

To: david.wildstein@gmail.com
Subject: Fwd: First draft
From: Bill Baroni <billbaroni@gmail.com>
Received(Date): Fri, 15 Nov 2013 12:27:40 -0500
To: David Wildstein <david.wildstein@gmail.com>

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Gretchen DiMarco <DiMarco@yahoo.com>
Date: November 15, 2013 at 11:20:35 AM EST
To: "billbaroni@gmail.com" <billbaroni@gmail.com>
Subject: First draft
Reply-To: Gretchen DiMarco <DiMarco@yahoo.com>

I reworked the second paragraph in the future study section a little bit. Both versions are there, though, so you can just cut one. Four pages, 1341 words.

The George Washington Bridge is the busiest bridge in the world. In 2012, more than 102 million vehicles crossed the bridge connecting Fort Lee, New Jersey and New York City. The bridge is a vital lifeline for commuters, visitors, and commerce.

As the busiest bridge in the world, the George Washington Bridge also experiences significant traffic backups – usually during rush hour. It is not unheard of that, due to the volume on the bridge, drivers can wait in backups lasting more than 45 minutes during the morning and evening rush. Drivers from more than ____ New Jersey municipalities sit in traffic leading into New York City every morning.

These traffic backups affect the lives of drivers from throughout the region. They also cause residual traffic delays in the host municipalities of the bridge – Fort Lee and New York City. Because of these impacts, the Port Authority has spent more than _____ in Fort Lee to assist the community in ameliorating the impacts of this traffic. Some examples include:

XXXX
XXXX
XXXX

Drivers using the bridge pay a toll to cross the bridge east bound only. This means that vehicles entering New York cue through toll lanes in New Jersey. There are _____ toll lanes at the bridge. On an average weekday, _____ lanes are designated for cash toll payers

and _____ lanes are reserved for EZPass users. Traffic enters these toll lanes using a variety of approaches, including Routes 95, 46, _____.

Background

In the early 1990s, according to police officers employed at that time, then Manager of Fort Lee, Jack Alter, insisted that the Governor of New Jersey and the Port Authority create special entrance lanes to the George Washington Bridge for Fort Lee residents. These lanes were created by placing traffic cones to block all other traffic from using three toll lanes from all other approaches. This reduced the number of toll lanes from _____ to _____. This forced the creation of three special “Fort Lee Lanes” – lanes segregated for use only by residents of Fort Lee who access them via _____ Street.

This plan allowed Fort Lee residents to avoid the longer traffic lanes experienced by non-Fort Lee residents and enabled them to bypass the general traffic back up at the bridge.

These segregated lanes were ordered by the Port Authority nearly 20 years ago by the Port Authority without any recorded traffic study, without any analysis of their impact and without consultation with any Bergen County municipality or government. According to Port Authority police officers, they were ordered to create and enforce these special, segregated lanes in response to the directive from Mayor Alter.

As a result, traffic from the rest of Bergen and Passaic counties – and all the other users of the bridge – had their available toll lanes reduced _____%.

(insert chart)

To create these segregated lanes each morning during the workweek, Port Authority police officers placed cones to segregate the three southern most toll lanes. These lanes remain in place today.

August/September 2013

In August 2013, as a result of conversations with members of the Port Authority police, Port Authority Director of Interstate Capital Projects David Wildstein met with Port Authority officials in Engineering, Traffic Engineering, and Tunnels Bridges and Terminals to review the situation of the segregated Fort Lee Lanes.

After reviewing the current lane structure, Mr. Wildstein asked that a review of the segregated lanes be performed during the first week of September 2013. The study was intended to determine if these segregated lanes cause a clear and marked increase in traffic into the bridge for users from other areas of Bergen and Passaic Counties and across the state. Mr. Wildstein requested that the segregated lanes not be eliminated entirely, but be reduced from three to only one segregated Fort Lee lane.

The reduction in lanes was performed by Port Authority police at the bridge. At all times during the week of the review, the Port Authority police monitored traffic. They were alert

for any emergency vehicles in the area of the bridge and prepared to alter traffic patterns in the event of an emergency.

According to bridge staff, the return of two lanes to general use resulted in a moderate relief and reduction in traffic times for non-Fort Lee Lane users. However, the reduction in segregated lanes resulted in significant traffic in the Borough of Fort Lee. On Friday, September 13, Port Authority Executive Director Pat Foye ordered the Fort Lee lanes returned to use by Fort Lee users only.

Communication

The implementation of the reduction of Fort Lee Lanes from three to one was not accompanied by customary communications, both within the Port Authority and externally. The decision to move forward with the study was not approved by either the Executive level of the agency or the Board of Commissioners. The Borough of Fort Lee was not notified of the closures in advance. These communication breakdowns cannot be repeated. The Port Authority relies on mutual cooperation both internally and with our community stakeholders. Not having complete buy-in within the agency and securing the cooperation of Fort Lee resulted in a lack of information that is not consistent with our agency's commitment to transparency. While the question of the segregated Fort Lee Lanes is critically important, it must be addressed in an open and transparent manner.

Future Study

Two clear lessons were learned from this situation. First, a new formalized process will be implemented immediately to address any changes to lane configurations. Beginning immediately, any traffic changes must be approved by both the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director, and the Board of Commissioners must be notified. In addition, notification must be made to the local municipality and county not less than 30 days prior to implementation. (This would exclude emergency activity conducted in the interest of public safety.) This 30-day notification period will allow time for improved dialogue between the Port Authority, our host communities and the public.

Second, the issue of the segregated Fort Lee Lanes is one that clearly has become a regional controversy. While residents of Fort Lee have a segregated entrance to the bridge, they also are impacted as the host the busiest bridge in the world. Residents of Bergen and Passaic Counties – and all other bridge users – wait in longer traffic lanes because of the segregated lanes. This balance is one of regional significance and requires study by public officials and leaders both inside and outside the Port Authority.

SUGGESTED REVISION:

Second, the segregated Fort Lee Lanes are clearly a controversial issue in the region. Mayor Alter felt that in return for hosting the world's busiest bridge, the residents of Fort Lee deserved three special, segregated access lanes. As a result, other residents of Bergen and Passaic Counties – and all other bridge users – wait in longer traffic lines. This is an issue of regional significance that requires study by public officials and leaders both inside and outside the Port Authority.

Therefore, the Port Authority will immediately create a Fort Lee Lane Task Force to study the lanes at the bridge. The agency asks that representatives of the five legislative districts in Bergen County participate along with representatives of the Bergen County Executive, Bergen County Freeholders, Borough of Fort Lee, New Jersey Department of Transportation and the Port Authority's Chief Engineer, Chief Traffic Engineer, Director of Tunnels, Bridges and Terminals and General Manager of the George Washington Bridge to review the traffic patterns at the toll lanes to determine in a public, open and transparent way how access to the George Washington Bridge should be configured.

By opening the process, both specifically at the George Washington Bridge and generally other Port Authority crossings, the Port Authority will fulfill our commitment to transparency. By including members of the public and their representatives, the Port Authority will benefit from the input of those who live and work around the George Washington Bridge.

We believe that the Port Authority will learn from the events of September 2013 and will be a more open, inclusive and transparent agency as a result.