

Endangered Taxpayers

Everyone who arrives on Hatteras Island via the Bonner Bridge can recall the sight: just as you pass through the nature preserve onto Hatteras Island in Rodanthe, beautiful kites, sometimes hundreds at a time, dance in the sky over the Pamlico Sound. It's truly a breathtaking thing, the way they are all grouped there, and like an OBX sunset, the sight has become representative of vacationing here.

In a few years though, vacationers could arrive to Hatteras Island via a high-walled, chute-like bridge, making their first sight of the island a red light and gas station. They will miss the drive through the nature preserve, spotting the ocean through the dunes, and most importantly the first glimpse of Hatteras Island, complete with kites, one of the most beautiful views on earth.

Why? An argument has been raging for decades between environmentalist groups represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). SELC does not want people to access Hatteras Island via NC12 through Pea Island, "their" protected Nature Preserve that we (the people) maintain with federal tax dollars and enjoy as a public park. We also want reliable access on and off Hatteras Island. This is especially true of local residents who desperately need reliable access to jobs, medical appointments, and let's face it, all the stuff the rest of us non-locals take for granted. Then, there is NCDOT. They have the impossible job of making us all happy and the responsibility of listening to our feedback in order to spend our money properly.

Why all the controversy now? NCDOT, after being caught up in lawsuits for decades by SELC, recently settled one law suit with a promise. Their promise was to recommend the building of a \$200 Million dollar "Jug Handle" bridge over the Pamlico Sound at Rodanthe, rather than less intrusive, and less expensive alternatives that some argue could be less reliable over the next 60 years. Still others reasonably argue that access via bridge, especially during storms, is less reliable to begin with. NCDOT's "recommendation" is being pushed as a "done deal" and in fact, due process with regard to public hearings is being blatantly rushed. While arguments regarding the true nature of factors such as environmental impact and long-term reliability continue (and likely could for decades), the issue of government agencies overspending tax dollars "behind closed doors" is being quietly concealed. Worse, this issue has hemorrhaged tax dollars for years debating details like seaweed safety. Meanwhile, traffic on NC12 flows just fine for all but a few days per year during hurricanes. In fact, beach nourishment a few years ago has made access through the segment relative to this proposed bridge much more reliable than several hot spots South on NC12.

Any American, whether a local or property owner in Rodanthe or not, should be angry over this shameful waste of tax payers money, especially as the latest American Infrastructure Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has issued a D+ grade to our country's infrastructure. The ASCE estimates \$3.6 Trillion dollars in repairs, not new structures, is needed by 2020. Meanwhile, **NCDOT is quietly making promises to spend \$200 million on a single unnecessary bridge** because they are tired of fighting decades of frivolous claims made by the SELC.

Got an opinion? Get involved! Email: Save Our Sound OBX at saveoursoundobx@gmail.com or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/saveoursoundobx or www.sos-obx.org .