Public Comments

The Long Bridge Corridor Project

NCPC

July 7, 2022 Meeting
June 24, 2022

National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

re: Long Bridge Corridor Project

Dear Commissioners,

We were recently made aware of the NCPC’s meeting on the Long Bridge Project scheduled for July 7. We are writing to formally express our concerns regarding the Project, particularly with respect to the Maine Avenue SW Phase.

Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. is a luxury hotel located at 1330 Maryland Avenue S.W. and has established an outstanding reputation both for its service as well as its optimal location adjacent to the Southwest Waterfront and Tidal Basin. It is also part of The Portals, a premier mixed-use development in the District.

While we have met with the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority periodically over the last several months in an attempt to understand the impact of the Long Bridge Project on our hotel, our key concerns have not yet been addressed. In particular, we are concerned about the impact of construction on our business and require that appropriate steps be taken to mitigate the impact on the Hotel. A second key issue for us is the Project’s plan to replace the pedestrian bridge. The pedestrian bridge is a core amenity for our guests and provides a link to the waterfront. We believe the Project should take into consideration views of the Hotel and the other Portals’ owners in the redesign.

While we appreciate the need for expanded rail service through the District, it is essential that our concerns be taken into consideration as Project planning continues. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

Nicolas Dubort
Thank you for taking comments on the Long Bridge Project. We are excited that this project is underway.
The problem is that the proposed 14' wide bike/ped bridge is too narrow. Given the presence of vertical barriers on each side, the usable width will be only 8-10', too narrow for the bike/ped traffic now and in the coming years.

Given the difficulty and expense of widening a bridge, it is common and wise to "build for the future." For example, the recently-built W&OD Trail Bridge over Langston Blvd features a 20' clear width despite the rest of the W&OD trail being significantly narrower. We are grateful for that excellent bridge.

Given the length of the proposed Long Bridge, getting emergency services to the location of a bike/ped crash on the bridge will be difficult and slow. A wider bridge will serve in the interest of safety and access for emergency vehicles. It will be important to minimize bike/ped conflict and to ensure sufficient width for future use.

Page 22-12 of the Draft Long Bridge EIS indicated that "The materials and dimensions of the bridge would be confirmed in a final design phase following completion of the EIS." If now is not the time for public comments that this bridge must be wider, then when?

Thanks.
Yours sincerely,
Cynthia Palmer
chair, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee

Received June 27, 2022 at 6:46 pm
To whom it may concern,

I am writing to share my thoughts on the Long Bridge proposed bike path width. My colleagues at Sustainable Mobility for Arlington County have put it very well below, and I echo their thoughts:

The proposed 14' wide bike/ped bridge is too narrow. Given the presence of vertical barriers on each side, the usable width will be only 8-10', too narrow for the likely bike/ped traffic when it opens, let alone what it will grow to over the useful life of the bridge.

Given the difficulty and expense of widening a bridge, it is common and wise to "build for the future". For example, the recently-built W&OD Trail Bridge over Langston Blvd features a 20' clear width despite the rest of the W&OD trail being significantly narrower.

Given the length of the bridge, getting emergency services to the site of a bike/ped crash on the bridge will be difficult and slow. The bridge width should recognize this and strive to minimize bike/ped conflict by ensuring sufficient width for likely future traffic growth.

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Please consider this as we proceed with the Long Bridge project.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Melissa Riggio, biker and resident of Arlington (22201)

Received June 27, 2022 at 4:26 pm
June 30, 2022

Members of the National Capital Planning Commission,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment as part of your review of the Long Bridge Project. I represent Sustainable Mobility for Arlington County, a small, scrappy 501c4 Advocacy Organization fighting for sustainable mobility options in Arlington, Virginia.

**Summary**

We are strongly supportive of the overall Long Bridge project. The additional rail capacity is crucial for growing rail transit in the region from Commuter Rail, which largely benefits white-collar office workers commuting into the downtown core, to Regional Rail which can benefit many more people by supporting non-commute trips throughout the region on weekends and outside traditional commute times or in traditional commute directions.

We are strongly supportive of the bicycle & pedestrian span proposed as mitigation and believe it is consistent with actions in the Transportation Element of the NCPC Comprehensive Plan such as “develop an integrated system of bicycle and pedestrian trails that provide connections throughout the region, including to and from federal destinations”.

However, we have serious concerns about the width of the bicycle & pedestrian span as currently designed; we believe it to be insufficient for the expected volumes of bicycle and pedestrian usage at the time it opens, and certainly insufficient for the growing volumes that will occur over the life span of the bridge. We believe the width to be insufficient for timely emergency access in the event of an emergency, and inconsistent with best practices for trail design that recommend providing separate space for pedestrians from those on wheels to prevent conflict between users traveling at different speeds on high-traffic facilities.

We urge the Commission to echo our feedback & request an updated design for the bicycle & pedestrian span that features a 20’ clear width.

**Clear Width vs Usable Width**

The currently proposed design features 14’ of clear width between the walls of the bridge. A 14’ trail at-grade through a park with no hazards on either side would be a high-capacity, low-stress, well-enjoyed trail. With little consequence to accidentally leaving the trail surface beyond a slightly bumpy ride for a few feet, trail users put the whole trail width to good use.

This same behavior does not hold true when there are nearby hazards, especially vertical hazards. Trail users shy away from these vertical elements, especially when they perceive that these hazards present a danger should they accidentally leave the trail surface and collide with them. The walls on each side of the bridge present just such a vertical hazard and result in a “usable width” of trail that is far narrower than the 14’ clear width.
Common trail standards recognize this behavior and call for a buffer distance between the usable portion of the trail and any vertical element. The Virginia Department of Transportation shared use path standards, for example, require 3’ of distance between the path and “lateral obstructions”. Assuming 3’ of the 14’ clear width is a necessary buffer from the walls on each side, this leaves a mere 8’ of usable trail width in the center of the bridge, this is narrower than the Mt Vernon Trail, W&OD Trail, Metropolitan Branch Trail, and the Custis Trail.

**Design for the Future**

It is not enough to ensure that the proposed bridge will be wide enough to accommodate current levels of bicycle & pedestrian traffic, it must be wide enough to accommodate the levels of bicycle & pedestrian traffic expected over its lifetime.

The region has passed significant and challenging emissions targets which will require dramatically expanding the use of non-motorized transportation. It is critical that NCPC support sufficient bike & pedestrian capacity across the Potomac.

While widening a trail on land is relatively routine, it is our understanding that widening a truss bridge like the one proposed is drastically more expensive and quite rare. We are likely to be stuck with the width that is built for decades to come.

Given the length and lack of curves on the bridge, it is likely that those on wheels will be inclined to reach relatively high speeds, potentially creating conflict with pedestrians. In trails with these sort of likely conflicts, especially when high volumes are also expected, it is a common mitigation to provide separate space for pedestrians and those on wheels. The minimum required width for this, however, is more than the 14’ of clear space currently allocated for the bridge.

**Emergency Access**

Given the length of the bridge, we think thought needs to be given to facilitating emergency access. If a crash or medical emergency happens in the center of the bridge, is a 14’ clear width sufficient to allow fast and easy emergency access, especially given the likely presence of other trail users?

**Not a Settled Issue**

Members of the public tried to raise this issue at the recent Long Bridge Virtual Public Meeting, but VPRA staff tried to indicate that the 14’ clear width was locked in place by the Environmental Impact Statement and was a settled issue that could not be changed.

This idea is utterly incompatible with the last opportunity that the public had to weigh in on this project. In the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the project, which is the last document the public had an opportunity to comment on, it was stated on page 22-12 that “The materials and dimensions of the bridge would be confirmed in a final design phase following completion of the EIS” (emphasis added). We will also note that we are unable to find any reference to the 14’ dimension for the bike &
pedestrian span in the “Combined Final Environmental Impact Statement/Record of Decision and Final Section 4(f) Evaluation” document posted to the Long Bridge Project website.

**Similar Bridges**

Finally, we wish to highlight that other recent bike & pedestrian bridges have been built with a significantly wider cross-section. The new bridge that carries the W&OD Trail over Langston Blvd has a 20’ clear width. The new Douglass Bridge includes two 18’ paths (one on each side). These are designs that are thinking about the future, and the Long Bridge span should as well.

**Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight this design issue with the Long Bridge bike & pedestrian span. I hope that it is useful as the Commission gives feedback on the project.

Christopher Slatt  
President, Sustainable Mobility for Arlington County  
chris@susmo.org  
703-539-7574
The proposed 14' wide bike/ped bridge is too narrow. Given the presence of vertical barriers on each side, the usable width will be only 8-10', too narrow for the likely bike/ped traffic when it opens, let alone what it will grow to over the useful life of the bridge.

Given the difficulty and expense of widening a bridge, it is common and wise to "build for the future". For example, the recently-built W&OD Trail Bridge over Langston Blvd features a 20' clear width despite the rest of the W&OD trail being significantly narrower.

Given the length of the bridge, getting emergency services to the site of a bike/ped crash on the bridge will be difficult and slow. The bridge width should recognize this and strive to minimize bike/ped conflict by ensuring sufficient width for likely future traffic growth.

Page 22-12 of the Draft Long Bridge EIS indicated that "The materials and dimensions of the bridge would be confirmed in a final design phase following completion of the EIS". If now is not the time for public comments that this bridge must be wider, then when?
I agree with Sustainable Mobility for Arlington County's comments on the Long Bridge Project. For your convenience I quote them below.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Jerry Cowden
Arlington, VA
Received July 2, 2022 4:46 pm
Hello, please add the following comments to the feedback process regarding the Long Bridge project.

In a nutshell, the pedestrian / cyclist path as designed is too narrow. Multimodal users will not be able to interact in a safe and low-stress manner at the current design width. Given the presence of vertical barriers on each side, the usable width will be only 8-10', too narrow for the likely bike/ped traffic when it opens, let alone what it will grow to over the useful life of the bridge.

Given the difficulty and expense of widening a bridge, it is common and wise to "build for the future". For example, the recently-built W&OD Trail Bridge over Langston Blvd features a 20' clear width despite the rest of the W&OD trail being significantly narrower.

Additionally, with a bridge this long (no pun intended), getting emergency services to the site of a bike/ped crash on the bridge will be difficult and slow. The bridge width should recognize this and strive to minimize bike/ped conflict by ensuring sufficient width for likely future traffic growth.

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Thanks for your consideration.

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Rory Lamond
Received July 3, 2022 8:29 pm
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Christy Anthony
Received July 5, 2022 7:11 am

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Pronouns: she/her/hers
**If you have a disability accommodations that will help us communicate and interact better, please let me know."