

I-95 runoff concerns Norwalk Harbor Management Commission

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The Norwalk Harbor Management Commission plans to step up effort to get The Connecticut Department of Transportation to incorporate pollutant-trapping runoff measure into an upcoming overhaul of The Yankee ... [more](#)

NORWALK — The Harbor Management Commission isn't giving up on its battle to keep contaminants from running off the Yankee Doodle Bridge.

The bridge carries Interstate 95 over the Norwalk Harbor and is home to 92 bridge deck drains, many of which dump water directly into the harbor.

To the commission's dismay, the [Connecticut Department of Transportation](#) planned \$30 million overhaul of the bridge won't change that. As such, the commission plans to assemble evidence for

the DOT to consider.

“If the DOT was not agreeable and we had to argue with them about the source of the contamination and the sediment, we thought we could do an evaluation of the pollutants that come off automobiles,” said **Geoffrey Steadman**, planning consultant for the commission. “We could say, there's X amount of these pollutants that are generated each year on the I-95 bridge with the 150,000 cars that go over it” daily.

The commission initially planned to launch a \$6,000 study that would have included a computer model analysis of pollutants entering the river from the bridge. After discussion at City Hall on Wednesday evening, the commission reduced the scope to identifying and analyzing best practices used elsewhere.

For example, offset deck drains and raised scuppers may be incorporated into bridge decks to “effectively collect and convey runoff from small to mid-sized bridge projects.” Swales, detention basins and sand filters can be used near bridge abutments, according to a report commissioned by the **Transportation Research Board**.

Steadman said the commission plans to engage **Thomas Hart**, principal investigator for the commission's recent analysis of water quality data in the Norwalk River and watershed, in the forthcoming study.

“The first part is to identify the types of pollutants that are generated by automobiles,” Steadman said.

The commission believes those pollutants include oil, gasoline, asbestos, chromium, copper, nickel, rubber, zinc and lead.

In December, Mayor **Harry W. Rilling** wrote the DOT, urging the agency to support the harbor commission's effort to incorporate improved stormwater management practices into the bridge overhaul. He said contaminated sediment beneath the bridge “added substantially” to the cost of the federal dredging of the harbor in 2005.

“The city's cost-share for disposal of this materials was over \$200,000,” Rilling wrote. “At that time, CT DOT officials told the Mayor's Office and Harbor Management Commission that they would be

better able to address bridge-related storm water issues at such time as the bridge might be repaired.”

That time is now, according to Norwalk officials.

DOT has planned a \$30 million overhaul of the 911-foot, seven-span steel, multi-girder structure that was built in 1958 and is currently rated in fair to poor condition. The project is slated to begin in February 2017, according to the state agency.

Theodore H. Nezames, manager of bridges in DOT's **Bureau of Engineering and Construction**, responded to Rilling in a letter dated March 15.

“The Department reviewed the documents from the 2005 dredging and does not conclude that drainage from the bridge was a significant contributor to the contamination contained in the sediment,” Nezames wrote. “The contamination included PCBs and metals. Vehicle emissions and roadway oils and grease are not typical sources of documented contamination.”

Nezames continued that deck drainage configurations are not typically altered in bridge rehabilitation projects because the drainage is designed based on the existing deck slopes and profiles.

“For this bridge, a retrofit to outlet all drainage at grade at either end of the bridge would require multiple or large diameter pipes placed on a relatively shallow pitch within the existing superstructure framework,” Nezames wrote. “The shallow pitch would make the drainage pipes prone to clogging and could result in dangerous travel conditions.”

Norwalk officials on Wednesday evening expressed frustration with that stance. **Peter M. Johnson**, **Norwalk Shellfish Commission** chairman, found it difficult to believe solutions cannot be found.

“All we’re talking is runoff from a bridge,” Johnson said. “It’s not rocket science.”

Harbor Commissioner **Jan Schaefer** asked if it might be too late to get the state to rethink the project.

“If they’ve finished with the design, doesn’t that make it a moot point?” Schaefer asked.

Steadman said it is not too late to present the DOT with different ideas as the **Connecticut Department of Energy** and Environmental Protection must issue a permit for the bridge overall to begin. Input by the **Norwalk Harbor Management Commission** is part of that process, he said.

"It's not to cast blame on the DOT but to help initiate a solution to address these things," Steadman said. "Maybe they can't do anything, or maybe it's not cost-effective, but they should at least go through the exercise."

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