

PORT AUTHORITY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AUTHORIZE \$1.03 BILLION PROJECT TO REPLACE GWB SUSPENDER ROPES

Investment will result in 4,900 jobs and \$1.7 billion in economic activity for the region

The Port Authority Board of Commissioners today authorized the largest capital investment in the George Washington Bridge's 82-year history and one of the largest projects in the Port Authority's recently approved 10-year capital plan. The estimated \$1.03 billion state-of-good-repair and improvement project will replace the bridge's 592 suspender ropes, rehabilitate all of the span's main cables, replace the north and south sidewalks, and provide enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access ramps at the world's busiest vehicular crossing.

The project is the first large state-of-good-repair capital investment made since the Board approved the agency's historic 10-year Capital Plan in February. It will ensure the continued structural integrity of the bridge for decades, minimizing the need for future unplanned closures resulting from emergency repairs. It also significantly improves access and safety for pedestrian and bicyclists. Construction is expected to result in 4,900 jobs, \$365 million in wages and \$1.7 billion in economic activity for the region.

"The George Washington Bridge is a national asset and the world's busiest bridge, and the Port Authority is committed to making needed investments that ensure this vital transportation artery for the region thrives for another 100 years," said Port Authority Executive Director Pat Foye. "As part of the program, the Port Authority not only will invest in needed state-of-good-repair work, but also will make major access improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists, with an eye toward sustainability and the future."

"Maintaining our core transportation infrastructure is critical to the Port Authority's mission," said Port Authority Deputy Executive Director Deb Gramiccioni. "The Board's authorization of the George Washington Bridge suspender rope program will ensure that the iconic structure is preserved for generations to come. The bridge project will also serve as a bistate economic engine, creating nearly 5,000 jobs for the region."

As part of the project, construction crews will install state-of-the-art smart bridge technology on key elements of the span, including the new suspender ropes, to monitor their condition and warn engineers of any changes before they become a problem. The existing main cables and anchorages will be wrapped in a protective cover and dry dehumidified air will be pumped in, forcing humidity out. This will stop further deterioration of the cables and extend their useful life. The new suspender ropes also will be fitted with modern sockets with a connection point at the top of the beam. This keeps the socket cleaner and makes it easier to maintain, resulting in a longer life cycle.

Additional elements of the project include replacement of roadway lighting on the main span, new sidewalk lighting on the main span, and replacement of necklace lighting with a new energy-efficient programmable LED light system.

Construction on the suspender ropes is expected to begin in 2017. The overall program is forecasted for completion in 2024, with the project to replace all the existing suspender ropes substantially completed by the end of 2022.

Cyclists and pedestrians will see significant improvements to their travels across the span. The current pedestrian sidewalks and access points on both sides of the George Washington Bridge will be completely reconstructed and access ramps will be built to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. These new ramps will provide cyclists and pedestrians with the ability to transition smoothly from the bridge to local streets in Fort Lee, N.J. and New York City. Under the current configuration, bikers and pedestrians must traverse numerous, steep staircase sections to access the bridge's shared use paths.

With the suspension system rehabilitation work requiring up to seven years to complete, work will be staged so that suspension system work and construction of sidewalk approach access ramps will be completed during each side's sidewalk closure. That will mean that after the completion of all north side construction, the sidewalk together with improved access will be reopened for public use. The work will then proceed on the south side of the bridge.

"Transportation Alternatives commends the Port Authority for pursuing these landmark safety and accessibility retrofits to the George Washington Bridge," said Transportation Alternatives Executive Director Paul White. "These important improvements -- forged in close collaboration with community partners -- will serve the increasing number of bicyclists and pedestrians who use the bridge for both commuting and recreation. We are working with the Port Authority and people who bike and walk across the bridge to help make sure the improvements are completed as quickly as possible."

"The New Jersey Bike + Walk Coalition is extremely appreciative of the resources required to make these substantial changes to the bike path across the George Washington Bridge," said Cyndi Steiner, Executive Director, New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition. "NJBWC has been working with the Port Authority to bring about these changes and looks forward to ongoing collaboration with the Port Authority to further the Authority's overall goal of making the bridge more bike and pedestrian friendly."

During construction, off-peak traffic lane closings on the bridge will be required and will be coordinated with facility operations and other ongoing projects to minimize disruption to facility operations. Construction of this project also will be fully coordinated with all other ongoing George Washington Bridge and Tunnels, Bridges and Terminals projects.