

Bridge2NoWhere in Orange Beach

900 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

November 11, 2018

Bridge2NoWhere in Orange Beach

Joe Emerson is a man of action. He made an activist's move over three years ago, establishing a Facebook Group, presently having 2660+ members called: End The Bridge2Nowhere (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/155706324781200/>). The group opposes an \$87 million state-funded Flyover Bridge (Diagram 1 below) west of the Foley Beach Express in Orange Beach.

The Flyover Bridge (Diagram 1) is scheduled for 2019, ostensibly alleviating tourist traffic, and providing a hurricane-evacuation route from Orange Beach and Gulf Shores. The Wolf Bay Bridge (Diagram 2) is another proposed project next to Doc's, but funded by the City of Orange Beach not the State of Alabama.

The two bridges have different funding. It is easy to confuse the two, being only a few miles apart on Canal Road. This piece is concerned with opposition to the Flyover Bridge. Although the Wolf Bay Bridge is mentioned, it is not the focus of any opposition in Orange Beach.

Joe's Facebook Group argues the taxpayer-funded Flyover Bridge is a misuse of the State of Alabama's infrastructure money.

According to a report by Apryl Marie Fogel in Alabama Today, the State of Alabama Transportation Department cannot explain how the decision was made; funding the ALDOT approved Flyover Bridge in Orange Beach with state taxpayer dollars, (<http://altdaily.com/archives/22630-governor-kay-ivey-needs-to-stop-john-coopers-bridge2nowhere>).

Mayor Tony Kennon of Orange Beach thinks Joe's group does not have all the facts, "...load up and come to a council meeting so that u can get the facts, the real truth and stop being educated into further ignorance by following this site," posted Mayor Tony Kennon on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/155706324781200/members/>).

Diagram 1: The Flyover Bridge will span the Intracoastal Waterway west of the Beach Express

Bridge2NoWhere in Orange Beach

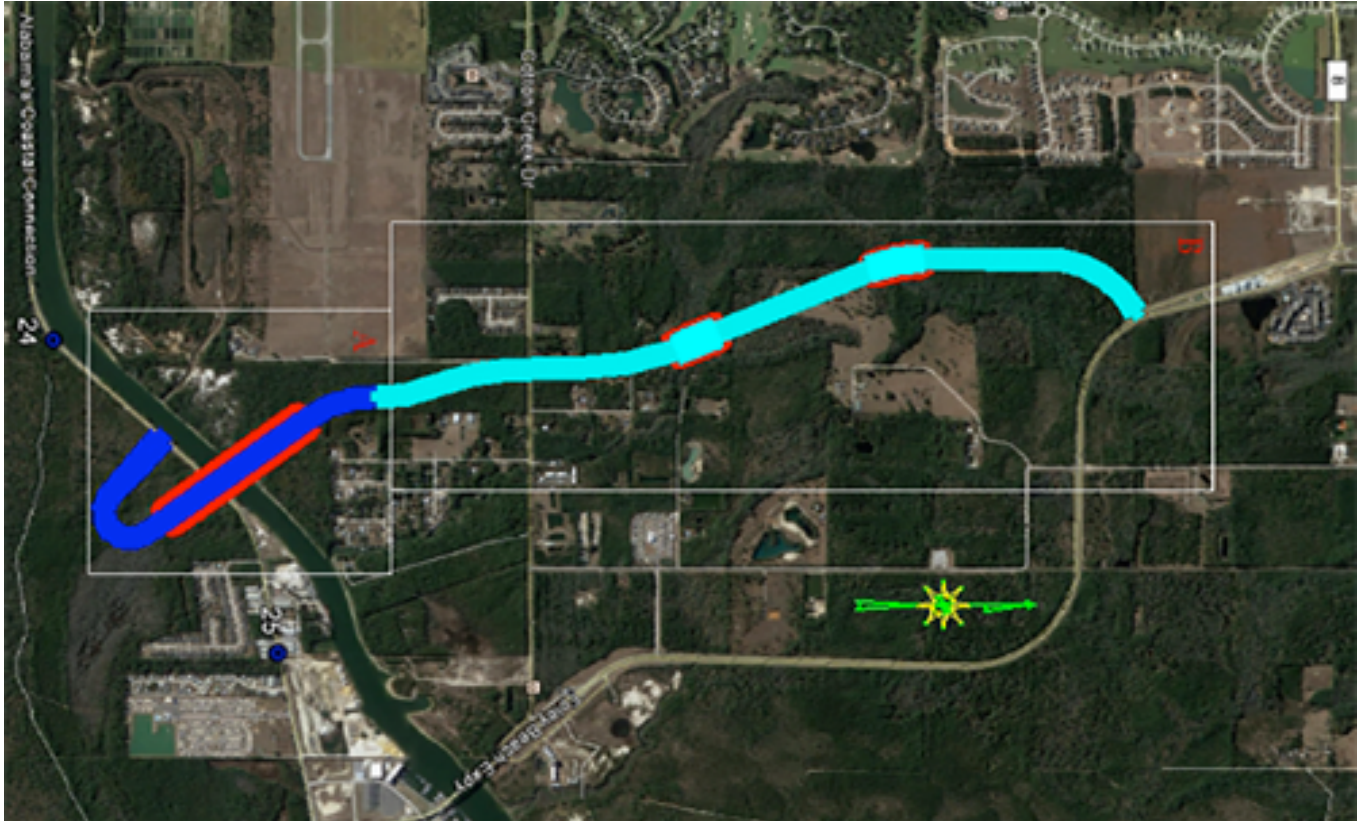


Diagram from ALDOT's Website October 2018: <https://rp.dot.state.al.us/WaterwayBlvd/>

Diagram 2: The Wolf Bay Bridge will span the Intracoastal Waterway by Doc's

Bridge2NoWhere in Orange Beach



Diagram from Mayor Tony Kennon's State of the City Presentation, May 2018

Public Meeting Notice: The City of Gulf Shores is hosting a comments meeting, as required by the Corps of Engineers, discussing the Flyover Bridge on November 15, 5 PM - 7 PM, in the Gulf Shores Activity Center, 260 Club House Drive, Gulf Shores, Alabama.

This meeting should clarify any doubts regarding the actual location of the proposed Flyover Bridge, allowing citizens to submit letters for or against the project. Send your email to: swinfo@dot.state.al.us.

"Right now, there is a proposal to take that damn flyover [bridge] out of our backyard [in Craft Farms]. Supposedly they are going to move the road further east closer to the Foley Beach Express. I don't have anything set in stone they're going to totally do away with the flyover," said Mike Powell in a report by the Lagniappe (<https://lagniappemobile.com/south-baldwin-residents-told-flyover-bridge-plans-changed/>).

"This bridge [Flyover Bridge] and roadway will be built," said Gulf Shores Mayor Craft at a Council Meeting, reported in the Mullet Wrapper (<http://mulletwrapper.net/gulf-shores-anticipates-state-building-new-waterway-bridge/>).

Bridge2NoWhere in Orange Beach

The Mayor's comments carry weight, summarizing the Public Hearing on November 15 as simply a formality by the Corps of Engineers. His comments essentially galvanize opponents of the Flyover Bridge with a mix of alarm and apathy. It seems the cities of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores have already decided to endorse the project.

Residents care about how their tax dollars are spent.

"I think a bridge [Flyover Bridge] west of the toll bridge would be a redundant idea, east of the bridge would be a better idea," says Jonathan Christie, an eight year resident of Orange Beach.

"Living in the Josephine community, I am afraid of the growth and everything that goes with that [Wolf Bay Bridge]," says Deputy Chief Greg Duck (retired), a veteran of the Orange Beach Police Department.

"Neither [bridge] makes sense to me," says Karen Clark, a 39-year resident of Orange Beach.

"It seems to me that bridge [Flyover Bridge] will only be another place that cars will be dumped on to Canal Road -- they'll then either have to go east or west just like they do coming off of the Foley Beach Express. That won't help the traffic problem on Canal. What I think is really needed is another road south to beach highway," says a resident of over 20 years, requesting anonymity.

The Facebook Group argues the Flyover Bridge is not needed, but others disagree.

"If we give them [tourists] another option [Flyover Bridge], a free option and potentially a quicker option than Highway 59, you're removing 20 percent of the traffic off of Highway 59. The largest pinch point on this island is that bridge [on Hwy 59]," says Blake Phelps, Gulf Shores Director of Economic Development, in a report by the Mullet Wrapper (<http://mulletwrapper.net/gulf-shores-anticipates-state-building-new-waterway-bridge/>).

One wonders if the sole motivation of the Flyover Bridge is to put the privately owned toll bridge (Foley Beach Express) out of business. Perhaps the Orange Beach City Council is planning to acquire the Toll Plaza in receivership for pennies on the dollar, giving residents a healthy return on their public-private partnership.

ENDS.