



December 15, 2021

Mr. Edward N. Austin  
Chief Engineer  
Alabama Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 303050  
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Mr. Austin:

Earlier today, the Eastern Shore MPO and Mobile MPO met to discuss the Bayway project and the critical importance to our region of formulating a plan to resolve the severe traffic congestion problem facing our area.

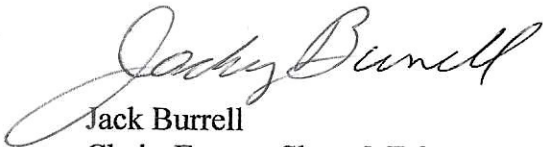
As you may know, over the past year local officials from both sides of Mobile Bay have been meeting to discuss this important matter and how we can develop a framework for a plan moving forward. Our two groups strongly agree that a plan must be developed now. We unanimously concur that any plan must include several important parameters:

- **Be comprehensive.** Our area cannot support a piecemeal plan that will take 25 years or more to complete. We would hope any plan would be completed in about five years once construction begins.
- **Free, no toll options.** We must have free, no toll options for passengers who do not wish to pay a toll. Unlike the previous plan, we strongly believe the Wallace Tunnel should be toll free as well as the Bankhead Tunnel, Africatown Bridge, and causeway. Under no circumstances should there be a toll on existing infrastructure that continues to be used.
- **Significant federal and state funding** should be made available to help pay for this project. We must move very quickly to protect \$125 million in federal money that has been dedicated to this project. We anticipate at least \$250 million to be contributed from the State of Alabama.
- **Toll fees should be significantly reduced.** Any tolls that must be charged to pay for infrastructure should be cut by more than half for cars and trucks from the previous plan. We recommend a maximum toll of \$2.50 or less on all passenger vehicles if a person chooses to use the new infrastructure, despite the fact that toll-free options remain available. Tolls for 18-wheeler-type trucks should be \$15 to \$18.

- **Local input.** We are forwarding to you other requests that have been developed by local officials. At the end of the day, local officials and local citizens must drive the process — not the state or federal government. Through our MPO process we will continue to be involved in this project moving forward and we strongly encourage continued public input throughout the process.

In the coming days we look forward to meeting with you and your staff to further discuss our recommendations and work together toward a plan that both solves this major congestion problem and has strong local input and support. We can assure you that all members of our MPOs stand ready to partner with you on this most important project, and we ask that you begin developing a plan for us to consider that incorporates the guidelines in the attached document, which has been reviewed and is supported by the Eastern Shore MPO and Mobile MPO.

Sincerely,



Jack Burrell  
Chair, Eastern Shore MPO



William S. Stimpson  
Chair, Mobile MPO



## **OUR BAYWAY: A BALDWIN-MOBILE FRAMEWORK FOR TRAFFIC RELIEF**

The Eastern Shore Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization recognize that the current system of tunnels and bridges that cross Mobile Bay and the Mobile River cause severe traffic congestion and significantly limits our region's ability to grow. The current crossings were designed to carry 35,000 cars and trucks each day; there are now nearly 100,000 cars and trucks crossing Mobile Bay each day. By increasing road capacity, Baldwin and Mobile Countians will see reduced traffic congestion, increased road safety, and improved hurricane evacuation.

As the local officials who will determine whether any solution moves forward, we want our position made clear to the public as well as to the state and federal governments.

First, we believe a long-term, comprehensive solution should happen now instead of a piecemeal, phased-in approach that will take 25 years to complete. The traffic congestion in our area will only get worse if we wait or do nothing.

Second, we believe both the state and federal governments should contribute significant funding to any solution. We expect \$125 million in federal funds will be completely expended on this project, and we expect all efforts will be made to maximize additional federal funding. In addition, we expect the state to contribute at least \$250 million to this project, which would make it one of the largest state projects ever.

Third, any final plan must include no-toll options for passenger vehicles. We dislike tolls and strongly prefer that the project be built without them, but existing funding sources are not sufficient to build the comprehensive solution our area needs. Our citizens must always have a choice to use free, no-toll options.

Fourth, any toll considered should not exceed \$2.50 for passenger vehicles. Tolls should only be levied on new infrastructure and toll revenue must pay down project debt. Tolling should end when original debt is paid, and any new federal or state funding should be used to pay down project debt in order to reduce tolling cost or duration. Revenue from this project should be used to pay for this project, not for other purposes.

Fifth, this must be a publicly owned project. No foreign or domestic corporation should own the infrastructure. Within these parameters, we support:

- A comprehensive solution that includes a new, six-lane Mobile River bridge, a new Bayway built to current safety and longevity standards, and appropriate interchanges in Baldwin and Mobile Counties that can be completed in five years.
- No-toll options for passenger vehicles crossing Mobile Bay with the causeway, the Wallace Tunnel, the Bankhead Tunnel, and the Africatown Bridge, at a minimum, remaining toll-free.
- Any passenger vehicle should be allowed to use all new infrastructure for a charge of \$2.50 or less rather than use the toll free options if they choose.
- Opportunities for citizens to provide input before the project moves forward.