Maura Healey, Governor
Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Secretary & CEO
Jonathan L. Gulliver, Highway Administrator

massDOT
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Highway Division

August 9, 2024

United States Coast Guard
Donna A. Fisher
First Coast Guard District
Bridge Program Manager 1
South Street
New York, NY 10004

RE: NEW BEDFORD-FAIRHAVEN – BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT
ROUTE 6 OVER THE ACUSHNET RIVER BRIDGE NO F-01-002=N-06-001
CITY OF NEW BEDFORD AND TOWN OF FAIRHAVEN
BRISTOL COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS
BRIDGE PROJECT USCG PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION
CLEARANCE DETERMINATION REQUEST

Dear Ms. Fisher,

MassDOT requests the United States Coast Guard issue a preliminary notification clearance determination (PNCD) for the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge. Project information as gathered and presented in the attached Navigation Impact Report (NIR) proposes a horizontal clearance of 260 feet and a minimum vertical clearance of 138 feet in keeping with the surrounding vertical clearance restrictions of the Braga Bridge in Fall River and the Cape Cod Canal Bridges.

User and stakeholder outreach has been conducted to confirm that the proposed horizontal and vertical navigational clearances are acceptable to all. Letters for support from the local delegation of state legislators are appended to the NIR. MassDOT's letter communicating the process by which we have reached the decision to move forward with the Vertical Lift Bridge as the most appropriate replacement of the existing swing bridge is also appended in the NIR. Coordination with local officials for the Town of Fairhaven, City of New Bedford and the New Bedford Port Authority is ongoing and will continue through the final design process to ensure that the proposed bridge meets the needs of all users and stakeholders of the bridge.

The existing New Bedford-Fairhaven (NB-FH) Bridge is a four-lane swing span bridge on US Route 6 between County Street in the City of New Bedford and Adams Street in the Town of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, located at river mile 0. The bridge is a 288-foot swing truss span with 1 fixed girder span to the west and 4 fixed girder spans to the east spanning from Fish Island to Popes Island in New Bedford Harbor. The bridge provides two 95-foot navigational openings protected by a timber fender system and provides unlimited vertical clearance in the open position. The bridge provides 6 feet of vertical clearance at high tide in the closed position. The bridge opens hourly from 6:00 AM to 6:15 PM and on demand in the evening and overnight for an average of 4,941 openings each year.

The existing bridge was constructed in 1903 and remains in overall fair to good condition based on the most recent condition inspections. The swing span is a pin and eye-bar truss which has received periodic rehabilitations to address deficiencies to the fracture critical structure. The bridge has been deemed functionally obsolete based on its age, condition and current vehicular traffic. The mechanical and electrical portions of the swing span are in fair condition.

The project is needed due to the increasing unreliability of the movable span and the limitations the existing bridge places on navigational traffic through the bridge. The bridge divides New Bedford Harbor into north and south sections. The users of the north harbor have identified the existing twin 95-foot navigational width restricts current and future uses of the north harbor including ongoing and future redevelopment projects in the north harbor.

The project will maintain marine traffic at all times during construction except for a series of pre-planned short-term and weekend closures to navigation traffic. Alternatives studied options to maintain vehicular traffic on-site or accelerate construction activities by using a full vehicular detour. To maintain access for the stakeholders on Fish and Pope's Islands, the existing roadway profile cannot be increased significantly to improve the 6-foot closed vertical clearance.

The project is currently completing NEPA/MEPA Environmental Assessment and preliminary engineering studies for the replacement of the bridge. These studies and assessment are anticipated to be completed in early 2025.

A number of permits and certifications will be required for the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge Project. Additionally, substantial coordination with Federal, State, and local agencies will be required.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or comments regarding this request, please contact Joe Breen, Project Manager, at Joseph.P.Breen@dot.state.ma.us.

Sincerely,

Carrie Lavallee, P.E.
Deputy Administrator/Chief Engineer
MassDOT Highway Division

C: Michael O'Dowd, Director of Major Projects, MassDOT
Mary-Joe Perry, District 5 Highway Director, MassDOT