



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE  
SENATOR MARC BASNIGHT  
RALEIGH 27601-2808

September 3, 2003

The Honorable Michael F. Easley  
Governor of the State of North Carolina  
State Capitol  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699

Dear Governor Easley:

As you and I have discussed many times in the past, NC 12 is the vital link that connects all of the Outer Banks communities and is indeed our only real highway. I am writing to share with you the very serious concerns that the citizens of Dare County have brought to me in light of discussions concerning the replacement of the Bonner Bridge. I have reviewed those concerns and share them. Governor, out of the more than 30,000 residents, I can find no one in Dare County, with the exception of three officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, that support the proposed alternative that the Department of Transportation is currently pursuing.

Last month, officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Transportation and Secretary Lyndo Tippett sat down with local officials at the request of the Dare County Commissioners. The purpose of the meeting was to lay out local concerns over the project. I would like to share these concerns with you in this letter for your consideration and immediate action.

**Funding** The proposed alternative that DOT is advocating would establish a new elevated causeway from the existing northern terminus of the bridge 17 miles south to a point just north of the village of Rodanthe. The cost of this alternative is \$260 million. At present the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) only has \$120 million allocated for the project. This leaves a deficit of \$140 million that will have to be included in the TIP in order to complete the project by 2010 as currently being promised.

An analysis of the TIP funding for Division 1 and Region A indicates that under current equity formula funding scenarios, \$1.016 billion is available to Region A for allocation. However, DOT has already programmed \$1.059 billion in projects

– a deficit of \$40 million. Add to that the project deficit illustrated above and the total exceeds \$180 million.

In addition, under the current program, the resources allocated for the Mid Currituck Bridge are likewise inadequate by about \$30 million to meet the construction needs of the project – thus driving the total deficit in Region A alone over \$210 million.

My staff quizzed the Secretary on this point during the meeting with Commissioners and was advised by the Secretary that the funding would not be a concern, that it would be worked out and that we did not need to worry about that at this time.

Furthermore, it was stated that any additional funding for the project would be subject to the equity formula allocation. That, in essence, means that other projects in the Division will have to be set aside or back as a result of the additional cost of this project. This is very alarming not only to the Dare County Commissioners but also to all of the constituents of Region A. I am very concerned over the funding situation.

*Access* Visitors and residents alike have always been able to enjoy the bounty of the full extent of Pea Island. Indeed, surveys by our own Division of Marine Fisheries indicate that literally thousands of visitors and residents fish from the current Oregon Inlet Bridge and the adjacent groin every year. This location provides for many folks the only point of access for those individuals who are not fortunate enough to gain water access by either boat or property ownership at our beaches. Unless we take some action to ensure access to the northern reaches of the island, we will have stolen from the people of this state and nation one of America's premiere fishing spots – and most importantly we will have taken it away from the common man who has no other opportunity. I know of no other location on the Outer Banks or in North Carolina that provides such an open opportunity.

In addition to the prolific fishing grounds, the northern reaches of Pea Island have also become a birdwatching sanctuary for visitors and residents of the Outer Banks. Mayor Sherry Rollason recalled in the meeting her family tradition of watching the waterfowl of the area come in during the evenings at Christmas time and on Sunday afternoons. I can't imagine that we as a state would try to take that tradition and heritage away from our people or that we would allow it to happen.

We can replace the Bonner Bridge without destroying that access. We should ensure that any planned replacement bridge does not deny citizens the right of access to the Northern end of Pea Island. We should also do it in such a way that the access point is a part of the primary route system of the state and not pit it

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The Honorable Michael F. Easley

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against other local project needs of the secondary road system. This point was made at the meeting and I hope that you will see to it that it is not lost on DOT. In fact, we should make it our mission to ensure that any bridge replacement project for the Bonner Bridge has as a component of the project the preservation of the existing bridge such that the fishing access is maintained both at the groin and along the sides of the bridge. Why not make the existing bridge a "pier" of sorts for fishing in and near Oregon Inlet. That would truly make a statement about what we are in North Carolina – a state that seeks to make opportunities better for every walk of life.

As you can see, the concerns of the citizens of Dare County are real and they must be addressed. As the meeting closed, it was proposed that a meeting be held in the mid October, 2003 time frame to follow up on these concerns and provide a reporting of what has been done to address them.

I hope that you will take a personal interest in this project and see to it that the citizens of Dare County are heard. This is a very important project, Governor, in a community that contributes very strongly to our state's economy. It is only fair that their voices be heard and that their concerns be addressed.

I thank you for your consideration of this matter and I look forward to working with and hearing from you on these issues.

Sincerely,



MB/rb



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
20301 MAIL SERVICE CENTER • RALEIGH, NC 27699-0301

MICHAEL F. EASLEY  
GOVERNOR

September 12, 2003

Honorable Marc Basnight  
President Pro Tem, North Carolina Senate

Dear Senator Basnight:

Thank you for your September 3 and September 11 letters regarding the proposed alternative to replace the Bonner Bridge. The concerns raised in your letter are important and have been the subject of much discussion between Dare County Commissioners and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT).

The one point upon which everyone agrees is that this bridge needs to be replaced. With that end, I have asked Secretary Tippet and DOT to halt further study of possible alternatives for a period of six months. This will allow Dare County leaders to have the opportunity to develop a feasible proposal of their own for replacing the Bonner Bridge.

As the member of the state Board of Transportation representing the citizens of Dare County and the taxpayers at large, Secretary Tippet has charged Stan White to take the lead in this effort. A copy of the Secretary's letter to Mr. White is enclosed.

As you state in your letter, N.C. 12 is indeed the vital link that connects all of the Outer Banks' communities. I am sure you share my concern for the many citizens who need a safe means of transportation during times of evacuation, and I ask that you and your staff work closely with the DOT and Mr. White in developing alternative proposals for the replacement of the bridge.

I look forward to working with you to bring this complex issue to a timely resolution.

With warm personal regards, I remain

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mike", written in black ink.

Michael F. Easley

Enclosure

cc: Lyndo Tippet, Secretary, NC Department of Transportation  
Doug Galyon, Chairman of the Board of Transportation  
G. R. Kindley, Vice-Chair of the Board of Transportation  
Stan White, Board of Transportation  
Marvin Blount, Board of Transportation  
Tom Betts, Board of Transportation



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY  
GOVERNOR

1501 MAIL SERVICE CENTER, RALEIGH, N.C. 27699-1501

LYNDO TIPPETT  
SECRETARY

September 12, 2003

Mr. Stan White  
Member, North Carolina Board of Transportation  
Stan White Realty  
Post Office Box 1447  
Nags Head, North Carolina 27959

Dear Stan:

The replacement of the Bonner Bridge continues to be a source of much discussion between the Department and Dare County Commissioners. As you know, the local government has expressed serious concerns about the proposed alternative recently selected for further study by a multi-agency team that included the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department. The one point upon which this team and Dare County agree is that an acceptable alternative to replace this aging bridge needs to be selected. With that end, I am asking Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Planning and Local Government Roger Sheats to halt the department's further study of possible alternatives for a period of six months.

The purpose of this moratorium is to allow Dare County leaders to have the opportunity to develop a feasible proposal of their own for replacing the Bonner Bridge. After all, public involvement is crucial to responsible and effective transportation decision-making. As a member of the state Board of Transportation representing the citizens of Dare County and the taxpayers at large, I hereby charge you with taking the lead in this effort.

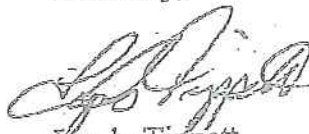
Please submit to me by March 31, 2004 (or before) a written proposal detailing Dare County's recommendation for replacing the Bonner Bridge. This proposal must include a financial plan as well as a suggested route likely to be permitted by the multiple resource agencies involved. Since this proposal will include local consensus, I have no doubt that it will also address the numerous other concerns of Dare County such as access within the refuge and the status of the Old Coast Guard Station and the terminal groin. I remind you that an alternative that does not meet the requirements of the environmental agencies is not likely to be permitted and will only cause further delay of construction of the much-needed new bridge. In addition, please bear in mind that this recommendation must be in the best interests of both the 30,000 residents of Dare County and the other taxpayers

Mr. Stan White  
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citizens of this state. Therefore, it must be **fiscally responsible** as well as environmentally sound.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and your willingness to help bring this complex issue to a timely resolution. Your contribution as a member of the Board of Transportation will be invaluable as we move forward.

Sincerely,



Lyndo Tippet

L/T/dsw