, either during the meeting or through the website, email, phone, and mail. These comments discussed concerns surrounding the categories shown in Table 1. These categories include Bicycles/Pedestrians, Boat Access, Construction Duration,

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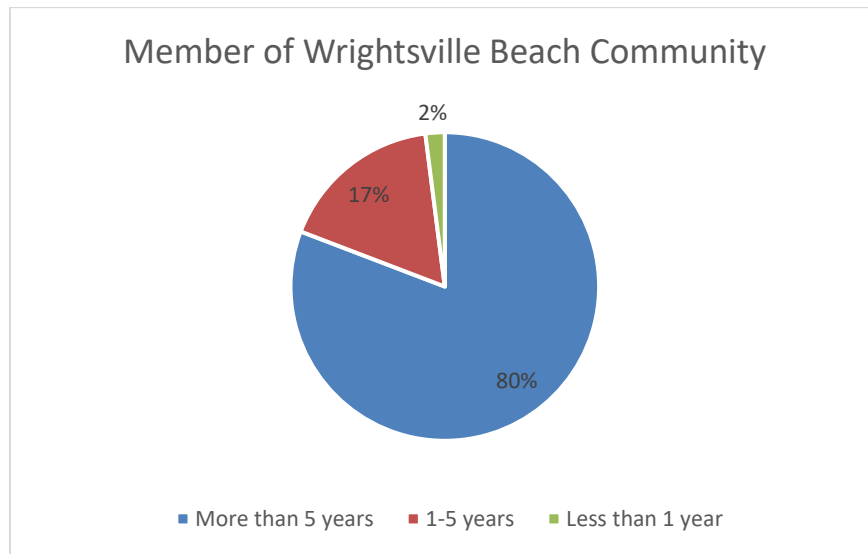
Design, Detour, Duplicate, General Comments, Impacts, Mapping, Right-of-way (ROW), Safety, Schedule, and Traffic. Comments not included in the table below were either duplicates, spam, or not legible.

Table 1. Categories of Comments

Bike/Ped	Boat Access	Construction Duration	Design	Detour	General Comment	Impacts	Mapping	ROW	Safety	Traffic
82	23	45	67	15	36	8	1	5	14	77

Public Input Summarized:

- *How long have you been a member of the Wrightsville Beach Community?*



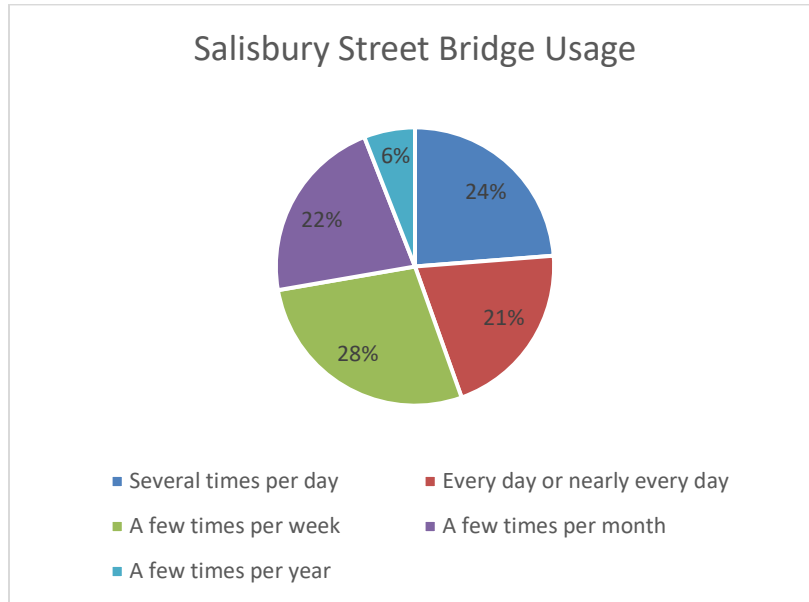


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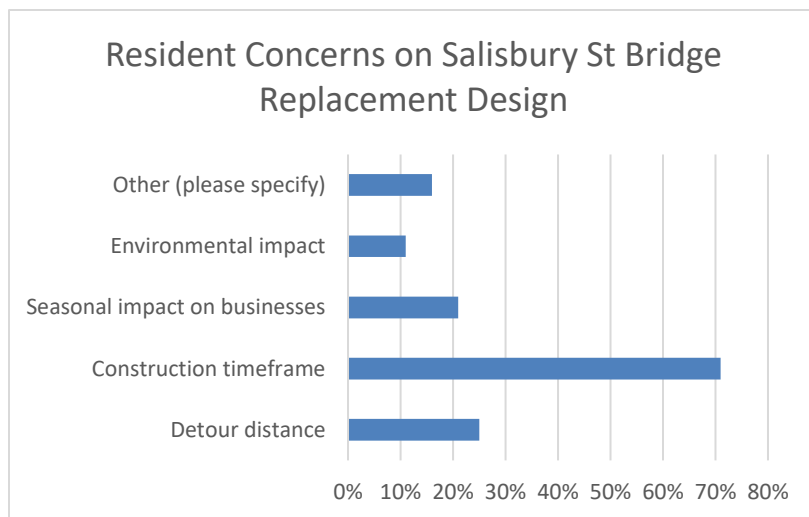
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- *How frequently do you cross the Salisbury Street Bridges*



- *What is your biggest concern about the proposed Salisbury Street bridge replacement designs?*



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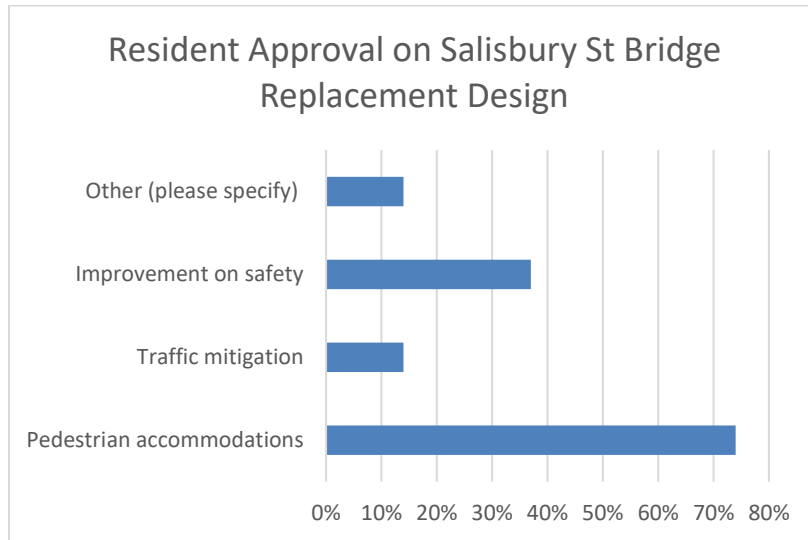


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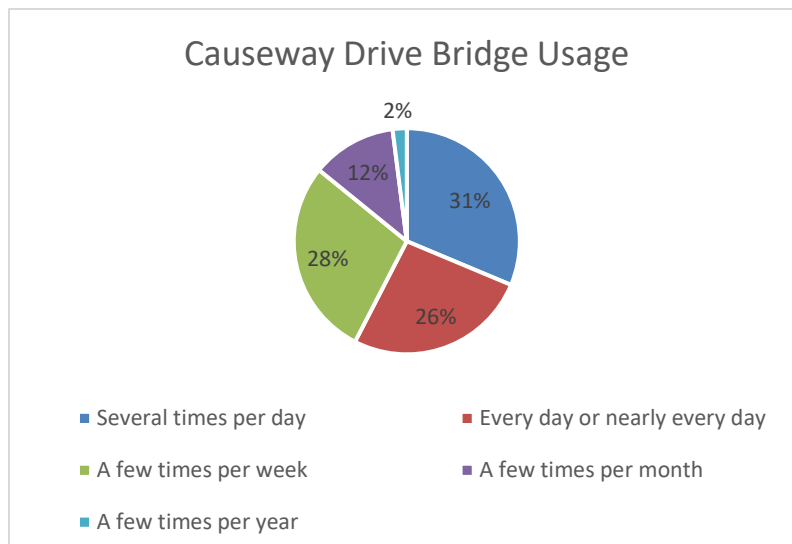
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- *What qualities do you like most about the proposed Salisbury Street bridge replacement designs?*



- *How frequently do you cross the Causeway Drive Bridge?*



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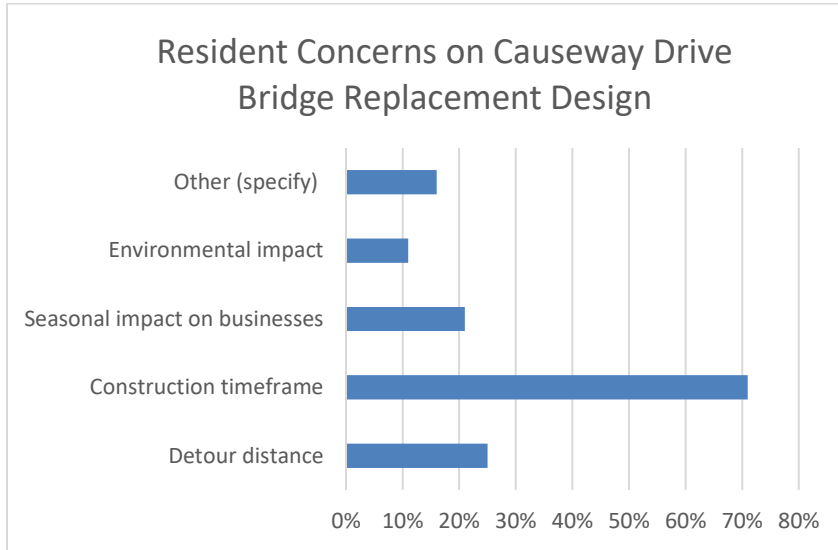


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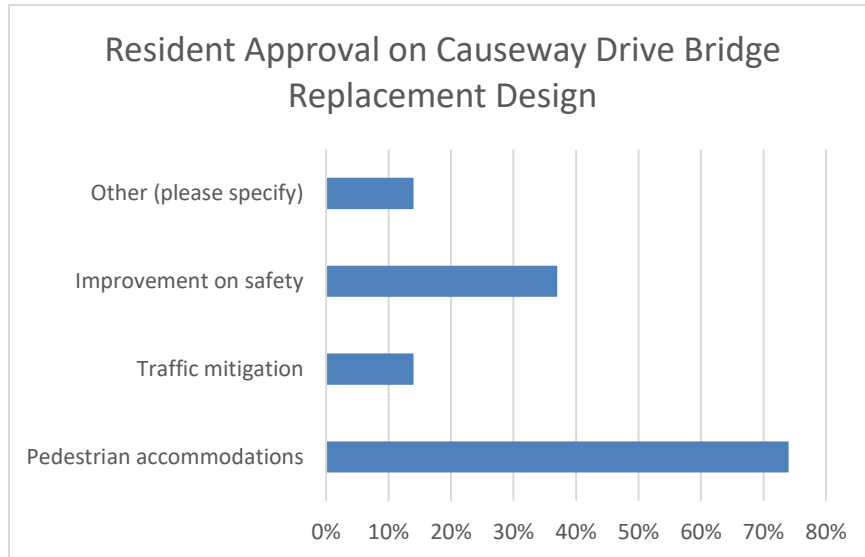
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- *What is your biggest concern about the proposed Causeway Drive bridge replacement design?*



- *What qualities do you like the most about the proposed Causeway Drive bridge replacement design?*



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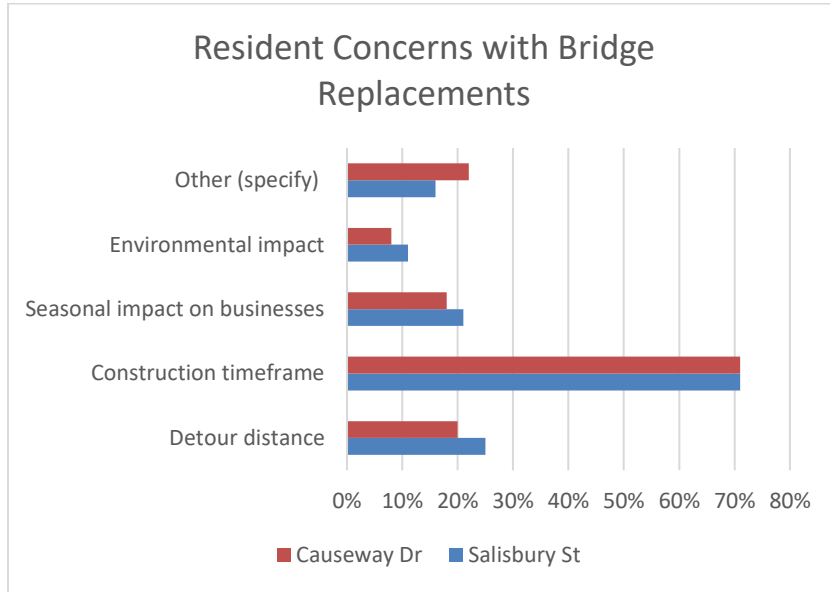


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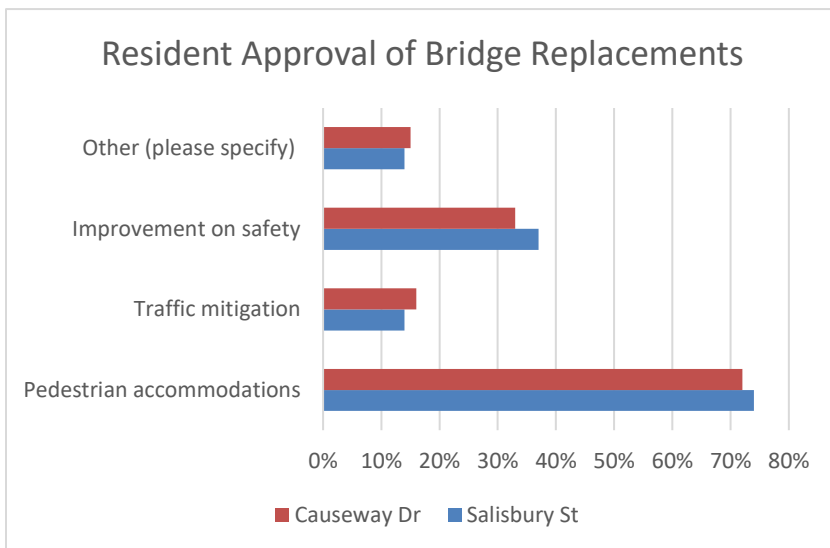
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- *Comparison of Concerns between Causeway Drive and Salisbury Street Bridge Replacements*



- *Comparison of Approval between Causeway Drive and Salisbury Street Bridge Replacements*



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RESPONSES TO COMMENTS

Seven questions from the comment card allowed for personal input as a short answer. The following summarizes the comments received and NCDOT responses.

Bicycles/Pedestrians

Many comments expressed concerns about the safety of the proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian facilities.

Response:

Regarding the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians, the appropriate safety amenities have been included in the preliminary designs. This project will make the corridor more pedestrian friendly by providing multi-use paths and designated bike lanes. Exact widths and locations for pedestrian/bicycle improvements will be determined during final design. All bicycle and pedestrian facilities will be designed according to the North Carolina Complete Streets Policy and Design Guidelines, AASHTO's (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, and the AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities. A primary goal of planning and design is to make it possible for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists to travel safely from their origins to their destinations.

More information about NCDOT's Complete Streets policy can be found here:

<https://www.ncdot.gov/divisions/bike-ped/Pages/complete-streets.aspx>

Several comments cited the need for a protected bike lane along the proposed structures for the safety of bicyclists.

Response:

NCDOT works to maximize the safety of all modes of travel for all our projects. Coordination with local planning staff resulted in the current design, which includes a multi-use path (MUP) and bike lanes. NCDOT is committed to Complete Streets improvements to provide for all modes of transportation. NCDOT will evaluate the need for more bike lane protection.

Many of the comments expressed a request for a pedestrian crossing on the proposed bridge designs.

Response:

Traffic signals and pedestrian/bicycle crossings will be evaluated during final design and signal crossing location recommendations will be made for the Causeway Drive Bridge.

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Residents also questioned the connectivity of the pedestrian accommodations on either side of the bridge.

Response:

This is a bridge replacement project and the current project limits do not extend past the bridge approaches.

One comment was received requesting a pedestrian bridge across Banks Channel.

Response:

NCDOT is evaluating bridge options for the Causeway Bridge to enhance the experience for all users.

Boat Access

Several comments mentioned concerns about the proposed bridge height regarding navigational access to waterways below the structures.

Response:

The proposed design provides bridge clearances at or above the existing bridge height. During preliminary design, the bridge height will be examined along with considerations for environment, bridge structural materials, wave force analysis, and coastal sea levels to determine the maximum height possible for each bridge.

Construction Duration

Many comments cited concern about the length of construction, due to Wrightsville Beach being a popular tourist destination during the summer months and how the duration would impact property values.

Response:

The anticipated duration of construction for each bridge is approximately 24 months. Only one bridge can be constructed at a time due to the detour route requiring the other bridges to remain open; therefore, the anticipated construction timeframe for all bridges will be approximately 72 months. Currently, right-of-way is scheduled for 2026 and construction is scheduled for 2028; these dates are subject to change. Every effort will be made to reduce the construction timeframe.



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Many residents expressed concerns about the current Causeway Drive Bridge maintenance project.

Response:

The bridge maintenance work being conducted on Causeway Drive Bridge is not related to this project. The maintenance work is needed to extend the useful life of the aging structure.

Design

Various comments expressed concerns that the Causeway Dr bridge design does not include enough lanes to account for the amount of traffic and congestion experienced during summer months.

Response:

NCDOT has consulted with the Town of Wrightsville Beach and Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) throughout planning and preliminary design for this project. We reviewed and considered local area plans in the context of the project's purpose. It should be noted that this project's purpose is to replace aging structures, not provide additional travel lanes.

Multiple alternatives have been studied throughout the development of the project and each considered the impacts to traffic in addition to the human and natural environments while also meeting the purpose and need of the project.

NCDOT is recommending two travel lanes on Salisbury Street and four travel lanes on Causeway Drive. Traffic analyses have been completed for this project and were factored into the design decisions. NCDOT has determined that these recommendations are adequate to accommodate traffic congestion during the off-summer peak season.

Several comments discussed the desire for aesthetics to be accounted for during bridge design, specifically mentioning the bridge railing shown at the public meeting.

Response:

The railing shown in the typical section in the presentation material is the standard rail that is required for pedestrian accommodations. The Department welcomes the opportunity to work with the Town and other local officials to discuss specific requests for aesthetics.

Detour

Many comments cited concerns about having two bridges closed during construction with the remaining bridge having to accommodate for all the traffic.

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Response:

Only one bridge will be closed at any given time. Project construction will begin with the Salisbury Street Bridge over Lee's Cut. Each bridge will be closed for the duration of construction which is anticipated to be approximately 24 months for each bridge. The construction type, length of the bridge, right-of-way, and utilities are all factors which can affect the construction duration. An off-site detour will be provided for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists utilizing Causeway Drive.

Residents have expressed concerns about a cut-through at the North Channel cul-de-sac in Lookout Harbor.

Response:

Currently, the detour route is not planned to pass through Lookout Harbor, as Lookout Harbor is private property, not public right-of-way.

Comments expressed the prevalence of traffic currently in Wrightsville Beach and expect volumes to increase substantially during the construction of the structures.

Response:

Traffic analyses are being completed for this project. Detour design comments from the public will be taken into consideration as NCDOT continues to refine the project design. NCDOT will work to minimize impacts to the community and natural environment.

Funding

Comments were expressed about the funding of these bridge replacements.

Response:

Currently, the project is funded in the NC Department of Transportation's State Bridge Program for preliminary engineering only. Funding for construction will be determined at a later date.

Impacts

The following comments were received regarding environmental impacts:

- One comment was received regarding the byproducts of the sanding and grinding falling into the water of the current bridge maintenance project.
- Another comment was received indicating no environmental oversight exists on the bridge maintenance project, citing toxic byproducts such as cement and plastic are going into the water.



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- A comment was received questioning the environmental impacts to the land the bridges will be constructed on.
- An additional comment was received suggesting that the environmental water impacts have not been included in the planning.

Response:

Minimization measures for unavoidable impacts have been developed through coordination with federal and state environmental regulatory and resource agencies including the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Coast Guard, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, and NC Division of Water Resources, among others. Following identification of the preferred alternative, designs will be refined based upon an updated traffic forecast.

NCDOT will continue to evaluate ways to modify the alternative to further avoid and minimize impacts to physical and natural environments. Impacts to wetlands and streams that cannot be avoided or further minimized will be compensated with mitigation agreed to by the permitting agencies. Water quality concerns will be avoided and/or mitigated through compliance with state and federal regulations covering watershed protection, floodplain protection, stream and river buffers, and stormwater management. NCDOT will continue to avoid and minimize impacts due to the project to the greatest extent practicable during final design and construction. The refined preliminary designs for the preferred alternative may incorporate measures to further minimize impacts to the natural and human environments.

Surface waters (lakes, rivers, and streams) and wetlands are subject to jurisdictional considerations under Section 404 and Section 401 program of the Clean Water Act. Under this program, any action that proposes to place fill material into these areas falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the North Carolina Division of Water Resources. As required by law, during the development of the preliminary design, efforts were made to avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands and streams wherever practicable. Several wetlands avoidance and minimization measures have been incorporated into the proposed project, including alignment revisions.

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One comment was received indicating a toll on the bridge would slow down traffic and negatively impact businesses.

Response:

A bridge toll is not anticipated.

One comment was received questioning how business property owners would be accommodated for two years.

Response:

Impacts shown on the public meeting/hearing maps reflect the "worst-case" scenario anticipated based on the most current data; they are preliminary and subject to change. NCDOT is committed to minimizing the number of residential and business relocations and impacts. Once a preferred alternative is identified, the design will be further refined. NCDOT considers safety, human and natural environment impacts, traffic service, cost, and public comments. All these things are considered when making decisions on projects. NCDOT will continue to look for other opportunities to further avoid and minimize impacts and relocations due to the project to the greatest extent practicable.

A comment was received that property owners would be negatively affected by construction and should have priority access to the beach during construction.

Response:

NCDOT is committed to minimizing the number of residential and business impacts during construction. While priority beach access cannot be provided, NCDOT will continue to look for opportunities to further avoid and minimize impacts and relocations due to the project to the greatest extent practicable.

A comment was received that the effects of prolonged construction on property values are not being addressed.

Response:

The project is not expected to have negative impacts to property values and is expected to provide a benefit to adjacent neighborhoods. Following construction, the project will provide pedestrian enhancements in the project study area. Improved pedestrian facilities can be expected to improve market reach of businesses along and in the vicinity of the project.



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Mapping

This comment expressed concern regarding the proposed design map of the Causeway Drive bridge over Banks Channel, as the property lines do not match up with the survey map from the New Hanover County Courthouse.

Response:

Once the preliminary design phase begins for this project, final surveys will be obtained and incorporated into all mapping and design.

Right-of-Way (ROW)

Comments expressed concern about property impacts and acquisition regarding Right-of-Way (ROW).

Response:

After the final design has been approved, the proposed right-of-way limits will be staked on the ground. Impacted property owners will be contacted by an NCDOT right-of-way agent or representative to discuss the next steps. If permanent right-of-way is required, independent appraisals are developed to determine the highest and best use. A NC General Certified appraiser will appraise your property and determine just compensation. Any damage to the remaining property are addressed in the appraisal and an offer for those damages will be included as part of the written offer for just compensation.

In some cases where project impacts are minimal to the subject property, a right-of-way agent may prepare a waiver valuation to determine just compensation. The appraisals will be reviewed for completeness and accuracy, and the right-of-way agent will make you, the property owner, a written offer. The current market value of the property, at its highest and best use, will be offered as compensation.

The Department of Transportation must treat all owners and tenants equally; fully explain the owner's rights; pay just compensation in exchange for property value; and furnish relocation advisory assistance, where applicable. More about the right-of-way acquisition process and relocation assistance can be found here:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/business/ROW/ROWManualsandPublications/Right%20of%20Way%20Brochure%20-%20Brochure%20Layout.pdf>

and

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/business/ROW/ROW%20Documents/Relocation%20Assistanc%20Brochure.pdf>

Right-of-Way Agent is Kaye D. Baggett, and she can be reached at (910) 341-2100 and

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Safety

These comments questioned whether the project construction will impact evacuation times during storms and emergency vehicle access.

Response:

NCDOT and the project team will be coordinating the Town of Wrightsville Beach and emergency responders to ensure public safety during construction periods.

Traffic

A few comments mentioned concern over the proposed bridge replacement designs not mitigating the traffic problem in Wrightsville.

Response:

NCDOT is recommending two travel lanes on Salisbury Street and four travel lanes on Causeway Drive. Traffic analyses have been completed for this project and were factored into the design decisions. NCDOT has determined that these recommendations are adequate to accommodate traffic congestion during the off-summer peak season. While the purpose of this project is to replace aging bridges, designing roadways that promote safe passage and provide flexibility for predicted traffic growth is a priority for NCDOT projects. The design of the preferred alternative follows AASHTO's (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) Policy on design standards (designed to ensure safety, permanence, utility, and flexibility to provide for predicted traffic growth). The design also follows NCDOT's Roadway Design Manual and NCDOT's Complete Streets Policy.

