

THE MID-CURRITUCK SOUND BRIDGE
FINANCIAL STUDY OF THE COST OF THE NO-BRIDGE ALTERNATIVE FOR
IMPROVING TRAFFIC FLOW ON THE NORTHERN OUTER BANKS OF NORTH CAROLINA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The need for a bridge linking the Currituck Outer Banks with the rest of Currituck County (The Mid Currituck Sound Bridge or MCSB) has long been recognized. In 1989, the NC legislature enacted legislation expressly designating a “new bridge over the Currituck Sound”. In 1993, the legislature created the NC Toll Bridge Authority solely for the construction of the MCSB. But the MCSB faced both political and bureaucratic challenges. The Toll Authority was allowed to lapse, and nothing was done. The widening of NC 12 to five lanes in Southern Shores and Duck, as well as the widening of US 158, was considered as a serious alternative to a bridge.

In the spring of 2003 as a result of these developments, concerned citizens and local government officials formed Build the Bridge-Preserve Our Roads, Inc. (BBPR), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. BBPR’s objectives are to support a Mid-Currituck Sound Bridge and to oppose widening NCI2 in Dare County and US158 in Currituck County. There are nine board members, including three members representing Currituck County interests and three each representing the Towns of Southern Shores and Duck.

In response to the on-going NCDOT study of a no-bridge alternative, BBPR sponsored a study of the financial costs of widening NC 12 in Southern Shores and Duck from two to five lanes and widening US 158 in Currituck County by adding two lanes. In addition to the virtual destruction of the Town of Duck and significant damage to the Town of Southern Shores, it is obvious that recent development and escalation in market values in Duck, Southern Shores, and along US 158 in Currituck County make consideration of the no-bridge alternative financially unfeasible.

The study bears out this observation. This study was sponsored and monitored by the Board and was conducted by volunteers living in the communities affected. A report on the study will be delivered to the Governor’s office in Raleigh and will be distributed to all government decision-makers and local organizations who have an interest. The full report on the study is available from BBPR. Key findings are summarized below.

Key Findings

The Study focused on two financial issues: *Right-of-Way Acquisition Costs* and *Lost Tax Revenue* in Southern Shores, Duck, and the Currituck mainland. Costs are not included for right-of-way acquisition along NC12 in Currituck County, construction costs for roads and bridges, or the relocation of utilities and walking paths.

Widening the roads would result in the following:

- A minimum payout by North Carolina Department of Transportation of \$439 million to acquire right-of-way
- A total of 3,772 properties harmed by widening:
 - * 83 families in Southern Shores and Duck will lose their homes
 - * 61 business owners in Duck will lose their livelihood and approximately 600 jobs will be lost
 - * 1,316 home and business owners will lose some portion of their property and the revenue generated
 - * 1,749 homes and businesses will lose value and revenue
- Duck, Southern Shores, Dare County, Currituck County and North Carolina will lose \$6 million a year in tax revenues

Right-of-Way Acquisition Costs

Right-of-Way acquisition costs are distributed as follows:

TYPE OF LOSS	SOUTHERN SHORES RESIDENTIAL	DUCK RESIDENTIAL	DUCK BUSINESS	MAINLAND, CURRITUCK RESIDENTIAL AND BUSINESS	TOTALS
Properties in Right-of-Way	\$ 25,000,000	\$ 85,426,000	\$16,400,000	\$ 14,425,000	\$141,251,000
Properties Adjacent to Right-of-Way	\$29,155,000	\$41,740,000	\$ 2,550,000	\$77,000,000	\$150,445,000
Properties Otherwise Affected	\$ 49,300,000	\$ 98,900,000			\$148,200,000
Totals	\$103,455,000	\$226,066,000	\$ 18,950,000	\$ 91,425,000	\$439,896,000

Lost Tax Revenue

Dare County Locations

For the most part, lost tax revenue to Duck, Southern Shores, and Dare County and to the State of North Carolina would be permanent. Duck and that portion of Southern Shores adjacent to NCI2 are essentially “built out”. There is no place for the businesses and homes that are lost to relocate. Widening NC 12 in Southern Shores and Duck greatly reduces the attractiveness of these communities as resorts with an unknown, but undoubtedly significant, impact on the number of people who would continue to choose these communities as vacation destinations.

The total annual tax loss in Duck, Southern Shores, and Dare County, including the related state portion, is estimated at over \$4.2 million, as follows:

Type of Tax	Loss in Millions
Real Estate	\$ 1.3
Retail Sales	\$ 1.3
Sales And Occupancy	\$ 1 .6
Total	\$4.2

Duck would lose an amount in excess of 12% of its annual budget, and Southern Shores would lose approximately 7% of its annual budget

Currituck County

Because of different geography and availability of relocation sites, tax losses in Currituck County resulting from the widening of US 158 may be less permanent. Estimates are:

Real Estate	\$283,000
Retail Sales	\$1,500,000

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study clearly documents the high costs to NCDOT and the community devastation that would result if any decision were made to pursue widening of US 158 and NCI2, and demonstrates that widening is not a feasible option to a bridge. However, the northern beaches of Currituck County have experienced rapid development that is continuing. It is obvious that additional access to the mainland is needed. We request two immediate actions by the State of North Carolina:

First, that the Governor order an immediate review of the ongoing Currituck Sound Area Study. The objectives of the review should be to streamline and greatly expedite the alternatives study and to achieve approval of a proposed Mid-Currituck Sound Bridge within a two-year time frame.

Second, that the Governor direct the Toll Bridge Authority to initiate a parallel feasibility study toward approval of the bridge project as a toll bridge. The North Carolina Toll Bridge Authority initiated during 1995 was created solely for the construction of a Mid-Currituck Sound Bridge, but the Authority was allowed to expire without any action. The new Toll Bridge Authority defined three criteria for approval as a toll project: public support, an alternate route, and financial feasibility. A Mid-Currituck Sound Bridge would satisfy all these requirements. Build the Bridge Preserve our Roads, Inc. will be pleased to assist the Toll Bridge Authority with resources and/or volunteers to conduct a study to evaluate all toll bridge options available.