Frequently Asked Questions

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER RAIL BRIDGE PROJECT

As of April 2025

Q1: *What is the Amtrak Susquehanna River Bridge Project?*

A: As the longest moveable bridge on the Northeast Corridor, the Susquehanna River Bridge, built in 1906, is a critical link and will be replaced with new structures to maintain future rail services across the Susquehanna River. The Susquehanna River Bridge Project will improve rail connectivity along the Northeast Corridor by replacing the existing two-track bridge with two new two-track fixed bridges over the Susquehanna River between the City of Havre de Grace in Harford County, Maryland and the Town of Perryville in Cecil County, Maryland. The project will also replace the accompanying piers and abutments, along with redesigned approaches and interlockings, track realignment, modernized signals and power, and installation of new embankments and retaining walls. The Project will provide future improvements to capacity, trip time and safety for commuter, freight and intercity passenger rail services on the NEC consistent with State and Amtrak plans. The project will also improve the navigation channel for marine users.

Q2: *Is the existing Susquehanna River Bridge safe?*

A: Yes, Amtrak regularly performs bridge inspections in accordance with federal laws and regulations. In addition, Amtrak performs maintenance to the existing bridge structure to ensure that it continues to be safe and operational for train service. Although safe, the structural condition, coupled with the movable-span design, requires extensive effort to open the bridge for marine traffic that impacts operations and reliability.

Q3: *Who uses the bridge?*

A: Bridge users include Amtrak, MARC commuter rail, and Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) to carry passenger and freight trains across the Susquehanna River.

Q4: *What will the new bridges look like?*

A: The new bridges will be located adjacent to the alignment of the existing Susquehanna River Bridge. There will be two new bridges; one that will replace the existing bridge and a second bridge located directly upstream. The existing bridge will be demolished. Both new bridges will carry two tracks and consist of a network tied arch span and steel plate girder approach spans. The design of the new bridges is being coordinated to be compatible with and conforms to the requirements established by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in addition to guidance contained in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and in consultation with the Maryland State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), the City of Havre de Grace, and the Town of Perryville. A robust public outreach program was implemented during the four-year planning phase to ensure the public could provide input on the design of the new bridges.

Q5: *What stage is the project in?*

A: Conceptual engineering and planning efforts began in 2013. Since then, the project team has completed the environmental review and preliminary design. Early construction and final design is currently underway. The project is fully funded thanks to a grant from FRA's Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program, along with contributions from Amtrak and the State of Maryland. Major construction is expected to begin in the upcoming year.

Q6: *When will construction start? How long will it take?*

A: Amtrak completed the first important early construction activity for this project in late 2024. This involved demolition and removal of 10 leftover piers, which remained from a nearby 1866 railroad bridge that had its superstructure removed several decades ago. This work was completed on schedule, with zero safety incidents or lost time. Additional early work is currently underway, including environmental and geotechnical testing on land and in the river, subsurface utility investigations and more. Major construction work for the first new bridge is expected to begin in the upcoming year.

Q7: *Did Amtrak consider improving the existing bridge or building a new bridge on the existing bridge piers?*

A: Yes. FRA, MDOT, and Amtrak conducted a rigorous alternatives development and screening process and sought early input from the public and a wide array of project stakeholders. Rehabilitating the existing bridge, building a new bridge on the existing bridge piers, and building a new bridge and new piers on the existing bridge alignment were all thoroughly studied. Building a new bridge (on the existing piers or new piers) on the existing bridge alignment without first providing a new crossing would prohibit the continued movement of freight and passenger trains along the Northeast Corridor during construction. The Northeast Corridor is the most heavily used passenger rail line in North America, one of the most heavily traveled rail corridors in the world, and an economic engine for the United States. This segment of the Northeast Corridor is a critical link for Amtrak intercity trains, MARC commuter rail, and Norfolk Southern freight trains. Any alternatives requiring extensive disruption to passenger and freight rail operations were therefore determined to be fatally flawed. Rehabilitating the existing bridge was determined to be not suitable for continued passenger and freight rail, due to the current condition and age of the bridge and the infeasibility of reconstructing the bridge to a state-of-good repair without extraordinary disruptions to rail service and prohibitive costs. More information on the alternatives development and screening process can be found in the 2017 Environmental Assessment (EA).

Q8: *Were other bridge alternatives considered?*

A: Yes. During the conceptual engineering phase, FRA, MDOT, and Amtrak conducted a rigorous alternatives development and screening process. The project team identified a list of conceptual alternatives based on engineering design factors such as railroad geometry, design speed, navigational clearances, grades/inclines, span layouts and other planned projects. In 2013, a robust public and agency outreach program was implemented to seek early input from a wide array of project stakeholders on the project alternatives. This was performed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which provides a role for the public in the planning and decision-making process. Various stakeholders and members of the public suggested additional project alternatives, which were added to the list of conceptual alternatives. Amtrak then retained an independent engineering firm to identify any other feasible alternatives. The alternatives varied in the number of new bridges, vertical and horizontal alignments, number of tracks, bridge types (fixed vs. moveable), and more. Rehabilitating and/or repurposing the existing bridge was also studied. A total of 25 alternatives were identified and thoroughly evaluated. The full list of alternatives can be found in the 2017 EA, Chapter 2, Table 2-1. More information about the alternatives studied can be found in the EA, see Environmental Studies at the following site: amtraknewera.com/SRB/ under "Resources".

Q9: *How did the team decide to build two new two-track fixed bridges?*

A: A two-step screening process (fatal flaw and detailed screening) was used to evaluate a total of 25 alternatives. The first step screened for fatal flaws and to ensure the project's purpose of providing continued rail connectivity along the Northeast Corridor would be met. Rail connectivity, navigational requirements, alternative feasibility and constructability, and critical property impacts were considered. The alternatives that passed the fatal flaw screening were then compared and contrasted based on the goals of optimizing existing and planned infrastructure; meeting operational, design, and construction requirements; and minimizing environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, and property impacts. A NEPA Environmental Assessment was prepared to evaluate the potential benefits and impacts of each of the retained alternatives and shared with the public and agencies for review and input. Various bridge design types were then presented to the public and agencies (e.g., girder approach, deck-truss approach, delta-frame approach, arch main span, through-truss main span).

These detailed studies and extensive stakeholder outreach efforts culminated with FRA's issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the selected alternative in 2017. This milestone marked the end of the alternatives evaluation and environmental review phase, and the beginning of the advanced engineering and permitting phase.

Q10: *Will the new bridges include a bicycle-pedestrian path?*

A: No. The feasibility of including a bicycle-pedestrian path on a new rail bridge was carefully considered during the environmental review phase. Between 2013 and 2017, early in the NEPA process for the Proposed Project, the Project Team received several requests to include a bicycle-pedestrian path on a new rail bridge in order to provide a more convenient crossing over the Susquehanna River. The Project Team worked closely with many of the interested parties, including trail advocacy groups, elected officials, planning agencies, and members of the public, to evaluate the level of interest and feasibility of a bicycle-pedestrian path. FRA, MDOT, and Amtrak assessed the feasibility of coordinating the project with potential bicycle and pedestrian access across the river and hosted several stakeholder meetings on the topic. To best address safety and security concerns and maintenance requirements, it was determined that a separate structure owned by a separate entity would be needed. The new Susquehanna River Bridges do not include a bicycle-pedestrian path; however, they have been designed so as not to preclude the future addition of a multi-use path on a separate structure.

Q11: *How will Amtrak mitigate environmental and cultural impacts from the construction of the new bridges and the demolition of the existing bridge?*

A: The 2017 EA analyzed potential environmental impacts due to the project and solicited input from agencies and the public on potential minimization and mitigation measures. FRA's issued of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in 2017 included various environmental commitments Amtrak must adhere to. Amtrak is working closely with state and federal natural resource agencies to obtain necessary environmental permits and coordinate potential environmental mitigation measures. More information about environmental commitments can be found in the FONSI. Studies of the cultural resources located within the Susquehanna River Bridge Project area have been ongoing since 2014 to ensure all significant buildings, objects, structures, districts, and archaeological sites are considered during bridge design and construction. The EA included a detailed assessment of the Project's potential impacts to cultural resources. The FONSI included several commitments to minimize and mitigate these impacts. A Programmatic Agreement (PA) was executed between FRA, SHPO, and Amtrak to describe these commitments in detail. More information can be found in the Programmatic Agreement.

Q12: *How will the history of the existing bridge be respected and honored?*

A: As part of the PA commitments established during the EA phase, the Project team is currently conducting Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation of three resources in the corridor: the Perryville Railroad Tower, the existing Susquehanna River Bridge, and a series of bridges and overpasses located in the City of Havre de Grace. The HABS/HAER process requires thorough recordation of these resources including research, field documentation, large format photographs, and the production of a series of documents. This extensive documentation will be placed in the U.S. Department of the Interior's permanent archives. Through this process, the Project team is coordinating with the relevant cultural resource agencies, including the Maryland Historical Trust, to ensure the history and prehistory of the Project area is studied and preserved throughout the bridge replacement process. In addition to this documentation, elements of the bridge superstructure may be salvaged as part of the project. The Salvage Plan, outlined in the PA, aims to recover materials such as deck truss parts, swing span pier tops, granite layers, motor and drive assemblies, control houses, and dedication plaques. The plan involves an initial assessment, identification of salvageable materials, and integration into project plans while adhering to regulations governing storage, transportation, cataloging, and distribution. The public will also be engaged through the creation of numerous interpretive elements sharing data on the use of this area by Native Americans and historic populations. This may include interpretive signage, plaques, public talks, and digital elements available online such as webpages and multimedia presentations. More information can be found in the Programmatic Agreement.

Q13: *Will construction impact my property?*

A: Any property owners directly impacted by the project have been or will be notified directly by Amtrak.

Q14: *How will the new bridges impact boating in the Susquehanna River?*

A: The project will improve navigation along the Susquehanna River. The design of the new bridges will provide 60 feet of fixed vertical clearance and 235 feet of horizontal clearance and remove the old remnant piers which present navigation challenges.

Q15: *How will construction impact boating in the Susquehanna River?*

A: All impacts to waterway navigation will be closely coordinated with the United States Coast Guard (USCG). Local notices to mariners will be issued by the USCG and can be found here https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Featured-Content/Mariners/Local-Notice-to-Mariners-LNMs/.

Q16: *Will streets be closed during construction?*

A: Potential traffic detours will be coordinated closely with MDOT, Harford County, Cecil County, City of Havre de Grace, and the Town of Perryville. State, county and local authorities will be notified of any traffic detours planned prior to street closures. Clear signage will be posted to communicate traffic detours to vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

Q17: *How can members of the public stay informed of project updates?*

A: Members of the public can learn more about the project by visiting the project website at amtraknewera.com/SRB/. Sign up for the mailing list to receive project updates by filling out the Amtrak Susquehanna River Bridge Mailing List Form.

Technical Terms

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law requiring agencies that receive federal funding to consider the impact the proposed project could have on environmental, cultural, and social resources.

Environmental Assessment (EA)

An Environmental Assessment (EA) is a type of environmental review prepared in accordance with NEPA for proposed projects to analyze the potential for the project to have environmental impacts. The EA process includes defining the project's purpose and need, coordinating with agencies to identify key resources in the project area, developing project alternatives, evaluating the potential environmental effects of project alternatives, and documenting the environmental analysis. The EA is made available to the public and agencies for review and comment.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

If environmental analysis and interagency review during the EA process finds the proposed project to have no significant impacts on the quality of the environment, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared to document this decision. The FONSI completes the NEPA process.

Programmatic Agreement (PA)

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is a process that requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of a project on properties that are included in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A Programmatic Agreement (PA) is used to satisfy Section 106 requirements by committing to coordinate with relevant stakeholders and describing the measures the lead agency will implement to resolve potential effects on historic properties through avoidance, minimization, or mitigation.