

Buffalo Harbor Bridge

***(Outer Harbor Access
S. Michigan Ave.
Bridge Replacement)***

***PIN 5758.17
Erie County
City of Buffalo***

Project Newsletter

February 2011

U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration



NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
ANDREW M. CUOMO, Governor JOAN McDONALD, Acting Commissioner



Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.



1. Introduction

The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC), in partnership with the City of Buffalo and in cooperation with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), prepared the Final Scoping Report in March 2010 for the proposed Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project. Currently, the Project Team is progressing preliminary design and evaluating Retained Design Alternatives for analysis in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) is a subsidiary of Empire State Development (ESD) and was formed in 2005, by then-Governor George Pataki, to spearhead the City of Buffalo's waterfront redevelopment effort. As a result, ECHDC's mission is to revitalize Buffalo's inner and outer harbor areas and restore economic growth to Western New York, based on the region's legacy of pride, urban significance and natural beauty.

The Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project, officially designated as the "Outer Harbor Access; S. Michigan Avenue Bridge Replacement" under NYSDOT Project Identification Number (PIN) 5758.17, is a bridge replacement project located in the City of Buffalo, Erie County. ECHDC and NYSDOT are advancing this project through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 23 CFR 771, Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) under 6 NYCRR Part 617 and the NYSDOT Project Development Manual. The City of Buffalo is a cooperating agency for this project. This project is located within the City of Buffalo, as such, it is anticipated that the City will be taking over maintenance and operational responsibilities for the new crossing infrastructure once construction is completed.

2. Project Purpose and Need

Where is the Project Located?

The proposed project is located in western New York State within the County of Erie and the City of Buffalo. See Project Study Area Map foldout on the next page.

The project area is adjacent to the northeastern shore of Lake Erie and is comprised of an approximately 1.5 mile corridor extending from a northern terminus at the mouth of the Buffalo River in the vicinity of the Erie Basin Marina to a southern terminus near the southern navigation limit of the City Ship Canal west of the existing Ohio Street Bridge in the inner and outer harbor area of downtown Buffalo (containing various local streets that end short of the Buffalo River or the City Ship Canal). The Buffalo River and City Ship Canal cross the corridor and both contain federally-regulated shipping channels in this area.

The Project Study Area Map includes the Study Area limits, as well as highlighted boundaries of the New Downtown and Outer Harbor areas. The New Downtown is defined in the Queen City Hub: A Regional Action Plan for Downtown Buffalo ("The Queen City Hub Plan"); as five major investment areas to support new and existing economic functions downtown. One of these areas, the "Erie Canal Harbor & Waterfront District", includes most of the Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project corridor.

Why is the Project Needed?

In 1964, the former South Michigan Avenue Bridge was finally removed after being deemed inoperable following a mechanical failure. This bridge, which formerly passed over the City Ship Canal at the northern end of Kelly Island, allowed for a direct route between the now removed rail yards and warehouses at the edge of downtown, and the milling and feed complexes along the waterfront. From the mid-18th to mid-20th centuries, Buffalo served as a significant transshipment port for raw materials and agricultural goods between the Midwest and Northeast. With the loss of many of these businesses, the need to replace the bridge was determined to be unwarranted at the time and this connection was never replaced.



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PROJECT STUDY AREA MAP



The need for a reconnected downtown is now more important than ever. With a shift toward a diverse, sustainable and green economy, the development of the waterfront as an integrated part of downtown has become a cornerstone of City of Buffalo policy. All levels of government, as well as various community groups have focused their efforts to make Buffalo a true waterfront city. This project focuses on determining the best solution to reestablish a local connection between the New Downtown and the Outer Harbor.

What are the Objectives/Purposes of the Project?

The purpose of this project is to directly and efficiently connect the New Downtown and the Outer Harbor area with a multi-modal (pedestrian, bicyclist, and motorized traffic) transportation facility over the Buffalo River and/or City Ship Canal in the City of Buffalo. This proposed transportation facility is referred to as the Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project.

Project Need Statement

The overall need for the Buffalo Harbor Bridge Project is to address the current transportation inadequacies and deficiencies associated with the lack of a local crossing between the New Downtown and the Outer Harbor. The following are specific project needs:

System Linkage Needs

Since the former South Michigan Avenue Bridge over the City Ship Canal was closed in the early-1960s, local access between the inner and outer harbor areas has been inefficient. The confusing and circuitous routes that remain between the New Downtown and the Outer Harbor require a 4-mile trip compared to a ±600-ft. river crossing. Due to decline of industrial transportation needs between Kelly Island and the Outer Harbor the bridge was never rebuilt.

The existing Michigan Avenue Bridge over the Buffalo River provides access to the Outer Harbor via Kelly Island and, given the industrial nature of the Island, Michigan Avenue/Ganson Street mainly function as truck access roadways for several large-scale, active manufacturing plants, mills and distribution centers.

Modal Interrelationships

The present routes between downtown and the Outer Harbor do not provide for adequate multi-modal access. Recent and proposed development along the Inner Harbor area (Naval Park and Canal Side) as well as improvements along the Outer Harbor (Outer Harbor Parkway Project) where multiuse paths and trails are being constructed have increased the demand for direct and efficient connection between the inner and outer harbor areas. NY Route 5, an elevated expressway commonly referred to as "the Skyway," prohibits pedestrians and bicyclists. Both Ohio Street (and the Ohio Street Lift Bridge) and Michigan Avenue/Ganson Street (and the Michigan Street Lift Bridge), are locally designated truck routes that impede pedestrian and bicyclist access with high truck traffic volumes and speeds, and the lack of appropriate streetscape and refuge areas to facilitate safe access. In addition, the lift bridges are not compliant with the current Americans with Disabilities Act.

While access to the waterfront by land has been wanting, commercial and recreational watercraft users enjoy the nearly unimpeded boating/shipping use of the Harbor, River and the City Ship Canal. A new bridge must maintain adequate waterway access to the harbor by commercial and recreational watercraft seeking refuge during storms and for docking and harbor facility use.

Transportation Demand

Previously, two City of Buffalo reports, the Engineering Report for Gateway Bridge, February 1987 and the Expanded Project Proposal for a Proposed Bridge - Inner/Outer Harbor Link, February 1999, were completed to determine the feasibility and cost of constructing a bridge



across the Buffalo River. While a bridge project was determined to be feasible, the inability to finance the project led to its demise each time.

The need to reconnect the City with a direct and efficient local connection to the waterfront has remained. The City of Buffalo's Draft Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (January 2007) specifically states as a policy standard (Standard 9.1(D)(7)):

Improve public access from downtown Buffalo and the Inner Harbor area to the Outer Harbor for both pedestrian, bicycles and motorized vehicles.

The Buffalo Harbor Bridge project (PIN 5758.17) is included in New York State's Long-Range Transportation Plan (Strategies for a New Age: New York State's Transportation Master Plan for 2030, approved 2006), the Region's Plan (Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan for the Erie and Niagara Counties Region, approved June 2007), the 2008-2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) approved June 22, 2007 and the New York State Department of Transportation's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for Federal Fiscal Years 2008-2011, approved December 10, 2007.

The GBNRTC's Long-Range Plan states that the project is intended to improve access to the waterfront by constructing "Outer Harbor Bridge(s) over the Buffalo River." The plan does not specify any location(s) for the transportation facility; these locations will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Social Demands and Economic Development

A Buffalo Harbor Bridge will directly and efficiently connect local traffic between the New Downtown Area and the Outer Harbor, and enhance local and regional programs that promote economic development of the waterfront. Current and/or planned development projects in the area include the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park, Queen City Landing, Greenway Nature Trail, Canal Side, Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino, Riverfest Park, Coast Guard Facilities Recapitalization and Site Consolidation project, proposed Wingate Hotel project as well as the cars on Main Street project. A map of these projects is included in Chapter 2 of the Project Scoping Report (PSR).

In addition to promoting economic development, the connection of the New Downtown and the Outer Harbor will yield returns that extend beyond a monetary value. As stated in the City of Buffalo's The Buffalo Waterfront Corridor Initiative, An Inventory and Analysis of Buffalo's Waterfront Planning Legacy (August 2005):

"Altogether, the community has a vision of a waterfront that is the beautiful, active, public edge of our City, continuously accessible from Riverside Park to Gallagher Beach and inland along the Buffalo River and Scajaquada Creek. It is a vision in which residents go down to enjoy the water as a part of daily life, and whose neighborhoods are better off for being there. It is a vision of a waterfront where visitors arrive and immediately see and understand what is so special about this place. It is a vision of a waterfront that is a safe and healthy place to visit. It is a vision of a waterfront that is an important part of our economy, providing an impetus for new development while we protect what is most valuable about it. It is a bundle of connections between our City and the world, but also between the City and the waterfront, braided carefully to accommodate the needs of transportation and safeguard the precious resources of the waterfront."

The City has a long history of waterfront planning and development of harbor crossing studies. To realize the community's vision, a transportation solution that balances public access and economic, social and environmental competing values is required.



3. What Alternative(s) Are Being Considered?

Based on past planning efforts and transportation studies, as well as input gathered during the public scoping process, a wide range of alternatives were identified, including the No-Build Alternative. Several scoping meetings were held with elected officials, Cooperating and Participating Agencies, community groups, businesses and residents. The past information and public suggestions were combined with recommendations from the Project Team's internal review to first, identify a "Range of Crossing Categories", and second to create a "List of Alternatives Considered".

The Range of Crossing Categories were identified in the Final Scoping Document and included: No-Build, Replacement, New Moveable Bridge, New Fixed Bridge, Water Ferry and Tunnel options. Based on the range of crossing categories, public comments, suggestions and ideas were combined with findings and recommendations of past and current planning efforts to create a list of reasonable alternatives. The following guidelines were considered by the Project Team in determining which alternatives would be developed for further review:

- Each alternative shall provide efficient multi-modal connectivity between the New Downtown and the Outer Harbor.
- Each alternative shall provide an improvement to the local street network while not negatively impacting the regional traffic network.
- Each alternative shall be financially feasible.

The Project Scoping Report identified the List of Alternatives Considered as the following:

List of Alternatives Considered:

No-Build Alternative (NB)

NB-1: No-Build

Replacement Alternatives (RE)

RE-1: South Michigan Avenue Bridge (with upgraded Existing Michigan Avenue Bridge)

RE-2: South Michigan Avenue Bridge with Water Taxi (with upgraded Existing Michigan Avenue Bridge)

RE-3: South Michigan Avenue Bridge with Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge

New Moveable Bridge Alternatives (BR)

BR-1: Erie Street Bridge with Existing Erie Street Approach

BR-2: Erie Street Bridge with Former Erie Street Approach

BR-3: Main Street Bridge

BR-4: Ganson Street Bridge (with upgraded Existing Michigan Avenue Bridge)

BR-5: Ganson Street Bridge with Water Taxi (with upgraded Existing Michigan Avenue Bridge)

BR-6: Ganson Street Bridge with Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge

Water Ferry Alternative (WF)

WF-1: Water Ferry

Tunnel Alternative (TU)

TU-1: Erie Street Tunnel

As with any scoping process, some suggestions and ideas do not "make the list". These alternatives as well as the alternatives listed above are discussed in detail in the Project Scoping Report (PSR).

A two step screening process was developed to determine which alternatives considered best meet the project purpose and need. This screening process is described in the PSR. Based on the evaluation of each alternative considered within the screening process, the following alternatives were determined to be feasible while best meeting the project purpose and need. They will be "retained" for further study in the DEIS and are described in detail in the Final PSR (March 2010). The Federal Highway Administration approved the Final PSR on May 4, 2010.

**List of Retained Alternatives:**

- NB-1: No-Build**
- BR-2: Erie Street Bridge with Former Erie Street Approach**
- BR-3: Main Street Bridge**

Sub-Alternatives of the Retained Alternatives

During preliminary design of the Retained Alternatives, permutations of the Retained Alternatives were developed based on the analysis and comments received on the final PSR, subsequent discussions with stakeholders, agencies and the project team. These additional options falling within the retained alternative locations are being studied further during development of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which include various bridge types, bridge height options, and alignments to avoid or minimize cultural, historic and environmental impacts the following alternatives will be studies in the DEIS:

- BR-2L: Erie Street (Lift Bridge)**
- BR-2HL: Erie Street (Medium Height Lift Bridge)**
- BR-3NL: Main Street - North of CTGE (Lift Bridge)**
- BR-3NB: Main Street - North of CTGE (Bascule Bridge)**
- BR-3TL: Main Street - Thru CTGE (Lift Bridge)**
- BR-3TB: Main Street - Thru CTGE (Bascule Bridge)**
- BR-3SL: Main Street – South of CTGE (Lift Bridge)**
- BR-3SB: Main Street – South of CTGE (Bascule Bridge)**
- BR-3RL: Main Street –CTGE Removal (Lift Bridge)**
- BR-3RB: Main Street – CTGE Removal (Bascule Bridge)**

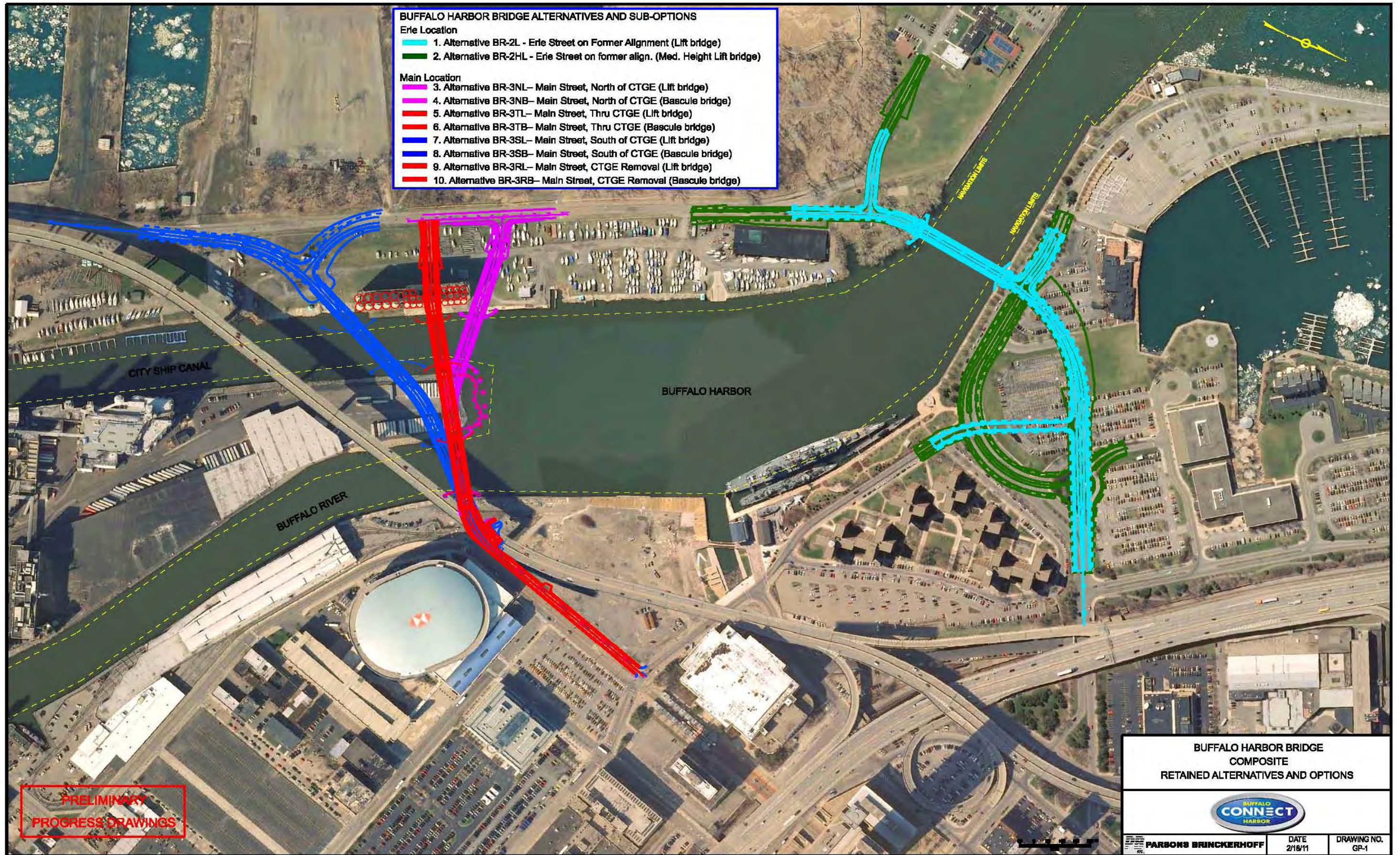
A Composite drawing showing the Retained Alternatives and Sub-Alternatives is included on the foldout.

4. How will the Alternative(s) Affect the Environment?

This project is classified under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (23 CFR 771, Section 771.115) as a 'Class 1' Action and will require and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This project is being advanced in accordance with Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU, which establishes an environmental review process for highway and transit projects that involve preparation of an EIS, while achieving better, faster and more efficient environmental reviews. Additionally, this project is a SEQR Type I action under 6 NYCRR Part 617. ECHDC is the SEQR Lead Agency.

The retained alternatives will be studied further and the full range of environmental impacts will be evaluated in the DEIS. Chapter 4 of the PSR outlines the social, economic & environmental conditions and consequences that will be studied for each alternative in the DEIS.

NEPA regulations (23 CFR 771.111(d)) require those federal agencies, other than the lead agency, with jurisdiction by law (with permitting or land transfer authority) or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposed project or project alternative be invited to be cooperating agencies for an EIS. A state or local agency of similar qualifications or, when the effects are on lands of tribal interest, a Native American tribe may, by agreement with the lead agencies, also become a cooperating agency. As each alterative is developed further, the types of environmental studies required may change based on review and input from cooperating agencies. A full list of participating and cooperating agencies are included in the Project Coordination Plan contained in an appendix of the PSR or available on the project website (www.buffaloharborbridge.com).



COMPOSITE ALTERNATIVES MAP



Ongoing Environmental and Engineering Studies

Preliminary Design Alternatives are being progressed as well as incorporating data collected and environmental studies to fully evaluate all sub alternatives and the affect on the environment. Currently the following environmental studies are underway:

- Cultural Resources Assessment
- Air Quality Analysis
- Noise Analysis
- Aquatic Habitat

Additionally, the following engineering studies have been completed:

- Connecting Terminal Grain Elevator Structural Inspection
- Sailboat Mast Height Survey
- Pedestrian and Boat Traffic Counts

Anticipated Permits/Certifications/Coordination:

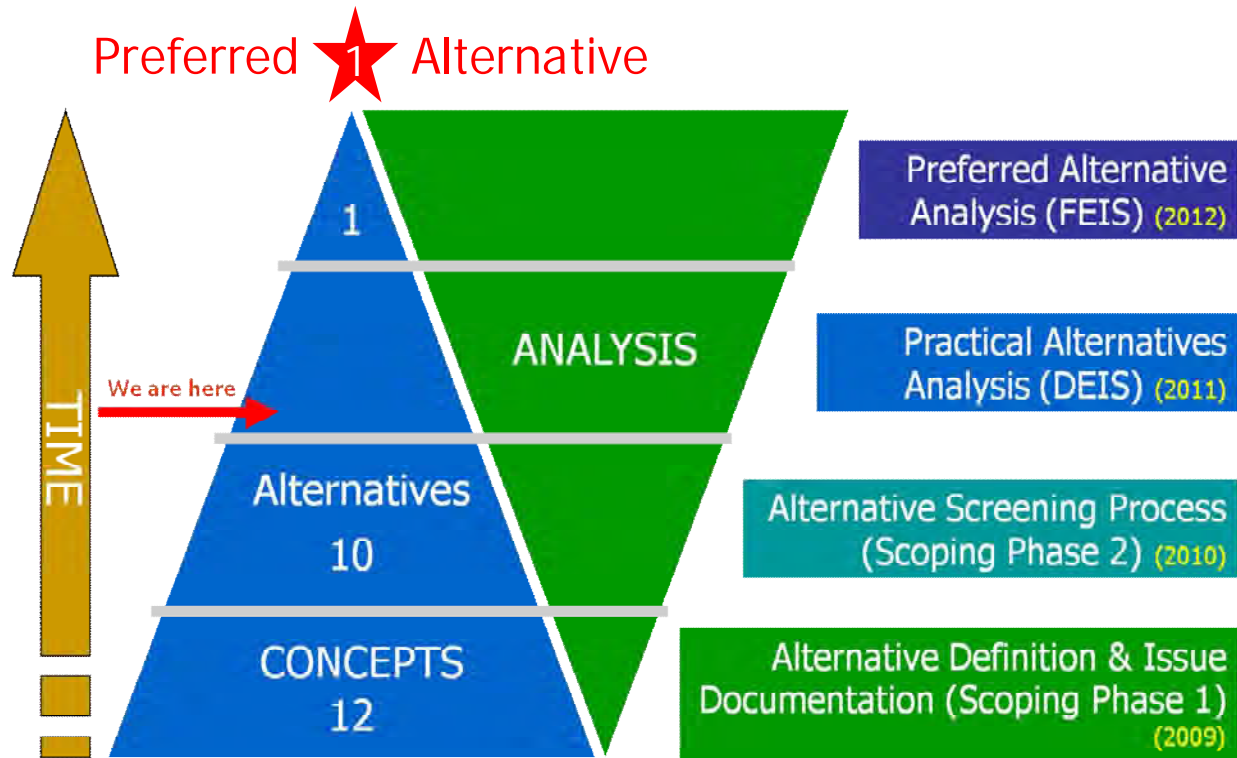
Based on initial input by cooperating agencies the following permit requirements are anticipated for this project.

Participants	Actions
USFWS, EPA, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE); National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and lead agencies	FHWA Executive Order 11990 Wetlands Finding. Evaluate and mitigate impacts on wetlands.
FEMA and lead agencies	Executive Order 11988:, Floodplain Management To avoid the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains, and to restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains.
US Coast Guard (9 th District); and lead agencies	Section 9 – Bridge Permit - Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899: 33 U.S.C. 40. Must obtain approval of plans for bridge permits
US Army Corps of Engineers and lead agencies	Section 10 Permit - Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899:33 U.S.C. 401) Must obtain approval of plans for construction, dumping, and dredging permits.
US Army Corps of Engineers; NYSDEC and lead agencies	Section 404 Permit - Federal Water Pollution Control Act (1972), as amended by the Clean Water Act (1977 & 1987): 33 U.S.C. 1251-1376 Restore and maintain chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters through prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution.
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and lead agencies	Section 401 Water Quality Certification. Protection of Waters Permit
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation	SPDES/NPDES Permit
New York State Department of State and lead agencies	Coastal Zone Consistency Approval Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972: 16 U.S.C. 145. Preserve, protect, develop, and (where possible) restore and enhance resources of the coastal zone.
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and lead agencies	Article 24 -Freshwater Wetlands Permit



5. Which Alternative is Preferred?

At this time there is no preferred alternative. As illustrated below the alternative evaluation process involves a continual increase in detail and analysis effort on a decreasing number of alternatives until the best solution is found. A decision will be made after evaluation of engineering, social, economic and environmental considerations of the project alternatives and after analysis of comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and at the public hearing.



6. Who Will Decide Which Alternative Will Be Selected And How Can I Be Involved In This Decision?

SAFETEA-LU requires the identification of lead, cooperating and participating agencies in the development of an EIS. The NEPA joint lead agencies for this project are:

- **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** The roles and responsibilities of FHWA are to: Manage the environmental review process; Prepare the EIS and Record of Decision document; Provide opportunity for public and participating/cooperating agency involvement; Arbitrate and resolve issues.
- **New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT)** The roles and responsibilities of the NYSDOT are to: Provide assistance with the environmental review process; Provide oversight of the NEPA process; Prepare EIS and decision document; Provide oversight of public participating/cooperating agency involvement; Arbitrate and resolve issues.
- **Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC)** The roles and responsibilities of the ECHDC are to: Manage environmental review process; Prepare EIS and decision document; Provide opportunity for public and participating/cooperating agency involvement; Arbitrate and resolve issues. The ECHDC is also the lead agency for SEQRA.



The City of Buffalo is a cooperating agency under SAFETEA-LU. As a future potential owner and operator of the crossing facility, the City is considered a partner in the decision making process. The City has and will continue to be closely involved in the evolution of the project.

Throughout the scoping process, numerous meetings were held with elected officials, Cooperating and Participating Agencies, community groups, businesses and residents. To date over 37 stakeholder meetings and 19 agency meetings have been held.

There are a variety of ways you can provide your thoughts.

- Additional public meetings and opportunities for public involvement will occur throughout the project development process including a Public Hearing following publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. A public involvement plan has been developed and is included within the SAFETEA-LU 6002 Coordination Plan included in Appendix C of the PSR.
- You can contact: the following Lead agency key personnel regarding the project:

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- A Project website has been established to disseminate project information and provided another means of input for the public and stakeholders. The website address is:
www.Buffaloharborbridge.com