

LOCAL PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING PHASE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN

Replacement of Bridge No. C0609 Picket Place Bridge over the South Branch of Raritan River

*Townships of Branchburg and Hillsborough
Somerset County, New Jersey*



April 2025

Prepared by:



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1. PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Public Involvement Action Plan (PIAP) is intended to serve as a framework to accomplish open, proactive, and productive community and stakeholder discussions concerning the Replacement of the Picket Place Bridge over the South Branch of Raritan River Project. Strategies and audiences for public involvement identified during each phase of the Project will be incorporated into subsequent phases.

The foundation for public outreach is set through the development and agreement of the PIAP. The PIAP considers the varying communications needs of elected and local officials, residents, businesses, resource agencies and personnel, and other stakeholders and special interest groups located throughout the study area. Through this process, specific goals, messages, and deliverables will be matched with various audiences to ensure all are informed about the aspects of the study that are most pertinent to them and/or their constituencies. Stakeholder feedback resulting from the PIAP will be an essential component in the refinement of the Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) for the Project within the context of the community.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The subject bridge, Somerset County Structure C0609 (NJDOT No. 18C0609), carries County Route 567 over the South Branch of Raritan River. The Picket Place Bridge sits in a primarily agricultural setting. The bridge is located near the Neshanic Valley Golf Course and the Sourland Mountain Preserve. It connects Hillsborough and Branchburg Townships and provides connections to major roadways in the area including Route 202, Pleasant Run Road (C.R. 667), and Amwell Road (C.R. 514).

Somerset County, in partnership with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) and the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), completed a Local Concept Development (LCD) Study



in 2020. The intent of the Study was to evaluate alternatives to restore the structural integrity of the Picket Place Bridge and to provide a safe and efficient crossing for all modes of transportation. During the LCD Study, the Project Team developed a purpose and need, determined a variety of alternatives to meet it, and received resolutions of support for the Study from the Townships of Hillsborough and Branchburg, and Somerset County.

Somerset County, NJTPA, and NJDOT have advanced the Picket Place Bridge Replacement Project (the “Project”) to the Local Preliminary Engineering (LPE) Phase. The intent of the LPE Phase is to refine the PPA selected in the LCD Study to replace the bridge and obtain the environmental document.

3. PROJECT TEAM

SOMERSET COUNTY

Lili Tsu, Principal Engineer, Bridge Section

NJDOT

Kumudika Somaratna, District 3 Local Aid
Sean Ream, Division of Environmental Resources
Ishita Malhotra, Division of Environmental Resources

NJTPA

Richard Brundage, Project Manager

CONSULTANT TEAM MEMBERS:

Richard Menino, Project Manager, Dewberry
Manuel Vera, Deputy Project Manager, Dewberry
Gary Doss, Environmental, Dewberry
Eric Boschen, Hydraulics, Dewberry
Michael McAlpin, Survey, Malick & Scherer
Kieran Stratton, Community Outreach, Stokes Creative Group

4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The PIAP summarizes a comprehensive effort to advance community awareness and participation and promote inclusivity. The document outlines the Project Team, program elements, and the proposed communication/information methods recommended for the Project. The PIAP is a living document and may be modified and amended as the Project progresses.

This process began in the LCD Study by gaining an understanding of local demographics and how these populations access information related to the Project. The Project Team consulted with local officials and determined no additional efforts were needed to address any potential concerns such as language and mobility. The Project Team will continue to confirm no additional efforts are necessary during the life of the Project. All communications will be mailed to organizations that serve these populations.

Public Involvement Action Plan elements include the following:

- A. Stakeholder Coordination
- B. Content Development

A. Stakeholder Coordination

1. *Stakeholder Distribution List*

The stakeholder distribution list will include a directory of interested and affected parties. The list will organize stakeholder contact information and include name, address, email and other pertinent fields. It can also be used to track meeting attendance. Stakeholders identified and engaged with during the LCD Study will remain on the distribution list and will be updated where necessary.

Interested and affected stakeholders are anticipated to include:

- **Somerset County:**
 - Elected Officials
 - Engineers and Planners
- **Branchburg and Hillsborough Townships:**
 - Elected Officials
 - Engineers and Planners
 - First Responders
 - Civic, Cultural and Religious Organizations
 - School District Officials
 - Private Residential Property Owners
 - Local Businesses
- **Federal / State Agencies:**
 - NJTPA
 - FHWA-NJ Division
 - NJDOT-Bureau of Environmental Program Resources
 - NJDOT-Local Aid
 - NJDOT-Bicycle/Pedestrian Program
 - NJDEP-State Historic Preservation Office
 - NJDEP-Division of Land Use Regulation
 - NJDEP Green Acres Program

Target organizations that serve NJ populations are anticipated to include:

- Community Centers
- Public Institutes
 - Educational/Academic
 - Religious

2. *Local Officials Briefings (LOBs)*

Briefings will be arranged with local officials throughout the Project to facilitate a convenient and transparent exchange of project information. Each briefing will be held in advance of the respective

stakeholder meeting to provide officials with the latest information regarding the Project prior to meeting with the stakeholders and the public. For this effort, additional coordination by phone, mail and e-mail will occur on an as-needed basis.

3. Stakeholder Meeting

Stakeholder meetings will occur to vet the transportation issues that matter most to the community and will provide a forum to work with the stakeholders in resolving concerns while also meeting the needs of the Project. Early and ongoing public involvement is intended to build trust and garner stakeholder support for the Project.

4. Public Information Meeting (PIM)

A PIM will be held to present project information to the public and maintain continued participation and support for the Project. It is anticipated that the PIM will be held in the early evening to accommodate local work schedules. All project materials for the PIM, which may include handouts, presentations, social media posts, and invitations, will be approved by the Project Team prior to the meeting. Comment cards may be disseminated, collected, compiled, then summarized for review by the Project Team. Following the PIM, a comment period will be open for one month. The PIM will be held in person or virtually, in coordination with Somerset County and the Townships of Branchburg and Hillsborough. If held in person, the venue for the PIM will be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Virtual outreach efforts will have various approaches and be cognizant of potential digital gaps in project areas. Alternative outreach methods may require mailing materials to residents in the study area, as well as providing call-in numbers for phone participation in virtual meetings if computer access is not possible.

The Project Team will work with Somerset County to advertise the PIMs and will assist with any press release or media requests, if necessary. Legal ads will be posted in newspapers serving Somerset County (one local and one regional).

B. Content Development

1. Project Website

A project specific website (www.PicketPlaceBridge.com) was created to communicate project news and informational updates to the public. The website includes the project overview, FAQs, community outreach efforts, maps, photos, contact information, project timeline, project documents, and helpful links. Additionally, the website serves as an opportunity for the public to submit comments and questions to the Project Team. All comments are documented and responded to when needed.

The project website is a mainstay information tool and will undergo updates to tailor the content to the different phases. Existing content from prior phases will remain accessible on the website.

The Project Team will alert the network of project stakeholders when the website has been updated. These stakeholders will be encouraged to share this information on their respective websites and with their stakeholder networks through newsletters, e-mail blasts, social sharing, and other means as their communications systems allow.

The website will remain in its current format and design. Stokes continues to maintain and update the website and will follow previously established designs when creating additional elements for subsequent phases.

2. Social Media Content

If requested Stokes will create meeting announcement alerts and other project information that can be shared on the Townships' and County's social media accounts. Short project updates and links to the project website, as well as meeting information, can all be shared to encourage attendance and participation in the project.

3. Project Factsheet

The factsheet will act as a quick-reference guide containing project background information, project status, and contact information.

The factsheet will be accessible and downloadable from the Project website, and a printed version will be available at all in-person public engagement events. The factsheet can be converted into a mailable piece if the Project Team deems necessary.

4. Public Outreach Summary

Stokes will prepare an outreach summary document. This summary will include a list of participating stakeholders, a summary of all comments and feedback provided, and a description of outreach activities performed along with an assessment of the results. Meeting materials, handouts and displays will be included in the report appendices, along with meeting summary reports documented during the Project.

5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A. Local Concept Development (LCD)

The intent of the LCD Study was to evaluate alternatives to restore the structural integrity of the Picket Place Bridge and to provide a safe and efficient crossing for all modes of transportation. During the LCD Study, the Project Team developed a purpose and need, determined a variety of alternatives to meet it, and received resolutions of support for the PPA from the Townships of Branchburg and Hillsborough and Somerset County. Public involvement is an integral part of Concept Development for any study, so the Project Team engaged the public throughout. Two LOBs, two stakeholders' meetings and two PIMs were held during the LCD Study.

At the initiation of the LCD Study, the project specific website (www.PicketPlaceBridge.com) and project fact sheet were created. The Project Team, with input from Local Officials and public engagements developed a stakeholder's database. A Public Outreach Summary was created following the completion of the LCD study and was included in the LCD Report.

The Project Team obtained Resolutions of Support for the PPA from the Townships of Branchburg and Hillsborough and Somerset County. A Resolution of Support is typically obtained after the PPA has been identified and vetted through the public outreach program.

B. Local Preliminary Engineering (LPE)

The intent of the LPE Phase is to refine the PPA selected in Local Concept Development (LCD) Study to replace the bridge and obtain the environmental document. Public input on the PPA remains important in this phase of the Project, as the goal is to determine how it can best serve the community.

The project website and factsheet from the LCD Study will be reviewed and updated for the LPE Phase of the Project. The Stakeholder’s database will also be reviewed and updated as necessary with input from the local officials.

The following is an anticipated agenda for all project-related meetings and is subject to change.

Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA): Replacement of the bridge with a completely new structure staging the work while maintaining a single lane of alternating traffic controlled by temporary traffic signals.		
Public Meeting Type	Proposed Timeframe	Audience and Agenda:
Local Officials Briefing #1	Spring 2025	Local and Elected Officials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain feedback and incorporate refinements to the PPA • Discuss any impacts that the PPA may have on residents, businesses, emergency responders, and schools
Stakeholders Meeting	Summer 2025	First Responders, Schools, Local Businesses, etc.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same agenda
Local Officials Briefing #2	Fall 2025	Local and Elected Officials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review refinements to the PPA per input from Stakeholders • Obtain concurrence on PPA
Public Information Meeting	Fall 2025	Open to the Public <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same agenda

The meetings during LPE are expected to follow a similar schedule as the LCD meetings, with the agenda revised and refined to more closely align with the views and concerns of the group being met with.

A Public Outreach Summary will be created following the completion of the LPE phase to be included in the LPE Report.

C. Final Design (FD)

During the Final Design Phase of the Project, input obtained through the public outreach and engagement during the LPE Phase will be used to develop construction documents for the Picket Place Bridge replacement.

With regards to community input, the FD Phase is mostly focused on the final engineering details of the Project, like landscaping, lighting, signage, streetscaping, and traffic staging. Public involvement initiatives will be developed once the Project completes LPE and advances to FD but will focus on sharing anticipated traffic control measures and staging impacts with the public.

D. Construction

The Construction Phase of a project brings the chosen alternative to life, and transparency and communication with the surrounding public is critical to its success. Notification of construction timelines and impacts to the traveling public will help minimize disruptions to daily life, leading to smooth project execution and continued community acceptance of the Project.