



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE  
SENATOR MARC BASNIGHT

April 12, 2006

To the Editor:

One of the most critical issues facing our region and state as a whole is the need to replace the aging Bonner Bridge spanning Oregon Inlet. I have heard from countless residents, constituents, and visitors to the Outer Banks who are increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress on this project. I share their belief that the bridge must be replaced as soon as possible.

For more than a decade and a half, I have been advocating for the replacement of the Bonner Bridge. We all know the Bonner Bridge has surpassed its expected lifespan, and that its current stability rating is a dangerously low 4 on a scale of 0 to 100. And, we all know the study and review process for the replacement of the Bonner Bridge has been going on for about 15 years – too long, in my opinion, for the safety and well being of our residents and visitors. A collapse of the Bonner Bridge would have catastrophic short term and long term consequences – threatening lives and public safety, and crippling the economy of our region. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

The easiest, fastest and most cost-effective solution is simply to build the “short bridge,” a replacement bridge spanning Oregon Inlet along the path of the existing Bonner Bridge. The funding to build this \$191 million bridge already exists in the NCDOT Transportation Improvement Plan, and almost everyone I know supports this approach and wants the bridge built immediately.

Unfortunately, one thing continues to stand in the way: US Fish & Wildlife Service, which has blocked this project for years and instead supports a 17-mile long bridge that we simply cannot afford to build. This so-called “long bridge” would cost \$424 million – but the funding we have in place for this project is less than half that amount. The only way to free up the funding needed to build this long bridge is to go into debt by more than \$200 million, or shift money away from other much-needed transportation projects in our region. That’s not right, it’s not fair – and it’s not fiscally responsible.

Only in Washington – where the national debt has increased by more than \$3 trillion in just the past four years and where Congress recently raised the debt ceiling to a mind-boggling \$9 trillion – would government bureaucrats oppose a cost-effective solution like the short bridge in favor of one that costs more than twice as much. And only in Washington DC – where runaway spending included more than \$220 million last year for Alaska’s “Bridge to Nowhere” and pork-barrel projects are at record highs, according to taxpayer watchdog groups – would a federal agency attempt to force the State of North Carolina down a similarly irresponsible path of unnecessarily borrowing and wasting people’s hard-earned tax dollars.

## Bonner Bridge Replacement Letter: April 12, 2006

Governor Easley, Dare County Commissioners, and countless residents and visitors all agree that the “short bridge” is the best approach. Senators Burr and Dole, and Congressman Jones, support this option as well – and I am hopeful that they can convince these federal bureaucrats at Fish & Wildlife that replacing the bridge is too important to continue to stonewall. The “short bridge” can be built much faster and at significantly less cost than the “long bridge” (\$191 million versus \$424 million), and can be designed to incorporate future bridging at the hotspots along Highway 12 as needed to address erosion. The short bridge also preserves full public access to and through Pea Island and to the vital fishing areas on the north end of Pea Island that are enjoyed by so many of our residents and visitors, causes less harm to the environment, maintains the existing Terminal Groin on the north end of Pea Island that is so critical to stabilizing Oregon Inlet, and maximizes the safety of residents and visitors during times of emergency evacuations.

It is simply incredible to me that one single federal agency can stall this project for years, and potentially force us into the position of building a bridge that we don’t want, can’t afford (and in fact, do not even have enough funding to construct), and threaten our ability to fully enjoy lands that the public owns and which are an integral part of our economy and indeed, our heritage. And yet, this appears to be exactly the case. I find this so outrageous that I have appealed to our Congressional delegation for help. I have been gratified at the support we have received, and my office has been in regular contact with Senator Burr’s office, who I am told is doing all he can to help us. We will continue to do all we can to stop one federal agency from controlling our destiny and forcing us into a situation where the safety, livelihoods, and rights of our citizens are made inferior to the agendas of federal bureaucrats.



Marc Basnight