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Peace Bridge Design to Change

Environmental considerations result in recommended 567 ft high two-tower cable stay bridge being dropped in favor of a lower profile bridge. Project slated to begin construction in late 2009.

(BUFFALO, NY/FORT ERIE, ON) – *Background:* Two and a half years ago a bi-national design jury selected a 567 ft. high two-tower cable stay bridge, designed by Christian Menn, as the recommended bridge for the Peace Bridge's capacity expansion project. The City of Buffalo, Town of Fort Erie, and the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority all concurred and it was the recommended alternative carried in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for agency review and public comment. The DEIS was issued in September 2007.



Current Situation: The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the federal lead agency for the Peace Bridge Capacity Expansion project, has advised that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the project to examine how best to avoid, minimize and mitigate adverse environmental impact and select the alternative best able to minimize these impacts while still meeting the project's purpose and need.

After a thorough review FHWA has determined that the height of the recommended two-tower cable stay bridge has unacceptable impacts on migratory birds and the protected Common Tern. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service (Dept. of Interior), US Environmental Protection Agency, and Environment Canada all expressed concerns about the selected bridge. In addition groups such as Audobon New York, the Baird Foundation, and members of the public also expressed concerns.

To comply with NEPA and deliver a permissible design, FHWA in an April 11th letter to Congressman Higgins, has determined to advance the lower profile three span arch, also considered by the design jury.



"From the outset the Peace Bridge Authority (PBA) was committed to doing the best possible bridge design with community consensus", said Paul Koessler, Chairman of the PBA. "We are disappointed that we cannot do the chosen design but the environmental process ultimately dictates what we can and cannot do. Just like we have modified the plaza design to reduce impacts as a result of comments received through the "draft" process, so too must we now modify the bridge design."

Design co-chairs Dr. Robert Shibley and Dr. Ted Ogilvie complimented the work of the design jury. "The jury did an excellent job in selecting the best possible design given the information provided. While we are disappointed the chosen design cannot proceed I am pleased that the three span arch, one of the finalists, is now being advanced", said Dr. Shibley.

The intent is to now work with the agencies and the design jury to develop the three span arch concept (developed by Figg Engineering Group- a world renowned bridge design firm). This bridge at its highest point is 226ft. The two-tower cable stay was two and a half times higher. In addition the three span arch has its two river piers placed in line with the existing piers out in the river as opposed to the cable stay concept that had piers along the Canadian shoreline and the Bird Island pier which could interfere with the shoreline movement of the Emerald Shiner, a primary food source for the Common Tern.

"The objective is to balance all the competing interests. We want to insure that we have a great design that the public wants yet still meet all the environmental regulations imposed by the agencies" said PBA vice-chairman Anthony Annunziata. "We will continue with the process and work towards achieving a Record of Decision during the summer and commencement of construction in late 2009."

The Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, a binational bridge authority, has owned and operated the Peace Bridge since 1933. The bridge, which was opened to traffic in 1927, spans the Niagara River between Fort Erie, Ontario, and Buffalo, New York, and is a key international border crossing. The Authority is governed by a 10 member board with an equal number of representatives from Canada and the United States.

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