



Memorandum

To: Rhode Island Department of
Transportation
Two Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02903

Date: March 15, 2019

Project #: 72900.00

From: Peter J. Pavao

Re: Reconstruction of the Pell Bridge Approaches Environmental
Assessment - Socioeconomics

1. Project Overview

The Claiborne Pell Newport Bridge (Pell Bridge) carries State Route 138 between Jamestown and Newport and is the only road connection between Jamestown and Aquidneck Island. The Proposed Action Alternative of the Pell Bridge Interchange Project (Project) would provide direct connection from the northern part of the City to the downtown area, reduce queued vehicle traffic onto the Pell Bridge, reduce traffic in downtown Newport, and provide a portion of the bicycle and pedestrian facilities envisioned in the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study. The Proposed Action (Project) would occur in the City of Newport and Town of Middletown, Rhode Island.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been developed to evaluate the impacts of construction and operation of the re-designed interchange on environmental resources. This technical memorandum identifies and describes socioeconomic conditions proximate to the reconstruction of the Pell Bridge Approaches (Project). This document also identifies the Project's potential impacts on these conditions and appropriate mitigation measures, as necessary.

2. Study Area and Methodology

Study Area

The Study Area for socioeconomic was defined as a 0.25-mile-wide buffer around the Project's limit of disturbance (LOD). This Study Area is based on the extent of the Project and those areas most likely to experience socioeconomic impacts due to their adjacency to the Project footprint. The Study Area is comprised of the following 13 intersecting census block groups that exist between the City of Newport and Town of Middletown.

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Resource Definition

For the purposes of this assessment, socioeconomic comprehends area demographics, including population and housing, as well as economic conditions such as income, employment, and the community tax base. It also concerns the intersection of social and economic conditions that influences the human experience for those living in an area,

which can extend to the sense of neighborhood connectivity and cohesion, the presence of community facilities, and the demand and provision of public services.

Methodology

Current-year estimates of demographic data obtained from ArcGIS software¹ informed the assessment of socioeconomic conditions for the 13 census block groups in the Study Area. These data were examined and cross-referenced with state-, county-, and municipal-wide data to provide appropriate reference points for comparison.

Various potential direct and indirect impacts were evaluated relative to the Project's timeline, including temporary impacts that would occur during the construction phase and permanent impacts that would occur during the operations and maintenance phase. The significance of various impacts, if present, was classified as minor, moderate, or major. Minor impacts would not affect socioeconomic conditions within the Study Area in a measurable way. Moderate impacts would affect socioeconomic conditions in a perceptible or measurable way, but not at a significant scale. Major impacts are those that are measurable and would significantly change socioeconomic conditions within the Study Area. Identified impacts to socioeconomics were further characterized as beneficial or adverse. Potential socioeconomic impacts from the Project include:

- Residential or commercial displacements;
- Disruption or improvements to neighborhood connectivity and cohesion;
- Changes to existing community facilities and the provision of related services;
- Alteration to the delivery of and/or demand for public services;
- Measurable shifts in population and housing patterns;
- Changes to employment; and
- Adjustments to the community tax base and property values.

3. Applicable Regulations and Criteria

The "human environment" is characterized by Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1508.14 as the relationship of people with their natural and physical environments. As impacts to either of these environments do not occur without affecting people, Section 1508.14 requires environmental documents prepared for Federal actions to address social impacts such as socioeconomic conditions.

As property acquisitions are required, RIDOT must act in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policies Act of 1970, as amended (42 USC Section 4601, et. seq.), and 49 CFR Part 24, *Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition for Federal and Federally-Assisted Programs*. A main purpose of these regulations is to assure that owners of real property to be acquired and persons displaced as a direct result of Federal or federally-assisted projects are treated fairly, consistently, and equitably.²

¹ Esri. (2018). *Updated Demographics*. Community Analyst (Version 6.0).

<https://communityanalyst.arcgis.com/esriCA/login/index.html>

² FHWA. (1999). *Part 24 - Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition for Federal and Federally-Assisted Programs*. Retrieved 10 November 2018, from <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legregs/directives/fapg/cfr4924a.htm>

4. Impact Assessment

Baseline Conditions

Demographic and Economic Indicators

Table 1 provides demographic information and select economic indicators on the 13 census block groups within the Study Area, along with the State of Rhode Island, Newport County, City of Newport, and Town of Middletown for comparison purposes. There are 14,432 persons living within the Study Area, a total that has remained relatively constant since 2010. The median age in the Study Area is 35.3 years old; younger than the median of the State at 40.7 years, Newport County at 45.3 years, the City of Newport at 36.9 years, and the Town of Middletown at 44.8 years. For information on minority status, please see the Environmental Justice Technical Memorandum.

Whereas 58 percent of occupied residential units in Rhode Island are owner-occupied, only 31.4 percent of the units in the Study Area are occupied by their owners, with the remainder occupied by renters. The median home value in the Study Area is higher than the State by 21.1 percent, but is lower than the other reference geographies, including 36.9 percent lower than the City of Newport, the largest such difference among the reference geographies. There are 6,143 households within the Study Area, and the median income of these households is \$57,144. This is lower than the median household income of the State at \$58,972, the County at \$76,030, the City of Newport at \$65,134, and the Town of Middletown at \$72,786. Per capita income in the Study Area is lower than all reference geographies at \$32,311. The unemployment rate in the Study Area, 3.4 percent, which matches the rate of the County, is lower than the State at 5 percent and Town of Middletown at 4.2 percent but higher than the City at 2.7 percent.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles

	Rhode Island	Newport County	City of Newport	Town of Middletown	Study Area
Population					
Population 2018	1,067,528	84,539	25,021	16,301	14,432
Population 2010	1,052,567	82,888	24,672	16,150	14,383
Percent Population Change 2010 – 2018	1.4%	2.0%	1.4%	0.9%	0.3%
Median Age	40.7	45.3	36.9	44.8	35.3

	Rhode Island	Newport County	City of Newport	Town of Middletown	Study Area
Households	420,315	35,807	10,727	6,856	6,143
Percent Owner Occupied Housing Units	58.0%	59.2%	39.0%	53.0%	31.4%
Percent Renter Occupied Housing Units	42.0%	40.8%	61.0%	47.0%	68.6%
Income					
Median Household Income	\$58,972	\$76,030	\$65,134	\$72,786	\$57,144
Per Capita Income	\$32,618	\$42,293	\$37,615	\$39,041	\$32,311
2018 Median Home Value	\$265,245	\$378,628	\$439,785	\$365,028	\$321,284
2018 Unemployment Rate	5%	3.4%	2.7%	4.2%	3.4%

Source: Esri, *Updated Demographics*; U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 Decennial Census*

Community Facilities and Public Services

An inventory of community facilities within the Study Area, including schools, parks, medical facilities, religious institutions, and community centers, was created to help assess the Project’s potential impacts on these facilities (see Figure 1). Within the Study Area, there are four educational facilities (e.g., Claiborne Pell Elementary School at 35 Dexter Street), 20 parks (Miantonomi Memorial Park, Hunter Park, Newport Dog Park), five religious institutions (e.g., Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses at 36 Hillside Avenue, St. John’s the Evangelist at 61 Poplar Street), three medical facilities (e.g., East Bay Community Action at 6 John H Chafee Boulevard, Navy Health Clinic at 43 Smith Road), and two community centers (the Florence Gray Center at 1 York Street and the Martin Luther King Community Center at 20 Dr Marcus Wheatland Boulevard).



Source: RIDOT, RIGIS, VHB

Legend

- Limit of Disturbance (LOD)
- - - Quarter Mile Study Area
- - - Municipal Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary

- Parks and Open Spaces
- Harbor Walk

Community Facilities by Type

- Educational Facility
- Medical Facility
- Park and Trail
- Fire Protection
- Multi-Purpose Community Center
- Religious Institution



Figure 1
Community Facilities

**Reconstruction at Pell Bridge Ramps
Newport/Middletown, Rhode Island**

Access to such facilities proximate to the Project's LOD is generally inhibited by the condition of existing surface transportation infrastructure, including sidewalks along JT Connell Highway and Admiral Kalbfus Road that are in fair/poor condition. Such condition ratings are based on an inventory conducted as part of the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study.

In addition to community facilities, this assessment identified public services within the Study Area. The City of Newport Department of Utilities is comprised of two subdivisions: the Water Division is responsible for drinking water and the Water Pollution Control Division is responsible for wastewater treatment. The City of Newport's water distribution system also services Middletown and the City provides wastewater treatment on a wholesale basis to Middletown.³ Waste collection is managed by Clean City Newport in Newport and by the Refuse Collection Department in Middletown. National Grid is the primary electric and gas utility provider for both the City of Newport and the Town of Middletown. Within the Study Area, there is one fire station at 63 W Marlborough Street and one police station at 120 Broadway; both serve the City of Newport.

Effects Analysis

Proposed Action

Direct Impacts

Residential and Commercial Displacements:

The Project would require the acquisition of several privately- and publicly-held properties. These acquisitions, which may be complete or partial depending on final concept design, include up to three residential properties along Halsey Street between Garfield Street and Columbus Way, up to two commercial properties including an unoccupied commercial building at 60 Halsey Street and the Waste Management – Newport Hauling & Transfer Station at 65 Halsey Street, and the municipally-owned 70-90 Halsey Street that houses facilities associated with the City's Water Department and Clean City Program. These acquisitions represent a moderate adverse impact relative to their potential for displacements, as they are measurable (i.e., number of parcels acquired) but are expected to be conducted fairly, consistently, and equitably in accordance with 49 CFR Part 24 requirements.

Community Connectivity and Cohesion:

The Project would have a beneficial impact by improving neighborhood connectivity through the creation of new north-south linkages. These linkages would better connect the City's North End neighborhood, including to Downtown by way of a reconnected JT Connell Highway and an improved Newport Secondary Rail Line that includes a shuttle with connected park and ride and walking/bike trail.

Community Facilities:

The Project is not anticipated to alter existing community facilities or the services they provide. Local surface transportation improvements, such as the resurfacing of JT Connell Highway/Coddington Highway to W Main Road, are expected to improve access to these facilities.

³ City of Newport. (2018). *Utilities*. Retrieved 12 November 2018, from <http://www.cityofnewport.com/departments/utilities>

Public Services and Utilities:

The Project is not expected to interfere with or place new demands on public services. Although the Project includes the acquisition of properties dedicated to Waste Management (i.e., Newport Hauling & Transfer Station at 65 Halsey Street) and the City's Water Department and Clean City Program at 70-90 Halsey Street, related services are expected to be accommodated elsewhere.

As the Project is transportation-based, its stationary-source energy requirements are minimal. Any additional streetlighting and electronic signage above current conditions are expected to be easily accommodated by the local electric utility company and will not impact the provision of electric utility to the community.

Demographics:

The Project will not directly result in significant shifts of population and housing into or out of the Study Area. Although the Project will result in the acquisition of up to three residential properties and up to two commercial properties, such properties represent a fraction of the total number of properties within the Study Area. As the Project is entirely composed of new or improved surface transportation infrastructure, it will not directly result in added employment.

Tax Base and Property Values:

The acquisition of several privately- and publicly-held properties within the Project's LOD represents a moderate adverse impact to the community tax base. These properties are a fraction of the total properties within the City of Newport and their acquisition and subsequent removal from the municipal tax roll is not anticipated to significantly reduce the City's property tax revenues.

The Project is not anticipated to negatively affect property values within the Study Area, as the neighborhood has largely developed around the Pell Bridge approaches and ramps since its construction commenced in 1966.

Temporary Construction Impacts:

Construction activities will likely result in temporary disruptions to local businesses, particularly along JT Connell Highway, by impeding access due to potential roadway closures or detours and Project-related traffic congestion. Such impacts, however, would be temporary and their intensity is considered minor as RIDOT will coordinate with local business owners to minimize related impacts.

Indirect Impacts

The reconfiguration of the Pell Bridge approaches and ramps, including the consolidation and removal of excess highway infrastructure, would open land formerly occupied and constrained by such infrastructure to new development. Such development is anticipated to be consistent with the City's plans for an "Innovation Hub," which is intended to be an economic driver that brings together government, research, educational, and private investment partners to create employment through incubator/accelerator type businesses focused on global resiliency and climate change issues.⁴ Additional business types may include ocean, alternative energy systems, defense (underwater,

⁴ City of Newport. (2017). *Newport Innovation Hub*. Retrieved 10 October 2018, from <http://www.cityofnewport.com/home/showdocument?id=5448>

maritime, and cyber security), and digital industries, along with their supporting sub-sectors. The Innovation Hub is expected to provide robust new employment opportunities within the Study Area aligned with these business sectors.

Though it is not possible to assess specific components of the future Innovation Hub at this time, given the scale of its redevelopment potential for currently vacant or underutilized properties, it is likely that related developments would significantly increase the community tax base and boost local property values. The employment potential of the Innovation Hub is likely to result in a population influx and create a demand for new housing within the Study Area, which will also place added demand on local public services and utilities. The added commercial/industrial floor area and its occupants will place additional demand on public services (e.g., water and sewer) and on stationary-source energy generation.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Project would not occur. Community connectivity and cohesiveness would continue to be impeded; the local roadway network would not be reconnected or improved and no new multimodal transportation options would be introduced to the Study Area. Development potential within the Study Area would continue to be limited by the Pell Bridge ramp right-of-way. No significant amount of land would be made available for the Innovation Hub, and therefore, the Study Area would not fully realize and benefit from the economic potential of this planned land use.

5. Cumulative Impacts

No past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions are known that would result in the Project having adverse cumulative effects to socioeconomic conditions within the Study Area. The potential redevelopment of the Newport Grand would generate new employment opportunities within the Study Area, and therefore, add to the number of potential jobs resulting from the redevelopment of the parcels freed up by the Project. The building program for the former casino includes a 250-room hotel and 150,000 square feet of new retail.

6. Mitigation

As no permanent adverse impacts are anticipated from the Project on socioeconomic conditions within the Study Area, no mitigation is proposed. As stated, RIDOT will coordinate with local business owners to minimize impacts to their operations during the construction phase.

7. Regulatory Coordination and Required Permits

The Project will require several property acquisitions to accommodate the reconfiguration of the Pell Bridge approaches and ramps. RIDOT will work with property owners to ensure fair compensation and relocation assistance in accordance with 49 CFR Part 24 requirements.

8. Summary of Impacts

The Project would improve neighborhood connectivity and cohesion through the creation of new multimodal north-south linkages and by improving conditions of existing surface transportation. Such improvements will improve access to community facilities and the services they provide. Although the Project will result in the acquisition of up to three

residential properties and up to two commercial properties, these acquisitions would be carried out in accordance with 49 CFR Part 24 requirements and are not anticipated to result in a significant adverse impact municipal tax revenues. Construction activities have the potential to temporarily disrupt commercial operations within the Project's LOD; however, RIDOT will coordinate with local business owners to minimize such disruptions.

The redevelopment of parcels freed up by the Project will result in new employment opportunities within the Study Area. Such opportunities are expected to be consistent with the City of Newport's vision of an Innovation Hub that creates employment through new incubator/accelerator type businesses largely focused on global resiliency and climate change issues. In addition to new employment, the Innovation Hub is likely to significantly increase the community tax base and boost local property values.