

Bonner Bridge Replacement

Long Bridge is the Safest Choice



NC-12 is not a Reliable Evacuation Route

The aging Bonner Bridge connecting Bodie and Hatteras islands in the Outer banks needs to be replaced. The road it connects to, NC-12, which runs through Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), is also unsafe and unreliable. Built on a rapidly eroding shoreline, the road needs continuous upkeep to battle erosion and overwash from storms. This often leaves residents and tourists with no or limited access via NC-12, posing a real threat to their safety in the event of a hurricane evacuation. The best way to address the concerns of the failing Bonner Bridge and the unreliable NC-12 is to create a new route that would bypass these problems. The long bridge alternative would avoid having to close down NC-12 to clear sand by building a long bridge over Pamlico Sound, bypassing the refuge and creating a reliable evacuation route.

Safety Study Confirms Long Bridge to be Best Alternative

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) sponsored a study on the safety of long bridges and issues related to traffic operations, incident response, the impact of weather in safety and crashes. In all categories, the long bridge alternative was found to be a very safe choice.

- Traffic operations: With two eight-foot shoulders and two twelve-foot travel lanes, there is plenty of room for cars in trouble to pull off the road and not impact the flow of traffic.
- Crashes: Comparing crash data with other North Carolina roads and bridges and with the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (CBBT), the data shows that long bridges greatly outperform the state average for two-lane roads and that long bridges are just as safe as NC-12 through the refuge.
- Incident response: The additional length of the bridge will cause a two-minute delay for emergency vehicles compared with traveling on NC-12. However, if NC-12 is closed or has limited traffic flow due to frequently needed maintenance, response times could be even longer. With the width of the bridge, there is room for emergency vehicles to turn around as well as room for a helicopter to land.
- Weather impacts: Dare County plans call for complete evacuation before winds reach gale force. Based on average wind gust data, the bridge would only be closed to passenger vehicles for an estimated 20 minutes per year, using the standards developed for the CBBT.

Road	Crash Rate*
NC two-lane state average	171-184
NC-12 south of the Pea Island NWR	206
NC-12 within Pea Island NWR	40
CBBT	49
Existing NC long bridges	25-55

*based on 100 million vehicle-miles

Lessons from Louisiana

Louisiana's Lake Ponchartrain Causeway in New Orleans is the longest bridge in the world at 24 miles. While other roads were damaged or washed out in Hurricane Katrina, the bridge remained and was used as a major evacuation route. In addition, Highway LA-1, a major transportation corridor for the nation's petrochemical industry, is currently being elevated onto a 17-mile bridge. Clearly, hurricane safety officials believe a long bridge can be safe and reliable in areas that experience hurricanes.

For More Information Contact:

Noah Matson, Defenders of Wildlife, nmatson@defenders.org (202) 682-9400

Derb Carter, Southern Environmental Law Center, derbc@selcnc.org (919) 967-1450

