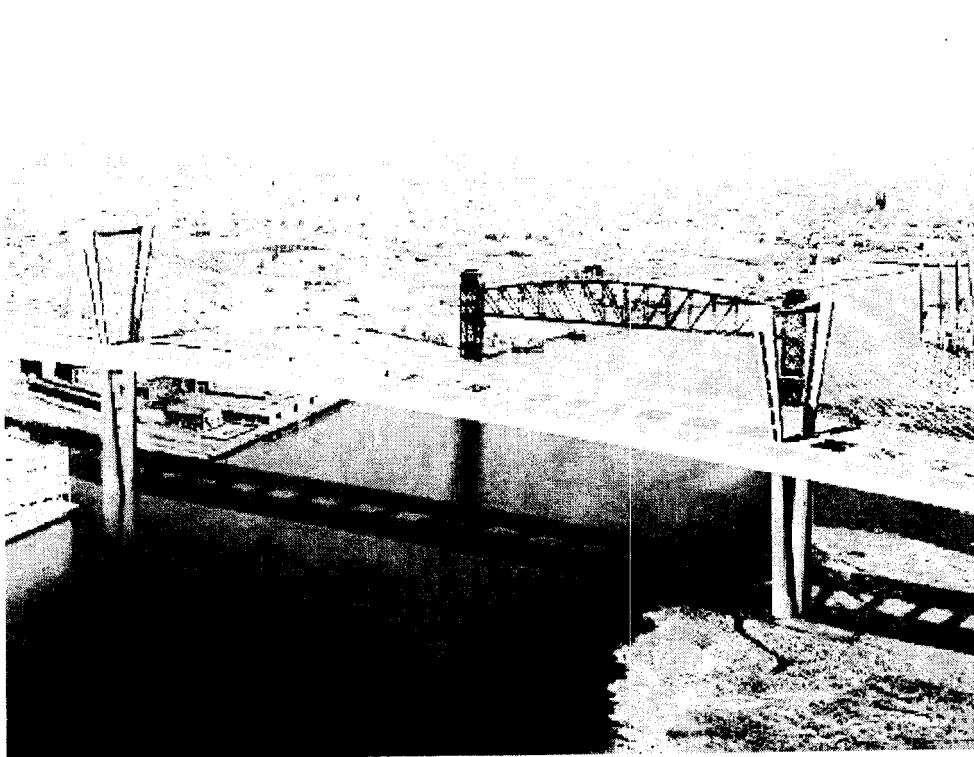


Wider lanes, pedestrian walkway & bike path all part of plan for new Goethals Bridge from S.I.

BY Barbara Ross

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PHOTO BY AP/WIDEWORLD



Above, an artist's rendition of the new Goethals Bridge. The Port Authority has partnered with a private company to finance the construction.

For the first time in more than 100 years, a private company will build, maintain and put up the money for a major bridge out of New York City.

Under the Port Authority's latest solution to the budget crunch, a private-sector company will erect a new Goethals Bridge linking Staten Island to New Jersey - and the PA will repay the company on a 30-year installment plan.

Experts predict the marriage with the private sector - actually a throwback to 19th century bridge-building - is the wave of the future.

"If this is successful, it could lead to more public-private partnership projects by the Port Authority and to state legislation that would allow more," says Richard Anderson, president of the New York Building Congress.

The PA spends most of its building budget on the World Trade Center while the bridge and tunnel tolls and airport fees it collects have diminished with the economic downturn.

Normally, the PA would sell bonds to pay for the bridge. Here, the agency will pay off the \$1 billion price tag over 30 years.

The winning private-sector consortium will plunk down at least 10% upfront, then get federal transportation bonds for the rest.

The PA will continue to set and collect the Goethals toll - now \$8 for eastbound cars.

"We are buying a bridge, paying for it over a period of time and getting a guaranteed warranty on it," PA spokesman Steve Coleman said.

If the winning bidder's performance doesn't meet PA standards, payments will be reduced.

The Goethals project does not involve a sale or lease, and the PA will own the new bridge.

Still, the project has created a buzz in the construction trades and political circles because it's the first major local bridge to be built in more than a century with private-sector money. A noteworthy example of private-sector bridge-building is the Brooklyn Bridge, constructed by the Roebling family.

State Sen. Charles Fuschillo (R-Nassau), chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, said the state's pathetic financial health means "many capital projects are going to need public-private partnerships."

Officials estimate the state needs \$250 billion in infrastructure improvements through 2030, and Gov.

Cuomo has signaled his support for private-sector help on that.

Last month, state Controller Thomas DiNapoli warned of the pitfalls to public-private projects.

"We have to ensure public assets are not squandered and taxpayers are protected," he said.

The PA - a bistate agency - doesn't need a change in the law, but the state would if it wanted to partner with the private sector, Anderson said.

The Goethals has been a festering problem, mostly because it's too small for its daily traffic.

The bridge's four 10-foot-wide lanes are inadequate for modern trucks and there are no shoulders. The new bridge will have six 12-foot-wide lanes, with shoulders.

A new 10-foot-wide pedestrian and bike walkway will grace the north side, and space in the center is set aside for future mass transit options like bus lanes or light rail.

After the new bridge opens in 2017, the old one will come down.