Amtrak Bush River Bridge and Gunpowder River Bridge Projects Gunpowder Bush Waterway Advocacy Group (GBWAG) Meeting 08/18/2026

Summary of Comments and Responses

A. Introduction

The Gunpowder Bush Waterway Advocacy Group (GBWAG) hosted a public information meeting on August 18, 2026, at 6:00 PM regarding the Amtrak Bush River Bridge Project and Amtrak Gunpowder River Bridge Project. Amtrak was invited to present at this meeting, and you can view the presentation here. The meeting was followed by a brief Q&A session and comment cards were distributed. The purpose of this document is to summarize the 28 comments received and provide Amtrak's responses, consistent with Amtrak's ongoing commitment to stakeholder engagement during the Preliminary Engineering & NEPA phase of both projects. The comments were grouped and summarized based on topic below. For additional questions, email the Project Team at BGRBProject@Amtrak.com.

B. Comments Pertaining to Environmental Impact

1. **Comment: One commenter expressed concerns about what mitigation is being considered for environmental impacts, specifically wetland and open water fill.**

   Response: Both Bush River Bridge and Gunpowder River Bridge projects will be subject to the Federal Railroad Administration's requirements for environmental review in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As part of the NEPA process, Amtrak will study how to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts on the natural environment and cultural resources. Amtrak is coordinating closely with state and federal agencies such as Maryland Department of the Environment and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to understand temporary and permanent impacts, as well as establish mitigation measures.

2. **Comment: One commenter provided a study from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science to supplement their concern of projected sea level rise. The study indicated that sea level along Maryland's shores will likely rise a foot by 2050.**

   Response: The Bush River Bridge and Gunpowder River Bridge projects will undergo the NEPA process. As part of this process, Amtrak will study how to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts on the natural environment and cultural resources. This NEPA

documentation will include potential future conditions as well as existing conditions.

3. **Comment: One commenter asked whether the Navigation Impact Report accounts for potential future commercial development on both rivers and how Amtrak determined who to send the surveys to. They also asked whether the NEPA review considers historical sites near the landings on the Bush River.**

   Response: As part of project planning in 2025, Amtrak completed a Navigation Impact Report (NIR) to inform how the construction of the proposed bridges would impact existing vessels navigating the waterways. In preparation of the NIR, no documented waterway development or future commercial interest plans were identified.

   To support the development of the NIR, Amtrak distributed waterway user surveys to local marinas, boat launches, commercial users, and private residences in the vicinity of both bridges with the highest likelihood of using vessels to travel though the bridges. Additionally, Amtrak conducted one-on-one outreach with local marinas and yacht clubs to collect additional waterway user data and validate the survey information received.

   Both projects will be subject to the FRA requirements for environmental review in accordance with NEPA. As part of the NEPA process, Amtrak will evaluate potential environmental impacts of both bridge projects, including impacts to historic and cultural resources through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This NEPA documentation will include potential future conditions as well as existing conditions.

C. Comments Pertaining to Bridge Design

1. **Comment: Several commenters requested greater vertical-clearance heights for the bridges, including:**
   - **A request for clearance higher than 15 feet, noting boaters also come out of the Bird River**
   - **A concern that a 3-foot clearance increase is insufficient given a 4-to-5-foot daily tidal range, and that a local marina is at risk of closing without substantially more clearance**
   - **A request that both the Bush River and Gunpowder River bridges be elevated as high as possible, citing economic impacts to Harford County boaters and**

businesses, and asking that a new, more targeted survey be conducted on desired bridge height

- **A concern about existing restrictions users face due to vessel size and bridge limitations, additionally noting that many others do not currently own vessels due to height restrictions**

Response: Amtrak is following the USCG Bridge Permitting process, which requires evaluation of the reasonable needs of navigation when establishing bridge clearances. As part of Project Planning in 2025, Amtrak completed a Navigation Impact Report (NIR) that evaluated waterway characteristics, federal navigation projects, existing bridge conditions and waterway usage. Information on vessel sizes (heights and widths), transit frequency, and navigational constraints was collected through surveys distributed to a broad group of waterway users, businesses and residents near both bridges.

For both bridges, the proposed vertical clearances (15' for Gunpowder River Bridge and 30' for Bush River Bridge) were developed based on findings of the NIR. The USCG will independently review this information in addition to the public comments received during the 2026 USCG Preliminary Public Notice and will make a Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination as part of the bridge permitting process. As a general practice, the USCG seeks to maintain existing navigation clearances unless there is a demonstrated need to modify them to address navigational constraints or hazards.

2. **Comment: One commenter asked, since boats will need to navigate at low tide for clearance, whether Amtrak can commit to dredging the bridge site for the next 100 years.**

   Response: Amtrak is not responsible for dredging navigable waterways.

3. **Comment: One commenter raised concerns about whether it is too late to raise the clearance heights and if a bond will be proposed in Baltimore County and put on a ballot.**

   Response: No, it is not too late to raise the clearance heights. The USCG will independently review the Navigation Impact Report and public comments as well as conduct their own navigation evaluation to make a Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination as part of the bridge permitting process.

   Regarding Baltimore County financing, Amtrak does not have authority over county bond initiatives or ballot measures. Although the project will not be funded with

county financing, counties and other public agencies could be potential partners to Amtrak in securing future funds.

4. **Comment: One commenter stated that the Navigation Impact Report contains an error, noting that the Bush River Bridge currently opens to allow unlimited vessel heights while the Gunpowder River Bridge does not, and asserted that the Navigation Impact Report is therefore incorrect.**

   Response: The Navigation Impact Report (NIR) is correct in stating that the vertical navigation clearance is not unlimited. The controlling feature at this location is the overhead electrical wires used to deliver power to Amtrak's trains. Although the span over the Bush River navigation channel moves to allow for the passage of navigation traffic, the position of the electrical wires does not change during these span movements, defining the vertical navigation clearance of approximately 30 feet above Mean High Water.

5. **Comment: Several commenters raised questions about property and land impacts, including:**

   - **Potential land acquisition and displacement near the Bush River Bridge, proximity to existing homes, and new transmission infrastructure**
   - **Alignment near Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG)**

   Response: Amtrak is currently in the early stages of the Preliminary Engineering & NEPA phase of the Bush River Bridge and Gunpowder River Bridge projects. As Amtrak develops alternatives, it will consider and evaluate potential temporary and permanent impacts to properties, including homes, Aberdeen Proving Ground, and new transmission infrastructure. Amtrak will notify property owners of any potential impacts early in the process, including temporary construction impacts.

6. **Comment: Several commenters asked for construction details, including:**

   - **Demo plans and pillar depths for the existing bridges**
   - **Whether new spans will be precast or poured in place**
   - **The expected horizontal clearance and alignment of intermediate (non-main) spans**

   Response: Amtrak is currently in the early stages of the Preliminary Engineering & NEPA phase, which is expected to continue through 2028. During this phase, Amtrak will evaluate a range of alternatives, including bridge layouts and their impact on the local community and adjacent properties. Because Amtrak is early in

the design process, construction information such as phasing, methods, train service plans, durations, or disruptions is currently unknown. Amtrak will keep the public informed on construction impacts early and often as the projects reach that stage.

7. **Comment: One commenter mentioned that they were initially told the bridge had to be higher to accommodate high speed rail. They added that there is a curve and loss of elevation on the Joppatowne side of the Gunpowder River Bridge. They asked if there is a usage count survey for traffic of both bridges since they felt it was evident that Gunpowder usage is much higher.**

   Response: While train speed is an important factor, the design and heights of the Bush River and Gunpowder River bridges are still under development. These decisions will be informed by a variety of sources, including Amtrak's design requirements and the U.S. Coast Guard's Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination. Boat traffic counts were not collected.

8. **Comment: One commenter, citing standing under the Rivers and Harbors Act and U.S. Coast Guard Bridge Permit Regulations, asked how Amtrak plans to address bridge height and environmental impact, and requested that clearance be increased to 30 feet.**

   Response: Amtrak is following the USCG Bridge Permitting process, which requires evaluation of the reasonable needs of navigation when establishing bridge clearances. As part of project Planning Phase in 2025, Amtrak completed a Navigation Impact Report (NIR) in accordance with the Bridge Permitting Application Guide.

   The study evaluated waterway characteristics, federal navigation projects, existing bridge conditions, and waterway usage. Information on vessel sizes (heights and widths), transit frequency, and navigational constraints was collected through surveys distributed to a broad group of waterway users, businesses, and residents near both bridges.

   For both bridges, the proposed vertical clearances were developed based on findings of the NIR and were intended to meet the reasonable needs of navigation.

   The USCG will independently review this information in addition to the public comments received during the 2026 USCG Preliminary Public Notice and make a Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination as part of the bridge permitting process. As a general practice, the USCG seeks to maintain existing navigation

clearances unless there is a demonstrated need to modify them to address navigational constraints or hazards.

Both bridge projects will be subject to Federal Railroad Administration requirements for environmental review in accordance with NEPA. Public Engagement will be a critical part of the NEPA process providing opportunities for residents, property owners, and the general public to provide feedback.

9. **Comment: One commenter asked about what happens to the old/existing bridges and which side the new bridges will be.**

   Response: Amtrak's primary goal is to ensure continued connectivity along the Northeast Corridor. The current expectation includes building new bridge structures, however, the feasibility of retaining the existing structure will be evaluated as part of the NEPA process. The determination of which side the new bridges will be built will be evaluated as part of the Preliminary Engineering & NEPA process.

10. **Comment: One commenter asked about the plans for re-routing MARC service during construction, including whether an earlier plan to double-track the rail 1–2 miles north during construction is still in place. They also mentioned that the tight corners at Baltimore Penn Station was the bigger bottleneck for the northeast corridor and would that be a higher priority for Amtrak pushing this project further down the road.**

    Response: Amtrak is currently in the early stages of the Preliminary Engineering & NEPA phase, which is expected to continue through 2028. Construction information such as phasing, methods, train service plans, durations, or disruptions is currently unknown. Amtrak will keep the public informed on construction impacts early and often when it reaches this stage in the project.

    Amtrak is working to address the greatest bottleneck on the Northeast Corridor between Washington, D.C., and New Jersey through the B&P Tunnel Replacement Program. The B&P Tunnel is the oldest Amtrak tunnel, and its deteriorating structure and tight curvature requires trains to reduce speeds, which can lead to chronic delays. The replacement program will result in a new 2-mile tunnel that will serve electrified passenger trains and support travel speeds up to 100 miles per hour. This effort, combined with multiple bridge replacement projects, is part of Amtrak's new era of rail, where aging infrastructure is updated or replaced to improve the reliability and capacity of American rail passenger service.

11. **Comment: One commenter asked where the MARC train platform is located between the two rivers, and whether that is why the Gunpowder River Bridge is planned to be lower than the Bush River Bridge.**

    Response: The MARC Edgewood Station is located approximately midway between the two bridges and falls within the Bush River Bridge project limits. The designs and heights of the Bush River Bridge and Gunpowder River Bridge projects are still in progress and will be informed by a variety of sources, including the Navigation Impact Report, public comments, and the Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination. The determinations of the bridge navigation clearances are independent of and have no connection to the MARC station platforms.

D. Comments Pertaining to Engagement

1. **Comment: Several commenters asked about long-term planning for the projects. One commenter inquired about a "Master Plan" for the river corridor and setting bridge heights based on regional needs.**

    Response: During the Project Planning phase in 2025, Amtrak completed a Navigation Impact Report (NIR) for each waterway following guidelines outlined in the USCG Bridge Permit Application Guide (BPAG). In line with BPAG guidelines, Amtrak researched local, state, regional, and private water-dependent use and development plans that could inform the river's future use. Amtrak also engaged elected officials, stakeholders, and the public to gather information on future waterway needs. Ultimately, no formally documented studies, master plans, or regional waterway use strategies were available during Amtrak's data collection and evaluation phase.

2. **Comment: One commenter asked when Amtrak will share its Coast Guard submissions and the Coast Guard's response, including the survey and evidence of submission, given that the bridges are 100-year assets. The commenter also asked what prospective impact assessment and alternatives analysis Amtrak has planned, and what prior stakeholder engagement has occurred.**

    Response: Both bridge projects will be subject to Federal Railroad Administration requirements for environmental review in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

    The Navigation Impact Reports, which were submitted to the USCG and include information related to the waterway user surveys, will be included as an appendix to

the NEPA documents. This is the established process for these types of rail bridge projects, as it allows the public to review the project, its potential benefits, and the impacts in a broader context. The NEPA environmental document and appendices for each project, once prepared, will be circulated broadly for public and stakeholder comment. You can learn more about FRA's process here: https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/environment/fra-environmental-documentation

Stakeholder engagement is a critical component of each of the four project phases—Planning, Preliminary Engineering & NEPA, Final Design & Permitting, and Construction—and began in 2025 during the Planning Phase with the distribution of the waterway user surveys. Amtrak will continue to keep the public involved as the projects progress.

3. **Comment: A few commenters asked how to contact the U.S. Coast Guard directly and how the community could arrange a meeting with the Coast Guard to discuss concerns about the Gunpowder River Bridge height.**

   Response: Amtrak is working closely with the USCG Bridge Administration. To contact the USCG directly, send mail to

   USCG East District
   Federal Building
   431 Crawford Street
   Portsmouth, VA 23704-5004
   571-607-8298

4. **Comment: One commenter asked for Amtrak's definition of "reasonable" as it applies to navigation needs.**

   Response: As a passenger rail company, Amtrak does not have a definition of reasonable navigation related to waterways. Likewise, the USCG does not define the "reasonable needs of navigation" through a single rigid formula. Rather, it is a legal and regulatory standard the USCG applies when evaluating bridges and other structures that may affect navigable waterways.

   For more information on the USCG and their bridge program, visit: https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Office-of-Bridge-Programs/.

5. **Comment: One commenter asked whether the Susquehanna River Bridge was NHPA eligible.**

   Response*:* The Susquehanna River Bridge structure was identified as eligible for placement on the National Historic Register and is subject to the consultation requirements of Section 106 under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). For questions on the Susquehanna River Bridge project, email SRBProject@amtrak.com.

E. Comments Pertaining to Economic Impact & Quality of Life

1. **Comment: One commenter asked whether there are more taxpayers along the Bush River, and if not, why more money is being spent there, and whether Amtrak has considered impacts to businesses, marinas, marine construction operations, and the state park on the Gunpowder River.**

   Response: The current Preliminary Engineering & NEPA phases of both bridge projects are funded through the Federal State Partnership Intercity Passenger Rail Program. Under this federal grant program, Amtrak and the State of Maryland are providing additional matching funds. Additional funding will need to be identified to advance the projects to Final Design & Permitting and Construction. The cost of the bridge is based on the estimated construction costs of the bridge. Costs are based on many factors including complexity, height, environmental conditions, topography, and width. The Bush River and Gunpowder River bridges are not identical and therefore will have different costs.

   NEPA will consider socioeconomic impacts resulting from the bridge. There is no specific cost-benefit analysis required in NEPA, but those socioeconomic impacts are covered.

   Stakeholder engagement is a critical component of each of the four project phases—Planning, Preliminary Engineering & NEPA, Final Design & Permitting, and Construction—and began in 2025 during the Planning Phase with the distribution of surveys to waterway users, businesses, and residents near both bridges. Amtrak will continue to keep the public involved as the projects progress.

2. **Comment: One commenter noted that economic impact studies typically focus on preventing negative impacts, such as job losses, and asked which organizations or agencies are studying possible positive impacts**.

   Response: NEPA environmental review typically includes evaluation of positive and negative environmental socioeconomic impacts.

3. **Comment: One commenter was curious about Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) funding and if it includes Marylander's tax money.**

   Response: Amtrak is currently in the early stages of the Preliminary Engineering & NEPA phase, which is expected to continue through 2028. This phase is being funded through the Federal State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program. Under this federal grant program, Amtrak and the State of Maryland are providing additional matching funds. Funding has not yet been established for future phases of the bridge projects.

4. **Comment: One commenter asked about the impact of the noise during construction and after construction with increased traffic.**

   Response: During this current phase of Preliminary Engineering & NEPA, Amtrak will evaluate a range of alternatives, including bridge placements and their associated impacts on the local community and adjacent properties. Amtrak will study potential noise, vibration and visual impacts, and mitigations. Although the placement of the bridges has not yet been selected, we will continue to inform the public about potential impacts and obtain community feedback on designs.

F. Conclusion

Amtrak appreciates the continued participation of the Gunpowder River and Bush River waterway community and other stakeholders. For the latest project information, including the August 18, 2026, presentation to the GBWAG, please visit AmtrakNewEra.com/Bush or AmtrakNewEra.com/Gunpowder. If you have any additional questions, please contact the Project Team at BGRBProject@Amtrak.com.