



## North Carolina General Assembly House of Representatives

REPRESENTATIVE TIMOTHY L. SPEAR

2ND DISTRICT

OFFICE ADDRESS: 402 LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
300 N. SALISBURY STREET  
RALEIGH, NC 27603-5925

TELEPHONE: (919) 715-3029  
(919) 733-3113 FAX

EMAIL: tims@ncleg.net

### COMMITTEES:

MARINE RESOURCES & AQUACULTURE, CHAIR  
APPROPRIATIONS  
APPROPRIATIONS SUB JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY,  
VICE CHAIR  
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS  
JUDICIARY II  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT II  
WILDLIFE RESOURCES

August 3, 2010

Drew Joyner  
Human Environment Unit Head  
NCDOT  
1598 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-1598

Dear Mr. Joyner,

This letter is written to give my full support for a new Oregon Inlet Bridge implementing the new NCDOT's Preferred Alternative Plan outlined in the Environmental Assessment (EA) dated May 7, 2010 replacing the current Bonner Bridge in Dare County.

The current Bonner Bridge received a rating of 2 out of 100 nearly five years ago from a NCDOT Bridge Inspection Report, noting the condition of the existing bridge as "poor". The original bridge was built in 1963 and was given a lifespan of 30 years. It is already seventeen years past replacement and we have not yet begun to build a new bridge. We know the consequences can be catastrophic. One only has to remember what occurred several years ago in Minnesota.

Much talk and planning has occurred in order to secure the best plan to construct a new bridge. At this point in time I believe most parties are in agreement that the 17 mile Pamlico Sound Long Bridge plan should be eliminated. The cost of such an endeavor in today's economic downturn is unrealistic at best. There are many other factors including environmental issues, but the cost alone is enough to abandon this plan.

The new preferred alternative bridge plan by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is a sound plan that addresses the most major concerns. In my opinion, the latest EA for the plan will not need any additional study. In fact, the studies that have been done to date have researched the impact to the environment and to the



citizens of North Carolina and the results are certainly more than adequate. Additional studies would be redundant and a waste of taxpayers' money. Furthermore, the Transportation Management Plan proposes a sensible way to handle the development of NC Highway 12, a huge stumbling block with the original longer bridge plan.

Two important factors exist that supports the critical necessity for a vehicular way onto this pristine part of North Carolina's coastline. The first factor is safety.

The current Bonner Bridge is the only mode of vehicular transportation onto the Cape Hatteras Natural Seashore. The year-round population of Hatteras Island in 2000 was 4,001 with a seasonal population estimated at 50,000. The year-round population of Ocracoke Island is 800. By shutting down the bridge a traffic flow decrease by as much as 87 percent in peak time could be expected.

If a northeaster or a hurricane threatens this area it is crucial that evacuation can be made in a timely manner. The emergency ferry operations plan shows accommodation for 650 cars (round trip) a day, weather permitting. During the busy season total evacuation could not be met completely and even in the off-season it would be difficult to evacuate over 4,000 residents by ferry alone. When storms intensify Highway 12, the only major road on the Outer Banks, has been known to flood, making it impassable. That is why it is so important for the citizens to be able to evacuate quickly and a bridge helps move a maximum amount of people off the island. We must be able to use every mode of transportation in order to implement a safe and swift evacuation.

Sheriff Midgett for Dare County points out other essential safety issues such as crime control, emergency services and medical support that are critical and should receive serious consideration during the decision making process.

The second factor is economic. If the Bonner Bridge is closed, 95 percent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area would be inaccessible to the public. Hatteras Island encompasses over 25 percent of the county's tourism revenues and those would decrease significantly. This would not only affect the local economy but also the rest of the state. Dare County is one of only a few counties in North Carolina that are donor counties – a county that contributes more to the state than it receives in funding from the state. In addition, in 2005 Hatteras Island accounted for 20 percent of taxable property values in Dare County, a value of \$3.1 billion. With interrupted traffic flow Hatteras Island would surely see a delay in construction and the area's economic viability would be impacted.

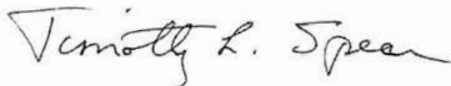
Oregon Inlet Bridge Replacement  
August 3, 2010  
Page 3

We have been fortunate that no real catastrophes have occurred to date but the poor condition of the Bonner Bridge puts everyone at risk. The current bridge sees a traffic flow of over 5,000 vehicles per day and during the summer months that can grow to around 10,000. It is past time to build this bridge – we cannot wait any longer. We do not need anymore studies and the Record of Decision (ROD) should be released as soon as the public comment period has expired.

The new Oregon Inlet Bridge proposed by NCDOT is a good plan and I am pleased to recommend immediate implementation. The citizens of this beautiful area of our state have been patient long enough. We must not forsake their safety or that of the many tourists that visit this area annually.

I give my full support for this project in conjunction with local support from the Dare County Commissioners. Please proceed to move this project forward without any further study or delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy L. Spear".

Timothy L. Spear

TLS/lh