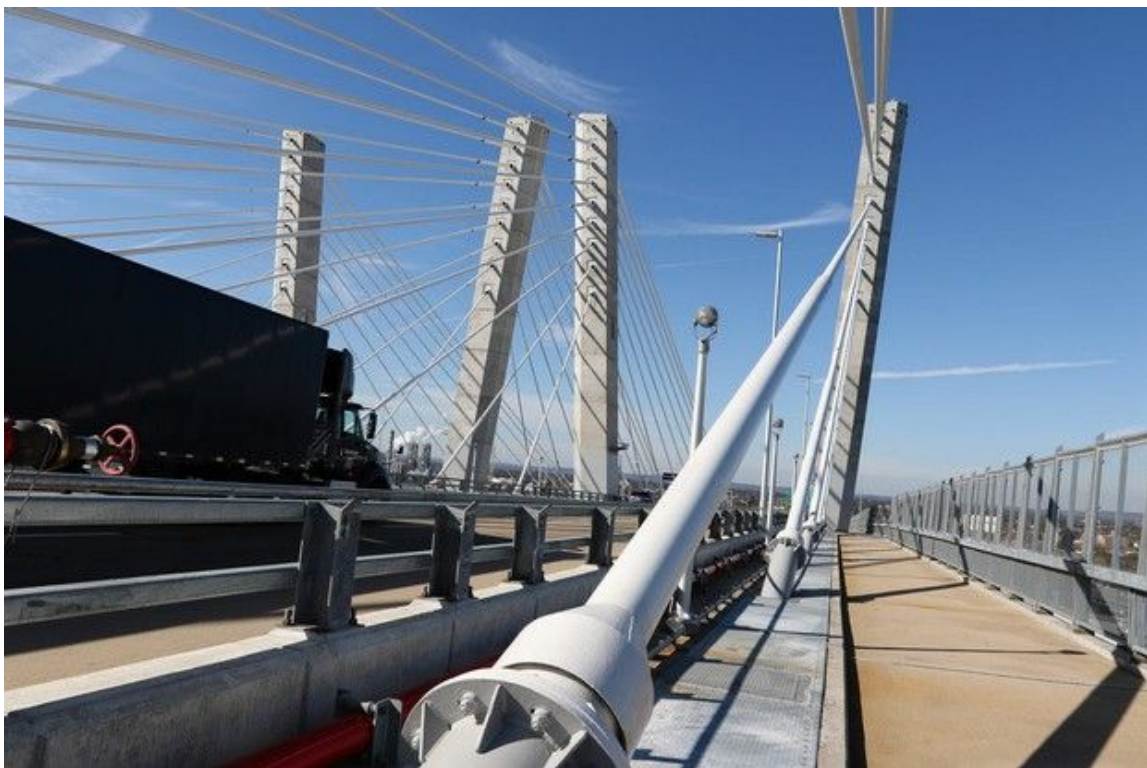


The new Goethals Bridge will let commuters walk - or bike - to Staten Island

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Alexandra Pais | for NJ Advance Media

By Steve Strunsky | for NJ Advance Media

In addition to its modern, cable-stayed design, wider (and increased) traffic lanes, and shoulders along the inside and outside of the roadway, the new Goethals Bridge has something the old span never did: a bicycle and pedestrian walkway that will let people travel between Elizabeth and Staten Island without a car or truck, taking in the spectacular view as they go.

The walkway, which is 10 feet wide and protected from traffic, is set to open in the coming months, possibly January, said Jim Blackmore, director of the Goethals Bridge Modernization Program for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which built the \$1.5 billion twin span in a public-private partnership with a consortium of investors known as New Jersey Link.



Panoramic views

With panoramic vistas that include the Manhattan skyline, the Bayonne Bridge arch, and other iconic images around the New York Harbor region, Blackmore said the walkway is likely to be used as much for sightseeing and recreation as a transportation option between New Jersey and New York City's remotest borough.

Blackmore said there were no projections for how many people would use the walkway. The point was to give people the option.

"The purpose was to accommodate pedestrians and, or, bicyclists," Blackmore said. "It wasn't a requirement. The option is there for folks. Personally, I think it'll be more of a sightseeing tool. It's nice to know that you can ride to Staten Island if you want to."

'If you build it, they will come.'

Advocates for pedestrians and cyclists applaud the agency's inclusion of the walkway in the bridge planning, and say its use will grow as more people become aware of it. "I think many people will use it," said Cyndi Steiner, executive director of the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition. "It's an important connection that we will have now, because the old Goethals bridge didn't have anything."

“We’ve had riders ask us about it,” Steiner said of the Goethals walkway. “You know the adage that we use, 'If you build it, they will come.' That’s going to happen here. It’s a new destination also. There’s tremendous views from that bridge.”



The distinctive V-shaped pylons and diagonal cables of the bridge are seen here from a residential neighborhood on Staten Island.

Jan Somma-Hammel | Staten Island Advance

Linking the walkway to local networks

Local officials are planning to incorporate the Goethals walkway into their pedestrian and cycling networks.

In Elizabeth, the city is applying for a Department of Environmental Protection grant to link the Goethals walkway to its River Trail System, which runs along the Elizabeth River between the Arthur Kill and downtown, said Kelly Martins, a spokeswoman for Mayor Chris Bollwage.

"We also have the Bike, Hike and Roll Throughway along the Arthur Kill on the Elizabeth Waterfront," Martins wrote in an email. "Connecting the Goethals Bridge to that amenity is a future goal."



Jose Acosta of Elizabeth ponders the new Goethals Bridge from a park in Elizabeth that stretches along the Arthur Kill.

'It's a good idea'

Elizabeth resident Jose Acosta was enjoying a sunny lunch hour recently on the flag plaza at the city's Veterans Memorial Park along the Arthur Kill, about a half mile north of the bridge.

Acosta, 35, squinted up at the sleek new span, with its white, diagonal cables in sharp contrast to the the blocky and aging Arthur Kill Vertical Lift Bridge that stood in the foreground.

"Muy bonito," Acosta said in Spanish, or "Very pretty."

Could he imagine walking over the bridge, even just for the view?

"Claro que si, es una buena idea," he said. "Of course, it's a good idea."



David Llanes of Manville tightens bolts at the base of the handrail that lines the Goethals Bridge's shared-use walkway for pedestrians and cyclists.

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Designed for aesthetics and safety

Blackmore said the walkway complies with federal design standards, including the smooth, uninterrupted handrail on the north side, facing Manhattan, which, at 42 inches tall, is handy for most bike riders to grip while still in the saddle.

Just behind the railing is a steel cable fence that officials say was designed to enhance both safety and aesthetics.

The fence is made from quarter-inch cables stretched vertically inside door-sized metal frames, or panels, spaced several inches apart and without horizontal cross pieces. This vertical-only design provides cleaner views to sightseers, while depriving footholds to prevent people from climbing over the fence.

The surface of the walkway is made from concrete nubby with tiny stones, intended to maximize traction, the same as the surface as the bridge roadway, though without the grooves cut to channel rainwater from under car tires.



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Tough to put a price on

Blackmore said it was difficult to put a price tag on the walkway because it was incorporated into the span's design from the earliest stages of the project, which began construction in May 2014, but had involved years of planning, engineering, environmental studies and permitting even before construction began.

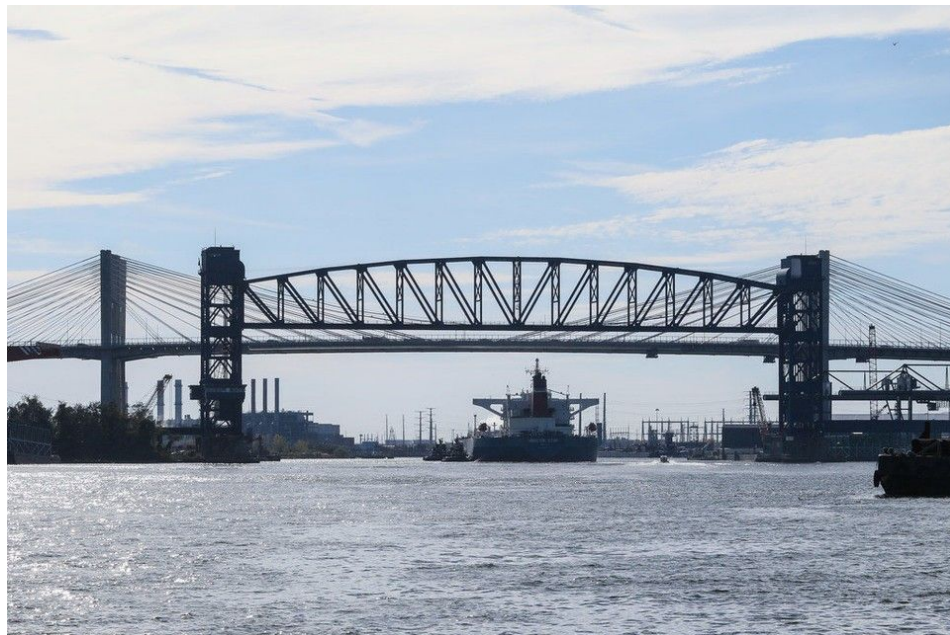
"The construction is the tip of the iceberg," said Blackmore.

Out with the old

The walkway is just one of the improvements that the new Goethals Bridge offers over the old span, a cantilever truss bridge built in 1928 at a cost of \$7.2 million, and named for the Port Authority's first consulting engineer, Major General George Washington Goethals, best known for supervising construction of the Panama Canal.

The new Goethals provides three, 12-foot lanes in both directions, with shoulders along the inner and outer lanes, with traffic in just one direction on each span. The old, single span bridge included two 10-foot lanes each way, with no shoulders and nowhere to walk or ride, for pleasure or in an emergency.

Removal of the old span began in January, and all that remained last week were the small bridge support islands in the Arthur Kill, now being removed by a crew with a backhoe and a barge.



A view of the Arthur Kill Vertical Lift Bridge from the north, with the Goethals Bridge behind it. The Arthur Kill bridge, built in 1959 for rail cargo, is the longest lift bridge in the world, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, with a truss span 558 feet long.

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'If you like to walk, it's beautiful'

But even for the unadventurous, the new Goethals walkway sounds inviting, at least in theory.

Tony Gones, a 56-year-old Elizabethan, was sitting in the flag plaza at Veteran's Memorial Park, when he was asked whether he might take a stroll across the bridge.

"No," said Gones. "I don't like to walk." At the nearby Bayonne Bridge, which links the southern end of Hudson County to Staten Island's North Shore, only a few miles from the Goethals Bridge, a walkway anticipated to open in mid-2019 will also be part of a new, higher roadway now being built through the bridge's iconic steel arch. The project is intended to accommodate the taller ships that travel on the Kill Van Kull to container terminals in Newark and Elizabeth.

Steiner said she can imagine adventurous cyclists using the walkways on both bridges to make a bi-state urban waterfront loop around the region: from Elizabeth over the Goethals; through Staten Island; then over the Bayonne Bridge into Bayonne; up through Jersey City and over the Hackensack River on the 1 & 9 Truck Route, which has a narrow - but passable - walkway; through Kearny and Newark; and back up to Elizabeth.

He doesn't ride a bike, either, or care much for sightseeing. But thinking of his Elizabeth neighbors, he added, "If you like the sights, and you like to walk, it's beautiful.