

# HIGHWAY 104 AT ANTIGONISH COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE

## MEETING NOTES APRIL 21, 2010

Attendees: Ken Donnelly  
Dwayne Cross  
Ian McCallum  
Sean Vane  
Brian Segal  
Alisha Grant  
Heather Mayhew  
Glen Robertson  
Hugh MacDougal  
Bill MacFarlane  
Mary McCarron  
Trudy Spooner  
Anne-Marie MacKenzie

### WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND REVIEW

Ken Donnelly welcomed the CLC to the meeting. At the last meeting, the environmental impacts of a 241m span and a 140m span were compared. Members of the CLC were asked to review the information and submit any questions or comments. The purpose of this meeting is to gather the CLC comments and inputs on the proposed 140m span.

### CLC COMMENTS

Below is a summary of the discussion which occurred surrounding the comments submitted by CLC members.

1. *Will noise levels increase, decrease, or remain similar?*

Noise will be similar to current levels. Noise is minimal on bridges because of the quieter asphalt. Furthermore, there are no expansion joints on this bridge.

2. *Will view planes increase, decrease, or remain similar? Will the current design be more “appealing to the eye” and the causeways less “appealing to the eye”?*

The bridge will be the same elevation as the land so it should not impact view planes, approximately 12 - 13m high. There will be a guard rail which may be visible.

There is no current plan to change the profile of the bridge. Currently the job is balanced between what is being cut with what is being filled. At this location there are vertical control issues because there are two fixed features at either side of the structure, so it is not possible to go any lower.

The tunnel that will be built on one side of the bridge will be lower than the elevation of the terrain.

*During this discussion, one participant noted that the tunnel must be big enough to accommodate farm equipment.*

The tunnel will be built to accommodate all legal vehicles. NSTIR has spoken with the farmer who will be most impacted and determined what size of vehicle he requires accommodated.

*During this discussion another participant inquired about if drainage would be a problem because the elevation will be the same.*

Drainage will not be a problem. The water will be funneled off the east side of the bridge. Erosion will be controlled through regular maintenance, though some design elements can be included to minimize erosion.

After the first flush in winter, when there is a lot of salt washing off the bridge there will be a retention system which collects the water and releases it slowly. With this system a large deposit of salty water is avoided and the environmental impacts are minimized.

3. *What affect will the design have on the dairy farm located at Willowdale lane?*

The farmer's house will not be lower than the bridge. NSTIR will get a cross section for the home, but it should not be overly affected. There will be some exposure but noise will be low and NSTIR is working to mitigate any noise.

4. *The Antigonish Harbour Watershed Association (AHWA) issued a statement regretting that NSTIR is considering any new project which increases environmental impacts from this project. Furthermore, they state that fiscal responsibility should not be the only consideration; protecting and conserving sensitive environments such as wetlands must take priority.*

*Did the government run out of money for the project and if so, why?*

Cost sharing with the federal government is done years in advance, before detailed planning has taken place. Once the federal government commits money, they do not increase the amount even if the details of the project cause an increase in cost. Furthermore, it is not possible to "fluff" up the initial proposals in order to account for future cost increases.

*During the discussion one participant noted that other cost cutting measures had not been examined, that the focus was entirely on the bridge. While the bridge has the most potential for cost savings, it also had the highest environmental impact. The bridge should be the "gold standard" for the project. If the bridge can be altered, what else is going to change?*

The government does not believe that they are sacrificing the environmental health. It would be far less expensive to build a shorter span, which would have more extreme environmental impacts but they are trying to balance cost and environmental impacts. Additionally, through collaboration with DFO, DNR and NSE there are plans to transplant or re-seed the protected species in the area.

5. *The AHWA strongly recommend that another Environmental Assessment (EA) be conducted now that the bridge plans are being altered. They would also like an opportunity for additional public consultation.*

A federal EA will definitely be triggered due to the alteration of fish habitat. As for a provincial EA, there is uncertainty if another EA will be conducted because only one element of the project, the bridge, has changed. If a provincial EA is conducted there is uncertainty as to whether or not a public hearing will be included. Public hearings are only required under Class II EAs, therefore, it would need to be determined if the bridge alterations constituted a Class I or a Class II EA. However, it is up to the Minister of Environment to determine if public hearings will be held. The decision making authority to have public hearings is outside the scope of the CLC. If hearings are not held, or if they deem fit, the CLC could hold public consultation on their own and report the comments back to the department.

6. *How does the \$5 million saved impact other parts of this project? Other provincial projects?*

The work which will be done to on the bridge to save the \$5 million will not affect the overall timeline of the project. Other portions of the highway construction can continue while the bridge issues are being resolved. However, the \$5 million may be able to be put to use in other areas of the provincial budget.

*Some members of the CLC felt that they should only be concerned with how the savings will impact Antigonish, while others felt that it was important they take a broad view of the entire province and how the money saved can have impacts elsewhere.*

7. *The Fresh Air Society and the THC would like clarity on how the wetland compensation will work, including information on timelines, the steps to be taken, who will be involved and clarification on the acronyms used. It can be very confusing. It would also be valuable to have a facilitator explain the EA process to the group.*

### Concerned Raised

The members of the CLC raised many concerns in the discussion. Some of the key points raised by individual members include:

- The environment is being sacrificed to save money;
- It's important to look at the whole picture of funding in the province. Protecting the environment is important but we should try to save money if we can;
- If the 140m bridge is approved, a new EA should be conducted;
- Public consultation should be done if there is a new EA.