

East Pass Bridge Committee

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025

6:00 PM

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. ROLL CALL/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- 3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 - A. October 23, 2025 Initial East Pass Bridge Meeting Minutes
- 4. NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. Nomintation of Chair & Vice Chair**
 - B. Discussion on Bridge Features**
 - C. Next Steps**
 - D. Set Next Meeting Date**
- 5. PUBLIC COMMENTS**
- 6. ADJOURN**

If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Council, committee, board, panel, or agency with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, he or she will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he or she will may need to ensure that a record of the verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon the appeal is to be based. "Persons with disabilities who require assistance to participate in this meeting are requested to notify the City Clerk's Office 850.837.4242 at least 48 hours in advance".

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT INFORMATIONAL EAST PASS BRIDGE
MEETING WITH HARBOR CRA,
HARBOR AND WATERWAYS BOARD, AND
PUBLIC WORKS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
DESTIN CITY HALL ANNEX
OCTOBER 23, 2025**

The purpose of this meeting is to receive a presentation and hold discussion on the planned replacement of the Destin/Marler Bridge, with emphasis on aesthetics, functionality, and local stakeholder and provide the input to FDOT.

- **Call to Order & Pledge:**

The meeting called to order by City Engineer, Robert Tomasek with the Pledge of Allegiance immediately following.

- **Introductions / Roll Call**

- **City staff:**

- City Manager Larry Jones
- Deputy City Clerk Kim Montgomery
- Kimberly Kopp, City Attorney
- Robert Tomasek, City Engineer
- Daniel Butler, Principal Planner
- Sherry Burney, Planning
- Steve O'Connor, Deputy Director.

- **Board/Committee members:**

- Bill McKissick, Harbor Board / Harbor & Waterways.
- Jim Green, Harbor and Waterways & Harbor CRA
- John Stevens, Harbor CRA & Harbor and Waterways
- Ryan Holloway, Harbor and Waterways
- Jim Wood, Public Works/Public Safety
- Guy Tadlock, Harbor and Waterways & Harbor CRA
- Marcie Bell, LPA and Public Works/Public Safety

- **Citizens / Guests:**

- Bradley Touchstone, attending as an interested citizen and bridge architect, not representing his employer (AECOM).
- RJ Gorman Marine Construction, LLC

- **Background on Project**

- City Engineer explained that FDOT is planning to replace the Destin/Marler Bridge, similar in concept/scale to other major coastal bridge replacements.
- Mr. Bradley Touchstone previously discussed the opportunity to pursue a design that is more than a standard “pre-stressed I-girder” bridge, prompting City Council to ask the three boards to meet jointly and provide input.
- Council has already directed staff to:
 - Convene this joint committee for discussion.

- Follow a set of five steps toward forming a bridge-focused committee and engaging in the FDOT process.
- **Presentation – Bridge Design & FDOT Process (Bradley Touchstone)**
 - Mr. Touchstone, Bridge Architect with approximately 35 years’ of experience; former National Practice Lead for Complex Bridge Design at AECOM).
 - Clarified he is not speaking for AECOM or FDOT, but as a citizen with professional expertise and emphasized:
 - Replacement of this bridge is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will shape the community’s skyline and identity for the next 100+ years.
 - FDOT is strong at solving defined problems, but citizens must help define the problem, which is more than “getting from A to B.”
 - The bridge crosses one of the most important and iconic waterways in the area, with extremely high boat interaction; design must acknowledge:
 - Drivers and vehicles.
 - Pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Boats and navigational safety.
 - **Examples of Bridge Impact & Aesthetics**
 - Provided several examples of projects he has worked on or is familiar with, illustrating:
 - Bridges as icons (e.g., Glass City Skyway in Toledo).
 - Bridges that stitch together urban fabric and prioritize pedestrians (e.g., Second Street Bridge in Austin).
 - Use of color, texture, and form as “low-cost or no-cost” enhancements (e.g., Hastings Bridge in Minnesota).
 - Enhanced user experience via overlooks, themes, and stopping points (e.g., Tappan Zee Bridge pedestrian/bike features).
 - Possibility of overlooks and viewpoints at mid-span overlooking the bay and gulf.
 - Importance of pedestrian and cyclist experience, not just vehicle throughput.
 - **FDOT PD&E Process & Aesthetics Levels**
 - FDOT is currently in the PD&E (Project Development & Environment) Study phase:
 - Evaluating alternatives.
 - Conducting environmental analysis.
 - Determining project scope and funding needs.
 - During PD&E, FDOT:
 - Identifies view sheds, key vantage points, and local impacts.
 - Evaluates tie-ins with adjacent roadways and long-term traffic impacts.
 - Seeks stakeholder input, where this committee and boards should play a major role.
 - FDOT uses aesthetic levels 1–3:
 - Level 1: minimal aesthetic consideration.
 - Level 2: some cohesive pier/structural detailing (typical, e.g., 331 Bridge).

- Level 3: higher emphasis on aesthetics in historic, urban, or visually sensitive areas.
 - Presenter believes Destin/Marler Bridge clearly qualifies as a Level 3 aesthetics project.
 - **Bridge Configuration Overview (FDOT Concepts)**
 - Proposed bridge is expected to:
 - Needs to be taller to meet Intercoastal Waterway clearance (around 65 ft vertical clearance).
 - Provide three lanes in each direction (for a total of six) with full shoulders and bike/pedestrian facilities.
 - Be roughly similar in scale to the Hathaway Bridge.
 - FDOT goal is to support a six-lane U.S. 98 corridor from Pensacola to Panama City where feasible.
 - Bridge will be designed for a 100-year service life, making initial choices critical.
 - **Bridge Type Options**
 - Compared standard AASHTO girder bridges (e.g., Clearwater Pass, 331 Bridge) with more refined solutions:
 - Standard girders result in many piers, long lines of beams and shadows, and create waterline footing hazards.
 - Discussed benefits of:
 - Longer spans and fewer piers in the water for:
 - Navigation safety.
 - Improved hydraulics (less scour, fewer vortex/sediment issues).
 - Better aesthetics and fewer “roosting” and jump-off points.
 - Trapezoidal box girders (concrete or steel) that:
 - Provide cleaner lines and monolithic appearance.
 - Allow for waterline or mudline footings that reduce hazards.
 - Integration of public art, historic/heritage imagery, and environmental themes into pier wraps, monuments, and railing details (examples from Florida and Minnesota).
 - Extradosed bridges as a potential option:
 - Span “sweet spot” around 500–700 ft.
 - Could provide longer clear channels, distinctive visual profile, and opportunities for lighting and iconic identity.
 - Emphasized the need to discourage people from jumping from the footings and reduce “play platforms” by preferring mudline or simple waterline columns over large, exposed pier tables.
- **Key Discussion Points from Boards and Public**
 - Channel Alignment & Navigation Safety
 - Several charter captains and boat operators described:
 - Strong, shifting currents under the existing bridge.
 - Narrow spans increasing collision risk.

- Incidents of boats being struck or pinned while under tow or in heavy current.
- Fewer, wider spans to improve safety and reduce congestion.
- Exploring shifting the navigation channel slightly west, if feasible, to separate harbor ingress/egress from main channel boat traffic and reduce conflicts near Crab Island.
- Concern for Coast Guard access and potential federal constraints on moving the federal channel.
- **Bridge Height, Grade, and Speed**
 - Discussion of:
 - Minimum 65-ft clearance for Intercoastal standards; note that very few local vessels require more clearance.
 - Whether additional height is necessary vs. effects on approach grade and landing locations.
 - FDOT's typical maximum grades (around 6%, with tradeoffs for 18-wheelers and pedestrians).
 - Concerns:
 - The draft concept assumes a 45-mph design speed, though the corridor has long operated at 35 mph speeds.
 - A three-lane bridge with full shoulders risks encouraging high speeds into a pedestrian-heavy harbor district ("building a speedway").
 - Potential mitigation:
 - Use of lane narrowing and other subtle traffic-calming design features on the bridge.
 - Short-term possibility of striping only two lanes initially and dedicating extra width to bike/ped facilities until/if three lanes are required in the future.
- **Landings, Local Streets, and Property Constraints**
 - Significant concern about the Destin-side landing:
 - Early conceptual layouts reportedly showed the bridge landing south of McGuire's, potentially cutting off access from Calhoun and Sibert and pushing more traffic toward the Stahlman Avenue intersection.
 - Fear that this could create a "bridge city" scenario, where the bridge dominates and degrades the historic harbor fabric.
 - Discussion of:
 - City-owned property north of the bridge and need to consider future uses (landing, marina, or other public functions) in the bridge design.
 - Comparison to Brooks Bridge in Fort Walton Beach:
 - FDOT used limited landing space and avoided major right-of-way takings (like Publix shopping center), demonstrating how geometry can be constrained but still workable.

- Consensus that local knowledge of traffic patterns, harbor operations, and neighborhood streets must shape bridge design decisions.
 - **Funding, Timing, and PD&E Status**
 - PD&E reportedly initiated in 2023.
 - PD&E completion is currently expected around summer 2026, though some rescheduling has already occurred.
 - Update shared that a key PD&E milestone occurred in December 2024, with another major step planned for March/April 2026.
 - Important points:
 - Project is not yet funded; until funding is secured, construction is not guaranteed.
 - After PD&E, the project advances to FDOT’s programming and building list, where state and federal funding/politics become critical.
 - At some point, the city will need to engage legislative representatives to support funding requests and secure allocations.
 - **FDOT & Consultant Coordination**
 - PD&E consultant identified as HNTB, with contact Brandon Bruner, PE.
 - Members requested the following:
 - FDOT provide copies of any PD&E “deliverables” completed to date so the committee has a background understanding.
 - PD&E consultant team are invited to meet with the City’s bridge committee, once formed, to discuss concepts and expectations.
- **Proposed “Bridge Aesthetics/Design Committee”**
 - Mr. Tomasek recommended creating a consolidated committee to serve as a Bridge Aesthetics / Bridge Design Committee to:
 - Represent the three boards and the broader community.
 - Develop a project-specific Aesthetic Design Guideline document, including:
 - Key view sheds and vantage points (e.g., Duke and Destin, jetties, Noriego Point, harbor fleet, Crab Island, etc.).
 - Desired user experiences for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and boaters.
 - Safety priorities (during and after construction).
 - Preferred bridge types, structural characteristics, and aesthetic themes.
 - Advocate for a Level 3 aesthetic classification with FDOT.
 - Serve as an advisory body during procurement and construction, monitor changes and potential value-engineering that could erode aesthetic or functional goals.
 - Strong recommendation to require:
 - A “pass/fail” aesthetic gateway in the FDOT design-build procurement:
 - Competing design-build teams must demonstrate compliance with the City’s Aesthetic Design Guidelines.
 - The committee would review and approve or reject concepts against those guidelines.

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- Without such a gateway, aesthetics risk being treated as “recommendations” that may be discarded in a lowest-cost bid scenario.
- **Next Steps & Action Items**
 - **Council Resolution to Form Committee**
 - The City Attorney is tasked to prepare a resolution for City Council’s November 3 , 2025 City Council meeting to:
 - Formally create a bridge aesthetics/design committee (sometimes referred to as a “blue-ribbon panel”).
 - Define membership drawn from the Harbor CRA, Harbor and Waterways Board, and Public Works and Safety Committee.
 - Place the new committee under Sunshine Law and specify its scope.
 - **Board Appointments**
 - Each board/committee will, at its next regular meeting, nominate and appoint two members to serve on the new bridge committee.
 - The total membership will be kept to an odd number, with the presenter offering to serve as the “odd number” if appropriate.
 - **Contact with FDOT & PD&E Consultant**
 - City staff (City Engineer/Attorney) to:
 - Inform FDOT and HNTB that the city is forming a bridge committee.
 - Express the City’s expectation that the committee will:
 - Engage early with the PD&E team.
 - Provide stakeholder input on aesthetics, bridge type, view sheds, traffic impacts, and navigation issues.
 - Request existing PD&E deliverables (reports, concept layouts, etc.) for committee review.
 - Explore inviting HNTB/FDOT representatives to a future meeting to discuss the project in detail.
 - **Future Meetings**
 - Another bridge committee meeting is tentatively targeted for early January (date to be finalized once the council resolution is passed and members are appointed).
 - Staff will circulate the council-adopted resolution and confirm the next meeting date to all boards.
 - **Legislative Advocacy (Future)**
 - At later stages (post-PD&E), the city anticipates:
 - Engaging state and federal legislators to support funding.
 - Coordinating messaging on project importance, aesthetics, and economic/tourism impacts.
- **Sunshine Law Reminder**
 - City Attorney Kim Kopp reminded all board and committee members:
 - They are subject to the Sunshine Law.
 - Upon adjournment, members may not discuss the bridge project with each other outside of properly noticed public meetings.

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- After the November 3 council resolution, discussions will still be restricted for those appointed to the new bridge committee unless they are in a noticed meeting of that committee.
- Chair thanked Bradley Touchstone for his presentation and insights. The Board and Committee members, City staff, and the City Manager for their participation.

ADJOURNMENT:

With there being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Adopted and approved this _____ day of _____ 2025.

Chairman

Kim Montgomery, Deputy City Clerk