



# THE CRANEY ISLAND CONNECTION

CRANEY ISLAND EASTWARD EXPANSION NEWS AND INFORMATION

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## TRANSPORTATION UPDATE



### THE CRANEY ISLAND EASTWARD EXPANSION & REGIONAL PROJECTS

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The bridges, tunnels, and highways of Hampton Roads are the vital transportation arteries which support the movement of people and goods through the region. Over the years, infrastructure projects which aim to increase capacity and improve mobility have been at the center of debate. While citizens, politicians, business leaders, and transportation planners may disagree on the most optimal solutions to solve the region's transportation problems, most agree that an additional harbor crossing is needed to relieve congestion chokepoints in Hampton Roads. This article will examine Hampton Roads transportation infrastructure demands and explain how the new Craney Island Marine Terminal (CIMT) will accommodate freight transportation access and capacity. Moreover, it will address the ongoing misconception that freight traffic is driving the need for large-scale transportation infrastructure projects in the region, like the planned Third Crossing.

In recent public meetings, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) outlined alternatives for an expansion of the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel. The proposed project aims to solve growing local traffic problems between the Peninsula and South Hampton Roads through the construction of a new tunnel or bridge crossing. Both support and opposition to this proposal emerged at the hearings, as various coalitions debated the costs and benefits of the proposed project alternatives. Shortly thereafter, elected city leaders from the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Planning Organization (HRMPO) and regional lawmakers met to draw consensus about the proposed expansion. While no consensus on how to relieve congestion at this regional chokepoint was made between the various interests, at the heart of this discussion remains uncertainty on the long-term plan for the Third Crossing.

The Hampton Roads Third Crossing Study was initiated in late 1993. The Third Crossing Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) examined the purpose and need for the Third Crossing by identifying "the transportation problems in the Hampton Roads region specifically concentrating on transportation deficiencies related to transportation needs between the Peninsula and the Southside" (2001).

The purpose of the study was to develop and analyze intermodal alternatives that could work together to improve accessibility, mobility, and goods movement in the Hampton Roads metropolitan area.

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The alternatives would help relieve the congestion that occurs at the existing I-64 Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. According to the VDOT website, the selected alternative for the Third Crossing would include:

- Widening I-664 in Newport News to eight lanes
- Constructing two new tubes parallel to the Monitor Merrimac Memorial Bridge Tunnel, adding four more lanes for travel
- Constructing an additional new multimodal tube to add transit/rail lines from the Monitor Merrimac Memorial Bridge Tunnel to near the Norfolk Naval Station
- Adding a new four-lane highway connector from the new bridge tunnel to the Western Freeway in Portsmouth
- Widening I-664 to six lanes from the Monitor Merrimac Memorial Bridge Tunnel to then Bowers Hill



HRMPO, the intergovernmental transportation planning body charged with setting transportation planning priorities in Hampton Roads, identified the Third Crossing as a solution that would relieve traffic at the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel. In fact, the region's long-range transportation plan, approved by the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and most local governments, lists six projects, including the Third Crossing.

An ongoing misconception about the Third Crossing is that it is required to support the construction of the Craney Island Marine Terminal (CIMT), and is directly aimed at securing the long-term growth and competitiveness of The Port of Virginia. Actually, infrastructure projects like the Third Crossing are needed to improve overall mobility in the region. The Third Crossing is not required for the construction and long-term operation of CIMT, or any of the other port facilities. Port-related freight trucks will be able to follow the existing and planned major highway system in traveling to and from the CIMT project through construction and terminal operation. The Third Crossing and other regional projects, such as the Route 460 improvements and the I-64 widening, are needed to reduce overall regional traffic congestion.

In summary, while the Third Crossing would benefit The Port in the same sense that it would benefit everyone else by easing regional congestion, it is not necessary for the construction of the Craney Island Marine Terminal. In fact, the Craney Island facility is ideally situated to avoid the Hampton Roads tunnel systems, as many trucks will travel west down Route 164 and north on Route 460 or Route 58 to reach Richmond and I-95.



## SPEEDING CARGO ACROSS THE NATION

U.S. economic growth and productivity has long relied on an efficient and reliable interstate transportation system. While many are aware of the role freight movement plays in U.S. economic competitiveness, few may know the historic role of the Nation's Interstate System.

The Interstate System is a network of limited-access highways across all 48 contiguous states. It was conceived in two reports to the U.S. Congress, Toll Roads and Free Roads (1939) and Interregional Highways (1944). The original plans envisioned interregional highways, with necessary connections around major cities to boost manufacturing and commerce. Limited progress was made on the plan until President Dwight D. Eisenhower championed the effort in the early 1950's. With the signing of the Federal-Highway Act of 1956, the Interstate System was born. By this time, quickly expanding highway freight transport required a much improved highway system.

The primary rationale for building the interstate highway system was to support national defense. As an Army Lieutenant Colonel, President Eisenhower witnessed the poor condition of the Nation's roads, which he would later compare with the German Autobahn, strengthening his belief that the United States required an equivalent highway system. During the unstable times of the Cold War, the superhighway system was viewed as a way to accommodate the quick and efficient movement of military equipment and personnel.

Once its profit and growth potential were realized, the Highway System evolved from a strategic corridor to a freight shipment corridor. By increasing speed and expanding access, freight costs have been substantially lowered. Moreover, the reliable shipment times offered by way of Interstate Highway travel has made "just in time" delivery feasible, adding to manufacturing efficiency. Consumer prices dropped with reduced overhead cost and expedited travel times. Today, freight trucks travel the Interstate System and move more than 10 billion tons of goods, compared with half a billion tons when President Eisenhower signed the bill.

Learn More: Celebrating 50th Years: The Eisenhower Interstate Highway System <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/>

## ROAD SHARE: UNDERSTANDING TRANSPORTATION DEMAND & CAPACITY ON ROUTE 164



Concerns have been expressed about the capacity of Route 164 to handle the increased volume of truck traffic coming from the Craney Island Marine Terminal. When the terminal opens in 2020, less than 900 trucks are expected to enter and exit the terminal on a daily basis. At full build-out in 2032 that number is expected to be about 6,000. This may sound like a lot of trucks, but it is important to remember that Route 164 was designed to carry 90,000 vehicles per day. Therefore, truck traffic will represent only 6.7% percent of the daily vehicular traffic on Route 164. Currently, Route 164 has enough capacity to handle the additional truck traffic generated by the Craney Island Marine Terminal. The Hampton Roads Planning District Commission has studied the future capacity of Route 164, and it is expected to reach capacity towards the end of 2026. This volume of traffic will be reached due to growth and expansion throughout Hampton Roads and will occur with or without the construction of the Craney Island Marine Terminal. Recognizing the future capacity constraints of Route 164, the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission is working with VDOT to plan for the widening of Route 164 to include an additional lane in each direction. At this time, it is anticipated that this widening would occur between 2020 and 2026.

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### **Craney Island Connector**

Craney Island Marine Terminal (CIMT) will be built with a connector road to Route 164 and connecting rail service to the Route 164 corridor. Known as the Craney Island Connector, this multimodal link will supply road and rail access from CIMT. Construction of the Craney Island Connector recognizes the VPA's commitment to keeping marine terminal traffic away from local neighborhood streets.

The road and rail connector will avoid busy residential thoroughfares like Cedar Lane, ensuring mobility and safety in the region. Construction of this transportation project will not affect private residences in the area. The state-owned limited access roadway will be constructed to accommodate trucks entering and exiting the marine terminal from or to Route 164. The two-mile, two-lane roadway will be combined with rail improvements, including a two-mile section of double rail track. The new rail segment will be used to put up to 50% of CIMT cargo onto rail. Placing cargo on rail means freight traffic will be diverted from regional highways, therefore improving regional mobility.



*Craney Island Road & Rail Connector Alignment*

Over the past few years, you may have noticed construction activity in the median of Route 164. This project is known as the Commonwealth Mainline Safety Relocation Project (CRMSRP). The project consists of the relocation of this rail line to the median of Route 164 and I-664. This rail line will eventually be extended to connect with the on-dock rail at CIMT via the Craney Island Connector. The new rail segment will ultimately connect Craney Island to the existing eastern terminus of the Heartland Corridor.

### **Conclusion**

The Craney Island Marine Terminal is a vital project for Hampton Roads economic growth and development. Through the creation of over 50,000 jobs, investments in labor and materials, and related development of distribution centers and warehouses, CIMT is an economic engine for the Commonwealth. Project engineers have plans in place to accommodate the expanded cargo to the region, through the development of the Craney Island Connector. Proposed Regional transportation projects like the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel Expansion and the Third Crossing are rooted in alleviating overall congestion problems in Hampton Roads, and not directly associated with Port development. In reality, port traffic represents a very small fraction of traffic on the road, therefore such projects are needed to reduce overall regional traffic congestion.

## Project Update

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Port Authority, identified and evaluated mitigation options and proposed acreage in the form of sediment clean-up and restoration, wetlands restoration and conservation, and oyster reef restoration, to provide large scale environmental benefits at a total cost of over \$50 million. Upon successful implementation, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) concluded that the mitigation plan would restore ecological functions and habitat in the Elizabeth and lower James River estuaries.

During the past several months project engineers have been working to refine the environmental mitigation plan for the project. This evaluation work has been focused on wetland sites, sediment sampling, and evaluation of potential oyster reef sites.



*Wetlands Surveying Investigation*

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In total, project engineers have surveyed over 140 acres. The team screened more than 35 potential wetland mitigation sites totaling almost 1000 acres. Additionally, more than 25 potential oyster restoration sites were screened. As part of this process over 100 sediment cores were collected, yielding 1642 samples for analysis. Project engineers and scientists are using this data to ensure that the overall project mitigation goals are achieved for the various sites.

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