

SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Updated February 2024

About the Project

What is the purpose of the project?

The SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing Project (PI No. 0017183) is evaluating future, long-term improvement alternatives for the existing SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge over the Savannah River. Although structurally sound, the bridge's clearance limits an ever-larger generation of ships from navigating beneath the bridge to access the Port of Savannah's terminals, located upriver from the bridge. The Port is a significant economic engine for the Savannah region, Georgia, and the rest of the Southeast. Potentially stifling future growth, however, is the Port's accessibility to larger ships. Therefore, this project is mainly driven by an economic need to address the bridge's clearance limitations while being mindful of the need to maintain safe, efficient vehicular access between Savannah, Hutchinson Island, and South Carolina (via the Back River Bridge).

What are the bridge clearance limitations?

The existing bridge provides 185 feet of clearance over the Savannah River. The bridge clearance is the distance from the mean high-water elevation to the underside of the bridge. Mean high water is the average of all daily tidal high-water elevations observed over 19 years. This clearance limits efficient, reliable passage to larger ships seeking access to the Port of Savannah. As of May 2021, the largest ship to call on the Port and travel beneath the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge was the CMA CGM Marco Polo at ~16,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs). TEUs describe the capacity of container ships. Meanwhile, ever-larger ships (up to and beyond 23,000 TEUs) are becoming increasingly common on the world's oceans given their economy-of-scale benefits of fuel efficiency and lower overall operating costs.

Who is managing the project?

The Georgia Department of Transportation is leading the work, in partnership with the Georgia Ports Authority.

How did the project come about?

The project follows the results of the Savannah River Crossing Feasibility Study, which examined more than two dozen improvement alternatives to the existing bridge. Out of those, the study put forward feasible alternatives that best meet the needs of Savannah, the region, and state. All alternatives underwent a three-tiered screening process, with the study either advancing or eliminating alternatives depending on their ability to meet certain criteria. These criteria evaluated each alternative based on engineering feasibility and practicality, impacts to the surrounding area (e.g., environmental, cultural), and cost of construction, among others. It should be noted that the feasible alternatives represent long-term solutions to the existing bridge's limitations.

What happens next?

In mid-2022, the study shifted to a conceptual project phase. From here, the feasible alternatives will be evaluated under a more intense microscope, with further assessments of impacts (e.g., environmental) as well as the opportunity for public review and feedback.

Does the presentation of feasible alternatives mean they will be implemented?

The presentation of feasible alternatives marks a significant milestone, but it is not the final step in this comprehensive process. There is no timeline or funding currently identified for a preferred alternative.

How can people learn more about the project?

The web page, available at <https://0017183-savannahrivercrossingproject-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>, is the primary source for up-to-date information about the project. Public engagement will commence in the future.

MORE INFORMATION

Web Page: <https://0017183-savannahrivercrossingproject-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>

Email: savannahriverxing@dot.ga.gov

How does the project relate to the Savannah Harbor Deepening Project (SHEP)?

The Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Ports Authority, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers marked the completion of the deepening in March 2022. The project deepened the Savannah Harbor to reduce tidal restrictions and provide more efficient passage for larger ships navigating the Savannah River. Even with the harbor deepening, the clearance limitations of the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge still pose challenges to larger ships. More information about SHEP can be found at www.sas.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Savannah-Harbor-Expansion/What-is-SHEP.

What other efforts are underway to address the clearance limitations?

Concurrently, Georgia DOT has launched the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge Major Maintenance Project (PI No. 0019219) to replace the existing cables, bridge bearings, and joints and explore raising the bridge profile to obtain additional vertical clearance. Although a short-term solution, these efforts will allow for more robust bridge inspections and extend the remaining service life of the bridge. Construction is expected to start in early 2025, although that schedule is subject to change. The bridge will remain open to traffic during construction; however, lane closures in both directions are anticipated. To learn more about the maintenance project, visit <https://us17sr404-0019219-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>

About the Bridge

Where is the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge?

Located in Chatham County, Georgia, the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge spans the Savannah River. The bridge carries US 17 from Savannah to Hutchinson Island. US 17 then enters South Carolina via the Back River Bridge.

Is there a traffic problem on the bridge?

No. Traffic volumes on the four-lane roadway of the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge totaled 19,200 vehicles per day in 2020, with no congestion on an average day, meaning there was adequate capacity for the volume of traffic using it. Traffic volumes totaled 20,300 vehicles per day in 2019.

Is there a structural problem with the bridge?

No. The existing SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge was built in 1991. The most recent bridge inspection report noted the bridge is in Satisfactory Condition.

How does Savannah's bridge clearance compare to other major East Coast ports?

The Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge in Charleston, South Carolina, has a clearance of 186 feet. The Port of Virginia in Norfolk, Virginia, has no clearance limitation because of a tunnel that carries vehicles under the river channel. The Bayonne Bridge in New York/New Jersey has a clearance of 215 feet; it was raised to this level in recent years due to a clearance limitation that hindered larger ships from calling on the Port of New York/New Jersey.

About the Port of Savannah

What is the significance of the Port of Savannah?

The Port of Savannah is a critical conduit through which raw materials and finished goods flow to and from destinations around the world. According to the Georgia Ports Authority, the Port of Savannah handled a total of 4.9 million TEUs in calendar year 2023, and it anticipates investing \$4.2 billion in the next 10 years as part of its master plan to expand cargo handling capabilities to support future supply chain requirements. Georgia's deepwater ports support more than 500,000 jobs and \$122 billion in annual revenue to the state's economy, according to a University of Georgia economic impact study.¹

¹ <https://www.terry.uga.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/GA-Ports-2019-final.pdf>