

Comments on the Bonner Bridge  
by Sheriff Rodney Midgett  
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While the economic security of Hatteras Island and Dare County are important issues to consider, public safety must be the primary concern when considering plans for replacement of the Bonner Bridge. As an elected public safety official, I believe this is the paramount issue.

The Bonner Bridge serves an essential role in providing emergency access for EMS, Fire Service and Law Enforcement vehicles. It is also a vital resource for hurricane and emergency evacuations. Motorists depend on the Bonner Bridge for safe access to and from Hatteras Island, and commercial vehicles rely on it to deliver needed supplies.

If load limits or one-way traffic restrictions are needed in the future because of the deteriorating condition of the bridge, I am concerned that our already over-burdened Sheriff's Office would not be able to provide adequate staffing to police the necessary restrictions on a 24-hour basis. Additionally, hurricane and emergency evacuations would be impaired.

As Dare County Sheriff, I am deeply concerned about what would happen if the Bonner Bridge were to fail. My first concern is for the loss of life and risk of serious injury that could occur during a bridge failure and in subsequent search and rescue operations.

Power lines running underneath the Bonner Bridge provide electric service to all of Hatteras Island. In the event of bridge failure, these lines would be vulnerable. Any disruption of electrical service on Hatteras Island would have a direct impact on crime and public safety. Furthermore, it would impede business operations and have life threatening consequences for those with serious medical issues or dependent upon life support equipment.

Emergency ferry service in the aftermath of bridge failure would not be capable of handling the large amount of essential EMS, Fire Service and Law Enforcement traffic that would be needed. Furthermore, hurricane and other evacuations would be severely hampered. This would pose a significant threat to public safety.

Since emergency ferry service would have to cease during severe weather conditions, public safety would be further compromised. During such times, residents and visitors would be helpless without any type of emergency transportation.

Without the Bonner Bridge, the Sheriff's Office and other public service agencies would face serious challenges maintaining adequate staff readiness on a continuing basis. Many Public Safety Employees rely upon the Bonner Bridge to report for duty. Without it, personnel levels could become compromised and further threaten public safety.

## **CONCLUSION**

As Dare County Sheriff, I support the new Preferred Alternative outlined in the Environmental Assessment dated May 7, 2010. I endorse it because it provides for immediate replacement of the Bonner Bridge. This is a public safety necessity.

In my professional opinion, it is imperative that the Bonner Bridge be replaced as quickly as possible and without further environmental studies or delay. Failure to replace the bridge in an expeditious manner further jeopardizes public safety.