

Nassau County Bridge Authority
(N.Y. Public Authorities Law § 651)

2014 Annual Report

The Nassau County Bridge Authority is a public benefit corporation created by the New York State Legislature in 1945 (L.1945, C. 893). The primary purposes of the original legislation were to finance by means of user tolls the construction, maintenance, and operation of a new drawbridge across Reynolds Channel between the Villages of Atlantic Beach and Lawrence and to replace an antiquated bridge that had become inadequate to accommodate the postwar surge in motor vehicle and commercial shipping traffic. Construction began on the second Atlantic Beach Bridge in October 1950, and it opened in May 1952.

The Nassau County Bridge Authority operates and maintains the Atlantic Beach Bridge. Title and interest in the bridge structure and adjacent real estate operated by the Bridge Authority are held in the name of the County of Nassau.

A secondary purpose of the Authority is to construct and maintain recreational and other facilities for the public. For example, through the joint efforts of the Nassau County Bridge Authority, the Nassau County Legislature and the New York State Legislature, legislation was passed to allow the Authority to lease Bridge property for thirty (30) years to the Atlantic Beach Fire District for the construction and operation of a marine rescue station [§ 654(16)] which was completed in 2004. This agreement is at no cost to the fire district.

The Authority also constructed and maintains a Nassau County Police Department 4th Precinct Police substation at no cost to the County Police Department. The Authority also constructed and maintains little league and soccer fields alongside the Bridge for use by various youth organizations in Atlantic Beach, Lawrence, Cedarhurst, Hewlett, Inwood and the local community.

The Authority also has leased at no cost to the Village of Atlantic Beach property for the recreational purposes of basketball and handball courts for use by the community.

Mission Statement

The primary goal of the Nassau County Bridge Authority is to efficiently operate and thoroughly maintain the Atlantic Beach Bridge for safe and secure passage for its users. In addition the Nassau County Bridge Authority provides recreational services and assists in emergency services for the benefit of the community.

Nassau County Bridge Authority Board

The Nassau County Bridge Authority Board is composed of five Board Members that hold non-salaried positions. Each board member is appointed by the Nassau County Executive with the approval of the County Legislature. Each member serves a staggered five year term.

Since January 2014, the Bridge Authority Chair is James J. Vilardi. In addition, the other Nassau County Bridge Authority Board Members are Helen Elovich, Shalom S. Maidenbaum, Russell Rosenthal, and Alan Hartstein.

Atlantic Beach Bridge Features and Utilization

The current Atlantic Beach Bridge is a 1,173 foot, six lane bridge which was constructed with a 68-foot-wide roadway, and a six-foot-wide walkway for pedestrians and cyclists. The 153 feet bascule draw span was built with a vertical clearance of 33 feet.

The bridge facility is located at the southern end of NY Route #878, a gateway to Kennedy Airport and I-95. The Atlantic Beach Bridge services the Village of Atlantic Beach and the Long Beach barrier island at its western end providing motorist and pedestrian access to the Five Towns area, Far Rockaway (Queens, NY City) and the Greater Metropolitan area. The Atlantic Beach Bridge is also designated as a coastal evacuation route for the barrier beach island.

The Atlantic Beach Bridge also provides bridge openings to commercial vessels, oil tankers, pleasure craft, and barges. Many of these vessels transport petroleum products that are used in the generation of electricity, as well as heating oil and gasoline for distribution to satisfy area consumption. Due to required water depth, commercial ships, and in particular larger oil tankers, can only navigate in the western portion of Reynolds Channel under the Atlantic Beach Bridge in route to Oil City in Oceanside and the Long Island Power Authority generation facility located in Island Park.

The strategic commercial importance of the Atlantic Beach Bridge is that it is the only bridge in the channel that can handle Atlantic Ocean shipping. In contrast, the Long Beach drawbridge, at the center of the barrier island, has little if any, commercial importance since it is situated to the east of oil city and lacks the water depth to accommodate commercial ships.

The Long Beach drawbridge opens for recreational boating only. As a result, it opens far less frequently than the Atlantic Beach Bridge. Bridge opening regulations and requirements are governed by the United States Coast Guard under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security.

The Atlantic Beach Bridge also plays a pivotal role in hurricanes and tropical storms. Not only is the bridge the westernmost of the three motor vehicle evacuation routes off the Long Beach barrier island, but it also provides a convenient safe harbor for ships in the nearby Atlantic Ocean.

For the past decade, annual bridge traffic has averaged more than 6 million motor vehicle trips. In the year 2014, there were 5,762,756 vehicles passages with an average daily traffic of 15,788 vehicles, with significantly increased traffic during the seasonal months of May through September.

In year 2014, there were 856 drawbridge openings of which 59% involved commercial vessels. This frequency of bridge openings requires ongoing oversight and intensive maintenance not required of the standard highway bridge.

The Authority's annual operating budget is financed exclusively through toll revenues. The Authority's finances are separate and distinct from Nassau County's finances and budget. No general tax revenues or other monies from the County of Nassau are used to fund the operation, maintenance or rehabilitation of any aspect of the Atlantic Beach Bridge.

The laws governing the Authority's powers and operations can be found in Section 654 of the New York Public Authorities Law. The Treasurer of the County of Nassau is the statutory agent of the Authority authorized to hold and maintain the Authority's moneys in special accounts.

Pursuant to Section 39 of the General Municipal Law, investments are secured by the Treasurer of the County of Nassau on behalf of the Authority. This statute provides that investments and deposits must be fully collateralized with securities, which are delivered to the custodial bank and held in safekeeping in the name of Treasurer of Nassau County.

Operations and Accomplishments

The Board of Commissioners of the Nassau County Bridge Authority conducts monthly public meetings with senior management to review the Authority's operations and policies. The Board of Commissioners has implemented prudent and conservative financial control management procedures, procurement policies, operational procedures, an employee assistance program, employee safety program and a heightened security monitoring program reflecting today's homeland security concerns.

The Board of Commissioners, at monthly Public meetings, also reviews operating budgets, capital budgets, security issues, safety matters and encourages public comment by the community and government entities to its operations. The members of the Authority's Board and management are proud of the significant accomplishments achieved in the past year.

The Authority's Board Members and Management have attended executive-level training

for public authority board members and senior manager on board governance and oversight responsibilities. The goal of the program is to assist public authority leaders to better understand and satisfy their legal, fiduciary, ethical and personal responsibilities in governing and operating a Public Authority.

The Authority's management team has implemented the Board's mandates of prudent, responsible financial practices and safeguards. The Board has provided oversight guidance to management and monitored executive management's performance closely to ensure operational efficiency and cost saving reductions. Management has implemented the Board's recommendations and the Board is monitoring the results and impact on the cost of daily operations.

Capital Improvement Projects

The major project that the Nassau County Bridge Authority began in 2011 is the replacement and rehabilitation of the electro-mechanical components of the bridge. As of the writing of this report, the project is complete.

Labor – Management

In recent years, the Authority has substantially reduced the workforce and payroll through attrition and automation. A new three-year collective bargaining agreement was negotiated in 2014 with Nassau County Local 882 of the Civil Service Employees' Association, resulting in a 3 year agreement, which will run from Jan 1, 2015 through Dec 31, 2017.

Atlantic Beach Bridge Regulations

Rules and Regulations governing the Atlantic Bridge Beach can be located in Title 21, Chapter 7, Part 300 of the NY State Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations, (NYCRR).

The United States Coast Guard, under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security regulates bridge span openings for the Atlantic Beach Bridge.

Assessment of the Effectiveness of Internal Controls

NCBA Management has assessed the effectiveness of the internal controls to be adequate, with ongoing evaluation to be critical.

Conclusion

The Atlantic Beach Bridge is in excellent condition. However, the Authority's work is not complete. The future goals are to continue streamlining operations with an eye toward additional cost savings and reducing long-term debt, but without sacrificing bridge maintenance and its structural integrity.