

Marine officials blast downtown crossing plan

By LARRY MAKINSON
Daily News reporter

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A proposed downtown location for the Knik Arm Crossing came under heavy fire from marine officials and the port of Anchorage Wednesday night, during a public hearing on the environmental effects of the project.

"In our opinion, if the downtown site is used you're asking for a marine casualty," said John Bradley of Southwest Alaska Pilots, a firm which supplies marine pilots to ships bound for Anchorage.

Bradley's comments echoed concerns raised last month by shippers and pilots that a bridge downtown

would pose a severe hazard to marine traffic heading to the port of Anchorage, especially during winter when a heavy ice pack limits the maneuverability of ships.

Sea-Land and TOTE, Anchorage's two principle suppliers of consumer cargo, threatened at that time to curtail their winter shipments to Anchorage.

That threat was taken seriously Wednesday night by Anchorage port director Tyler Jones. Jones said the port commission has voted unanimously to oppose the downtown project.

Wednesday's hearing drew about

350 people to the Egan Convention Center to hear a presentation on the proposed crossing. Thirty-six of them offered formal testimony.

The hearing was held to review the pros and cons of the two bridge sites presently under consideration: a downtown crossing that would cost \$743 million and connect at Third Avenue and I and L streets, and a \$547 million Elmendorf crossing that would wind through Elmendorf Air Force base and connect with the Anchorage road system at the Glenn Highway near Muldoon Road.

After the opening barrage of dissent from marine shippers and pi-

lots, the tone of the comments shifted to traffic, potential development and the financial feasibility of the project.

For the rest of the evening, the comments saw-sawed back and forth between those opposed to the costs and the effects of the project vs. those who spoke in support of the project — several of whom owned property across the Inlet.

Scattered applause followed virtually everyone's comments.

But the most dramatic testimony came from shippers and pilots who warned of the dangers to shipping that a downtown bridge could cause.

"I've got 40 years at sea, and I've never seen a bridge you can't knock down," said Capt. Bobby Parker, disputing the consultants' contention that the bridge can be engineered to withstand a collision.

Parker also said the buildup of ice against the bridge piers would plug the ice pans in the harbor and counteract the flushing action of the tides.

"You'll have yourself a two-mile ice jam," Parker predicted.

Capt. Jim Waters, master of the Sea-Land vessel Philadelphia,

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Port pays \$606,000 just to belong

By Scott Maier
P-I Reporter

The Seattle Port Commission yesterday approved spending \$606,000 next year on memberships and other contributions to business promotion groups and professional organizations.

Memberships include a wide range of organizations, such as the Washington Public Ports Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the Propeller Club, the American Dry Pea and Lentil Association, the Press Club, City Club, and the Boy Scouts.

Several civic groups had sharply criticized the port's membership and service agreements with outside organizations, which will cost about \$100,000 more in 1985 than this year. They say some port memberships are unnecessary and may be in conflict with the public's interest.

The port vigorously defends its memberships, saying they are a worthwhile investment in trade promotion and development of staff expertise. The port says the payoff is in jobs and other economic benefits of international trade.

Not enough scrutiny?

"We should be judged more on our overall record, rather than quibbling on \$20 to the Boy Scouts," said Richard Ford, port director.

The League of Women Voters, PortWatch and other critics readily acknowledge that many of the membership costs are relatively insignificant. But they say the port's long and growing membership list indicates that the agency doesn't give sufficient scrutiny to expenditures.

"It raises a flag," said Bill Erxleben of PortWatch. "You wonder how tight of a ship they are running."

The port, unlike private business, requires public vigilance because taxpayer money is at stake, Erxleben said. "We're the shareholders," he said.

The port's biggest contributions go to tourism promotion, supporting organizations such as the Seattle-King County Convention & Visitors Bureau (\$169,400) and the East King County Convention and Visitors Bureau (\$20,000). Another \$85,000 goes to Operation Welcome, which provides multilingual interpreters for international air travelers.

The port, which manages Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, says tourism promotion easily pays for itself from the new business and tax revenues generated by the influx of visitors.

Another big ticket item on the port's membership list is its \$136,000 contribution to the Washington Public Ports Association, an alliance of the state's ports. The Port of Seattle pays more than a third of the organization's budget.

The Washington Public Ports Association actively lobbies in Olympia, eliminating the need for the Port of Seattle to hire its own staff to cover legislative affairs, said Ford. Other benefits include promotion of maritime safety and trade, he said.

The port's contribution to business development groups, including \$5,575 to the Chamber of Commerce and \$2,000 to the Downtown Seattle Association, has generated the sharpest criticism.

Broken bridge stalls shipping traffic on Great Lakes

Seaway blockage may have 'very severe' impact

The Associated Press

MASSENA, N.Y. — A broken bridge blocking the St. Lawrence Seaway near Montreal could stall shipping for two weeks during the push to get Midwestern grain to Atlantic ports before winter, officials said Friday. A shipping firm said the standstill could have a "very severe" financial impact.

So far the delay has affected about 16 inbound ships and 14 outbound vessels, but there are at least 82 oceanbound ships in the seaway above Valleyfield, Quebec, where the Larocque Bridge broke Wednesday, said William O'Neil, president of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority in Canada.

"Nothing can flow through this end at all," said Richard McCarthy, a spokesman for the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corp., the U.S. counterpart of the Canadian seaway authority. "It can't flow through this end from Montreal, and nothing that's up in the (Great) lakes can get out through Montreal."

The seaway, which opened in 1959, allows shipping 2,300

miles from the tip of Lake Superior to the Atlantic Ocean.

"If this situation continues for two weeks as they are forecasting, it will have a very severe impact on the bulk carriers. And how long it would take to clean out the backlog would be anybody's guess," said David Blakely, vice president of Halco Maritime Transport of Montreal.

However, he added, "It's still very early to measure the impact."

Halco has a fleet of 15 ships plying the seaway. At least five of them are among the estimated 30 already delayed by the malfunctioning bridge.

"It (the delay) costs the ship owners," Blakely said. "They have the crews to pay and provisions to maintain. We still have our variable costs with no contributions."

O'Neil said officials were still trying to assess the full implications of the failure Wednesday of a steel shaft on the Larocque Bridge. The broken shaft left the vertical lift bridge partly open and in the way of shipping.



McCarthy said from his office here that it will take "up to two weeks" before shipping can resume.

"It's going to take them that long to jack the bridge open and clear the navigation channel for ship traffic. Then I assume once they get it open, they'll repair the bridge," he said.

The seaway will be kept open after the official Dec. 15 closing to clear up the expected two-week backlog of shipping, O'Neil said.

"We're trying to develop a scheme to get the bridge open as quickly as possible, but we're dealing with massive pieces of machinery and it's pretty precarious," O'Neil said.

Blakely said a two-week delay may force some ship owners to offload their tankers. Also, if the seaway is shut down for two weeks, it will take a long time to get the ships through the backed-up locks, he said.

Port to hire outside advisers

By Scott Maier
P-I Reporter

The Seattle Port Commission, overriding vehement opposition from the port's executive director, voted yesterday to hire outside assistants to help the five-member panel evaluate staff proposals.

Allocating \$250,000 for staff aides and consultants, the majority of commissioners said the port has become too big and complicated for them to make policy decisions without help. Some commissioners also said outside help is needed because the port staff has not always been cooperative.

"I haven't felt very welcome here, especially in the big bureaucracy," said Commissioner Ivar Haglund.

The hiring of commissioner aides, originally proposed by the League of Women Voters, was adamantly opposed by Port Director Richard Ford and Commission President Henry Simonson. They argued that aides would be an unnecessary expense and may generate an adversarial relationship between port staff and the commission.

The showdown came yesterday over the port's proposed \$248 million

1985 budget, including funding of staff aides.

Simonson proposed spending only \$200,000 on staff aides. He said he didn't need his share of the \$250,000 allocation because he has no intention of hiring any assistants. The commission turned down Simonson's proposal, clearing the way for passage of the budget and hiring of staff aides.

The new budget includes \$138 million for operating expenses and \$110 million for capital improvement, record spending for the port, said Cliff Muller, senior director of finance. It is also the first time in

recent years that the port has had to dip into its surplus fund, Muller said.

Most of the additional expenses will pay for the port's ambitious plans to operate a railroad, refurbish its piers and expand tourism promotion.

The budget will require only a modest increase in tax support. The budget calls for \$21.3 million in tax levies, a \$1 million tax increase.

In other port business, the commission decided to forgo scheduled increases for moorage at Shilshole Bay Marina. The price increases were rejected because they would have pushed rates, currently \$176 a

Response is cool to crossing

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review of the financial effects of a crossing and should "err on the side of conservatism" by shunning it until they are convinced it won't prove to be a financial liability to taxpayers.

Borough Manager Gary Thurlow conceded Friday that Bronson may have a point.

"He can multiply and divide, that's for sure," Thurlow said, as he calculated his own figures. In fact, the tax effects cited by Bronson may be conservative, Thurlow said.

Jerry Hamel, project manager for the Transportation Department, on Friday backed away from the \$5 million shortfall prediction.

Hamel said that many of the costs of providing road maintenance, fire protection and other costs could be borne by local Point MacKenzie residents — especially if they incorporated into a city.

The consultants for the state have proposed building a bridge that would be sited on the Anchorage side either downtown or at Elmendorf Air Force Base. They also studied but rejected alternatives that would make major improvements on the Glenn and Parks highways, use hovercraft to move people across the Inlet or do nothing to shorten the commute.

Thursday's hearing did show some support for a Knik Arm bridge, though it came mainly from developers and from landowners who own property near the proposed bridge site.

Dave Ring, a large landowner at Point MacKenzie, testified that additional revenue to offset tax increases could be raised by mining the considerable gravel deposits across the Inlet from Anchorage, and by selling borough land.

Several residents at the hearing spoke out against the

proposed alignment of the connector road on the Mat-Su side of the bridge. That road would connect with the Parks Highway just south of Houston.

It would also cross over the western end of Big Lake, something that Big Lake resident Pierre Strong said would bring unwanted visual and noise pollution to the area.

Though it was not explained at the hearing, the impact statement does predict an easing of traffic on the Glenn Highway if the bridge is built, as it would likely reduce development pressures on Eagle River and the Palmer-Wasilla area.

Jack Allen, project manager for the consulting team that prepared the impact report, said those improvements are currently scheduled and would not be affected by a Knik Arm Crossing.

Ben Wattum of Palmer said the Mat-Su connector road should have linked the bridge to Wasilla, not Houston.

As currently envisioned, the road would cut only six minutes from the present travel time between Wasilla and Anchorage, according to the impact statement.

"I'm very definitely against the Knik Arm Crossing," said Doug Bartko.

The specter of attempted annexation of Mat-Su land by Anchorage was raised by Charles Nevada, a Valley resident who formerly lived in Anchorage.

He warned that a Knik Arm Crossing will bring renewed pressures from Anchorage to annex the Point MacKenzie area.

He said a move was made by Anchorage in the 1950's to annex the area, but the attempt was rejected at the time because there was no direct access. The bridge, he said, will bring a renewed move for annexation.



A steel shaft broke on the Larocque Bridge near Montreal.

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