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Petitcodiac Causeway 2021 GNB Construction Disruption Project



Public Engagement Learnings & Recommendations

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In 2021, the Town of Riverview's traditional transportation corridors will undergo a significant transformation. The Petitcodiac Causeway will close for a six-month period from May to November 2021 to enable New Brunswick's Department of Transportation and Infrastructure to construct a 240-metre steel girder bridge.

The construction is the final stage of the multi-year federal/provincial government initiative to return the Petitcodiac River to its natural state, with a channel width of approximately 175 metres. The four-lane bridge will have an elevation of 17 metres, six metres higher than the existing causeway, and will include sidewalks, two river lookouts and connections to Riverview's existing nature trails.

During construction, foot, bicycle and vehicle travel between Riverview and Moncton will be limited to the Gunningsville Bridge which is expected to cause traffic congestion, particularly during the morning and evening commuter rush. In anticipation of the temporary disruptions this construction project will cause, the Town of Riverview is taking a multi-pronged approach to engaging, informing and preparing Riverview residents and visitors.

In response to the closure, the Town of Riverview created PetitcodiACTION, a campaign that will represent the Town's efforts in helping to alleviate foreseeable challenges. As its first initiative of PetitcodiACTION, the Town hosted a two-hour virtual public engagement session with 39 participants on Zoom, with parts of the session live-streamed on the Town's Facebook page. Consultant Lisa Hrabluk facilitated the session, assisted by Riverview High School students Vinz Bariring, Tristan Gallant, Kylie Macleod, Ka Lu Say Moo, Olivia Reeder and Kassi Stuart, who took notes and contributed to the writing of this report.

The session was followed up by a public survey that gathered 407 responses from Riverview residents on the construction project, the challenges they expect and actionable solutions for the Town to consider. Data collected from the virtual public engagement session and community survey have been used to create this report. Following the publication of this report, the Town of Riverview will work with residents, businesses and local organizations to enact some of the report's recommendations.



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As its second initiative of PetitcodiACTION, the Town will explore the concept of active transportation and how Riverview residents can use the Petitcodiac River bridge project as the catalyst to consider innovative new approaches to how they travel around and through the community. More information on the Town's PetitcodiACTION campaign can be found at www.townofriverview.ca/petitcodiaction.

Town of Riverview Public Engagement Session

The goal of this session was to enable Riverview residents, businesspeople and service providers to participate in the development of community-led solutions and, in doing so, to actively participate in the formation and support of the ideas once launched. While the impetus for this conversation was the municipality's desire for feedback regarding the expected traffic congestion, participants quickly moved to developing multi-sectoral solutions that complemented the Town's existing plans, and vice versa.

In preparation for the session, consultant Lisa Hrabluk hosted a live 20-minute interview with the Town of Riverview's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Colin Smith and Riverview MLA Bruce Fitch, current Minister of Social Development and former Riverview mayor. The interview was live-streamed on the Town's Facebook page on Friday, October 30, and to date has 2,300 views.

The public engagement session occurred Wednesday, November 4, 2020, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., using the Zoom video conferencing software. The opening and closing remarks, including the provincial government presentation on the bridge project and the final ranking of community recommendations, were live-streamed on the Town's Facebook page. The videos remain on the site. To date, this session has 2,600 views. All of the videos can be found at www.townofriverview.ca/petitcodiaction.



Attendees

The session featured 39 participants, including residents, businesspeople, public service providers, employers and commuters.

Angela Allain, City of Moncton	Julie Hopkins, Riverview Arts Centre
Alison Annis, Country Daycare	Alicia Ishmach, Venn Centre
Elizabeth Boutilier, Riverview Public Library	Deepa Koshla, Tech Mahindra
Kathy Bureaux, Riverview Golf Course	Conrad Landry, City of Moncton
Linda Carey, Boys and Girls Club	Sarah Lowe, Anglophone East
Gerry Cole, Town of Riverview	John Maillet, 3 Plus Corporation
Annette Crummey, Town of Riverview	Leanna Murphy, Nav Canada
Mark Davidson, Davidson Physiotherapy	Adrienne O'Prey, NB Business Council
Jeremie Desroches, NB Department of Transportation and Infrastructure	Michel Ouellet, Town of Riverview
Jennifer Dingman, Fundy Biosphere Reserve	Mike Pauley, NB Department of Transportation and Infrastructure
Michelle Duffie, Lounsbury Group	Craig Pierre, Medavie Blue Cross
Greg Dunn, Horizon Health Network	Denis Pleau, Town of Riverview
Jocelyne Dupuis, Adelin Properties	Kevin Rice, TransAqua
Dale Finnamore, NBCC	Monique Saulnier, Rogers Communications
Mario Fortin, RCMP	Kevin Silliker, City of Moncton
Pamela Fowler, Riverview High School	Colin Smith, Town of Riverview
Isabelle Gallant, Assomption Vie	Ross Smith, Riverview Skatepark
John Gonzalez, RehabOne	Shane Thomson, Town of Riverview
Alex Grcarovski, City of Moncton	John Wishart, Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce



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The session began with two short presentations by Mike Pauley, Assistant Director of the New Brunswick Highway Corporation, and Riverview CAO Colin Smith. Pauley said the project includes a realignment of the river and work to alleviate flooding at the traffic circle.

The construction project will begin May 1, 2021, and work will be scheduled to literally go with the flow, with crews and work scheduled to work with the Petitcodiac River tides flowing through the river channel. The new bridge is scheduled to open November 1, 2021. Smith said the project will affect businesses and residents, and that the Town has been working on a number of infrastructure projects in anticipation of the closure of the existing causeway, most notably the Bridgedale Boulevard Project. This includes the construction of Riverview's first roundabout to enhance connections to Gunningsville Boulevard and Runnymede Road, further development of Mill Creek Nature Park, and ongoing road infrastructure upgrades and renewals. He acknowledged that COVID-19 has changed working patterns in Riverview, including the volume of commuter traffic travelling to and from Moncton. It remains to be seen whether the work-from-home trend will continue in summer 2021.

A quick poll of attendees indicated that 69 per cent believed the Petitcodiac Bridge project would affect them often (52 per cent) or on a daily basis (19 per cent). Another 30 per cent indicated the project would rarely affect them.

Currently, about 27,000 vehicles use the Petitcodiac Causeway daily; 25,000 vehicles use the Gunningsville Bridge daily. About 5,000 people use the Riverview trail system each month.-The trails along the river will be closed as a safety precaution during the construction project.

The Challenges

Participants divided into six small groups to discuss expected challenges caused by the construction project. These challenges were sorted into seven categories: commuters/employers, daycares/schools, local retail businesses, residents, public health and safety, traffic flow, and public transit.



Commuters/employers: The general consensus was that the closing of the Petitcodiac Causeway for six months will cause longer traffic lines, which means commuters could be late for work or will opt to work from home. This could negatively impact employers who will need to manage these delays when their employees arrive and leave work.

Daycare/school: The concerns related to daycares and schools were an extension of concerns related to commuting, primarily how parents will get back to Riverview in time to pick up their children from daycare/afterschool care if they are delayed in traffic. Teachers travelling across the river from their homes to the schools where they work will face commuting challenges, with the added challenge that schools have a 'hard' start time, leaving them with little to no flexibility. There was also concern for Riverview post-secondary students and their ability to get across the bridge in time for classes.

Local retail businesses: The primary concern raised was that the construction project will make it inconvenient to shop at businesses located near the construction project or any located in the path of the traffic backup. This could be the final straw for businesses already suffering due to the pandemic. Having adapted to disruptions caused by COVID-19 through 2020, local businesses will now face a second year of disruptions because of construction. These businesses won't only lose Riverview customers, they will also experience a drop in the number of Moncton customers who would normally travel via the Causeway. The inconvenience of travelling to the Gunningsville Bridge could be too inconvenient and shoppers may stay on the Moncton side of the river.

Residents: The primary concerns raised by residents were an increase in construction-related noise and dealing with irritable neighbours and drivers travelling through subdivisions.

Public health and safety: There were three primary concerns raised regarding public health and safety. First, there could be an increased chance of accidents because of hurried and impatient drivers. Second, accessibility for emergency vehicles to travel between Riverview and Moncton, where the hospitals are located, is a significant concern. Finally, people travelling between Riverview



and Moncton for medical appointments could be delayed, particularly if they are travelling from Riverview to either of the hospitals for appointments and/or treatment.

Traffic flow: Participants cited common concerns that traffic will be heavy at peak times. Drivers might avoid traffic on Coverdale Road because of the construction project. There were questions as to how Findlay Boulevard will be connected, and how drivers will turn left onto Hillsborough Road during the construction project. There was also concern that any other construction projects will only add to the congestion. As well, there was concern that delays caused by the bridge project could cause related interruptions with other projects because it will take longer to get supplies and equipment in and out of Riverview.

Public transit: Codiac Transpo reports that its ridership is at about 55 per cent of its traditional service hours because of COVID-19 restrictions, which has caused it to lay off some employees. Ridership is struggling because of the pandemic and the construction project could cause a further drop in ridership, or public transit could become a key part of the solution.

Solutions

Following the initial small-group discussion, participants returned to the main 'room' in Zoom, with each group presenting its list of problems. Participants then returned to their small groups to discuss possible solutions, which were sorted into nine categories: regional cooperation, communications and public engagement, active transportation, public transit, commuters/employers, daycare/schools, local retail businesses, public health and safety, and traffic flow.

Regional cooperation: About 20,000 people work in downtown Moncton, and currently 7,000 people work remotely; the Petitcodiac Causeway project is not simply a Riverview issue. Participants agreed that Moncton, Dieppe and Riverview need to work together to ensure all residents and visitors are informed about the project and have the information they need to decide how best to navigate this temporary disruption.



Communications and public engagement: The groups agreed a robust communications and public engagement plan needs to be initiated to (a) get people prepared and planning for the disruption and (b) to approach the disruption with good humour, patience and a willingness to support local businesses. Participants had a variety of creative ideas for how to do this.

Tone: Take a light-hearted approach to the traffic jams, which will still be shorter than the norm in large cities. Position it as the 'Albert County Jam' and get people to post good-humoured images and creative fixes. Encourage people to work together, be positive and patient. For instance, being stuck in traffic can be your Zen moment to revel in the silence. The public can also be encouraged to focus on the final outcome when the construction is completed – the river returned to its natural state, a view that will be possible to enjoy from a new bridge, complete with connections to walking trails and lookouts.

Timing: Communications needs to start early and be consistent. Messaging should be 'don't be caught without a plan on May 1.'

Content: Publish times when the traffic is lighter and/or place traffic cameras at the Gunningsville Bridge and stream the feed online so drivers can view the traffic in real-time before leaving. Cross-promote buying and supporting local businesses during the construction project. Toolkits should be developed specifically for local businesses and regional employers to explain the situation and offer solutions for how to (a) maintain business traffic and (b) make adjustments for employees who will be caught in traffic.

Media: Make use of all forms of public communications, with a special emphasis on radio, digital, and mailouts.

Signage: Participants recommended project-specific signage to warn tourists and non-residents who may not be aware the bridge is closed. This signage should be posted along all roadways leading in and out of Riverview, which will require the participation of neighbouring communities, most notably Moncton, and provincial roadways leading to Hillsborough and the Fundy coast.



Active Transportation: Participant solutions focused on three aspects of active transportation: (a) encouraging people to use Codiac Transpo, (b) creating a Park & Ride system and (c) encouraging alternate forms of transportation.

- **Increase Codiac Transpo ridership:** Participants viewed Codiac Transpo as a key player in easing traffic congestion. They suggested extra stops and routes; a special 'construction project' rate for early purchases of monthly bus passes; a special shuttle to get people across the bridge; and the creation of a connection to Bridgedale and Hillsborough. Participants also pitched a weekly draw for bus users to incentivize increased ridership; a campaign to promote the use of bus bike racks to cycle/ride to work; and encouraging employers to purchase or subsidize bus passes for employees.
- **Park & Ride:** There were a few ideas as to how this could work. Drivers could use the old Public Works property as the site for a temporary Park & Ride or the Sobey's parking lot. There was a suggestion to have a Park & Ride specifically for parents, which would pick-up children in daycare and afterschool care, and bring them to a central location where parents would be waiting.
- **Alternate transportation:** There was strong support for promoting carpooling amongst neighbours or those who work together in nearby locations. Cycling was also a popular solution, with a recommendation to explore teaming up with La Bikery to provide short-term bike rentals to enable commuters to get across the bridge. People could park near the Gunningsville Bridge and cycle into Moncton.

Commuters/employers: Participants suggested that employers simply extend the pandemic-induced 'work from home' policy through the construction season and/or consider staggered work hours. As an alternative, the Riverview Public Library will be promoting itself as a co-location space, as it has boardrooms and study rooms available for rent, and free parking.

Daycare/school: Building off the work-from-home recommendation, participants suggested employers allow parents with small children to work from home to alleviate the stress of trying to get back in time to pick up children from daycare



and afterschool programs consider implementing flexible pick-up times without financial penalty.

Local retail businesses: The general consensus was that there should be a concerted campaign to encourage people to shop local, including offering incentives to encourage shoppers to patronize businesses in the construction/traffic congestion zone. The Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce will assist with these marketing strategies. A 'Shop Riverview' Rewards Program could be created to encourage local shopping.

Public health and safety: There were three primary recommendations in this area: 1) To ensure that an ambulance always be on the Riverview side of the river to ensure fast response times to emergency calls. 2) To set up a small medical facility in Riverview to triage emergencies and help treat seniors. 3) To have Moncton-area hospitals create a scheduling process that prioritizes and schedules patients based on postal code, which would automatically calculate for delays and longer travel times.

Traffic flow: Participants recommended advance greens specifically for buses, synchronized traffic lights to ensure traffic flow between Moncton and Riverview, and police assistance to direct traffic during busy times.

Public Survey Results

As part of the public engagement process, the Town of Riverview conducted an online public survey in November 2020 to gauge residents' concerns and recommendations. The Town received 405 responses via the survey and two additional emails sent directly to the Town office, for a total of 407 responses.

The survey indicated that the Petitcodiac Causeway construction project will cause significant disruption to residents and businesses on either side of the river for a six-month period. Furthermore, the survey revealed that the project is already causing stress and anxiety in residents, particularly parents with small children in care, workers who don't have flexible work situations and/or understanding managers, as well as people with medical conditions and their caregivers.



In addition, the survey showed an underlying current of frustration and distrust with government. Some respondents noted that the provincial government failed to adequately plan and manage the Causeway project. A smaller portion of residents expressed that the entire Causeway project was unnecessary, directing their frustration at the provincial government and, to a lesser extent, the federal government. Some also questioned the level of planning by the Town of Riverview and the implementation of infrastructure projects to alleviate the expected congestion.

While there was certainly some negative feedback in relation to the project, some respondents appeared to accept that the project will happen and offered recommendations for how to ease the congestion on their familiar routes, while also taking personal responsibility for developing alternate plans. What follows are highlights of suggestions made via the public survey.

Communications and public engagement

- Information targeted at medical and other professional services that patients/clients may be late for appointments because of traffic and to adjust scheduling accordingly.
- Locate the Tourism Bureau trailer just past the bridge on the way to Hillsborough to take advantage of Riverview's position as the gateway to the newly-completed Fundy Parkway.
- Create a public campaign explaining how to properly use a zipper merge.
- Have police provide traffic support to direct vehicles during the first week so drivers learn how to merge, turn and travel through the traffic congestion. Basically use real-time public education provided by police and possibly Public Works staff.
- Create maps with alternate routes for people to consider.

Active Transportation

- Create dedicated bike lanes.
- Purchase and install bike lockers for commuters who want to cycle and ride.
- Add a bus stop at either end of Gunningsville Bridge for cyclists.
- Install additional crosswalks, particularly at Gunningsville and Mill Creek, so people can cross safely.



- If there is not enough traffic on the 80 bus from Bridgedale to justify more frequent routes, perhaps the 81 or 82 could swing through Gunningsville on the way back to downtown.

Town of Riverview services

- Have extended hours for Town fitness programs, such as yoga and aquafit, to allow residents to participate later in the evening.

Public health and safety

- Have a blood donation clinic open in Riverview to save people driving across the bridge.
- Create a temporary police detachment in Riverview.

Adjust construction project schedule and scope

- Don't close the Causeway but instead design a construction schedule that keeps it open.
- Ensure construction crews work evenings and weekends to keep the closure period as short as possible.
- Close the Petitcodiac Bridge during the evenings but keep it open during business hours.
- Keep the current makeshift road open.

Traffic Flow

A number of survey participants offered suggestions and questions regarding easing traffic congestion and improving traffic flow. In reviewing these suggestions, Town staff noted a number of the ideas had been explored by either the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DTI) or the Town's Public Works department earlier in the process and rejected for safety and/or feasibility reasons. What follows are the most popular questions and the answers from Public Works staff.

- Consider mounted lights on Gunningsville Bridge to open three lanes leaving Riverview in the morning and three lanes returning in the afternoon rush, similar to what happens between Halifax/Dartmouth.
 - Answer: This option was explored and deemed too dangerous to attempt because drivers approach the bridge from multiple directions, which is not the case in Halifax.



- Install a temporary bridge to assist with traffic flow.
 - Answer: DTI explored this option and determined it was not feasible.
- Install a Bailey bridge for emergency vehicles only.
 - Answer: DTI explored this option and determined it was not feasible.
- Keep the old, designated lane for East Riverview to access the bridge.
 - Answer: The Town invested in the new intersection in preparation for the Causeway closure and the designated lane is no longer required.
- Is a carpooling lane feasible for the Gunningsville Bridge?
 - Answer: No, this is not an option.

Other suggestions regarding traffic flow included the following ideas.

- Communicate with residents located in neighbourhoods near the Gunningsville Bridge how they will be able to easily turn into their neighbourhoods if traffic is congested and blocking or slowing access.
- Connect Diligent Drive, Leonard Street, and the Riverview Elementary School road to the new boulevard so Gunningsville residents can go to the other end of town quickly and efficiently without going on Hillsborough Road, or going to the Old Coach Road lights (which are busy in morning drop-off), backtracking to Runnymede, then up and around.
- Put arrows on Hillsborough Road at Riverview Muffler to end confusion. Better access to right-side left-turning lane off bridge to Hillsborough.
- Extend the merge lane from the bridge onto Coverdale Road so drivers don't come to a dead stop trying to figure out how to merge.
- Extend the small right turn lane coming down the hill on Gunningsville Blvd onto Hillsborough Road, vehicles going straight from the Blvd onto the bridge.



Final Thoughts

Overall, residents – both those at the public engagement session and those who completed the survey – agreed that a robust public engagement and communications strategy is required and should begin immediately. This should include a regional approach to directional signage and to building understanding and awareness among employers, both large and small, to give employees flexibility and understanding while traffic is congested. A similar message should be communicated to schools, daycares and afterschool programs, and extended drop-off and pick-up times at such facilities should be encouraged to relieve parental stress. Financial penalties should be waived for parents who are late picking up their children during the construction period.

Within the public survey responses, there was a lot of commentary regarding following the Halifax/Dartmouth example and switch directional lanes on the Gunningsville Bridge during peak travel times. While this option is not feasible, it remains a popular idea and the Town should create public content for social media that clearly explains why this is not possible and asked DTI to include this message in its planned communications. Another popular idea was a public education campaign to explain how to properly execute a zipper merge when traffic is congested. The dos and don'ts of the zipper merge is a popular subject on social media and some eye-catching graphics accompanied with witty and direct language could help alleviate this common commuter frustration.

In all the communications related to the Petitcodiac Bridge Project, tone and positioning will be critically important to build and maintain the support of residents and the general public. The key will be to encourage residents and businesses to work with the Town in a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding to develop community-focused solutions to this temporary but significant disruption.