

## **The Precarious Gerald Desmond Bridge**

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The Gerald Desmond Bridge, as it currently sits, is a hazard to the health and economic wellbeing of the Long Beach community. It's a bridge so precarious that it wears what is commonly referred to as a "diaper," a net strung below it to catch dangerously falling concrete, and it must be dealt with before it costs lives or jobs.

Now is the time for Long Beach to replace the Gerald Desmond Bridge. With the help of federal, state and local funds, the Port of Long Beach is proposing to demolish the current bridge and replace it with a new, six-lane, cable-stayed span adjacent to its current site.

Built in 1968, the Gerald Desmond Bridge is outdated and, while safe for commuters to travel on, it is increasingly likely that Caltrans inspectors could uncover a structural deficiency as the bridge ages that would require it to shut down. The bridge already has a low "sufficiency rating" from Caltrans, receiving only 43 out of 100 points.

With millions of car, truck and port cargo trips annually on the bridge, the traffic now exceeds its operational capacity, posing safety, congestion and maintenance challenges. Distressed motorists and truckers on the current bridge can't pull over onto a shoulder, because there isn't one. Instead, they block an entire lane, causing congestion, making it dangerous to pass, and impeding emergency vehicles' ability to drive through. However, the new bridge will not only provide emergency lanes, but also three lanes in each direction, and a reduction in the bridge's steep grades to improve the traffic flow and safety.

Deteriorating and unsafe, the Gerald Desmond Bridge must be replaced to improve safety, accommodate future growth, and bring much-needed jobs to a region that has been in economic peril since before the recession.

In addition to moving commuter traffic, it is a vital component of the goods movement and transportation infrastructure in Long Beach and for the nation. Approximately 10 percent of the nation's cargo passes over the bridge now, but with California's port competitiveness threatened, we must invest now in trade infrastructure improvements that will make us more competitive as well as provide jobs to rejuvenate the economy. Building the new bridge will do both.

For the new bridge to improve both traffic safety and the Southern California economy, the Environmental Impact Review for the Gerald Desmond Bridge must be considered in a timely manner. We cannot afford more multi-year delays, like those that plague other port projects. Environmental objectives and reviews need to be consistent and

complementary to the wellbeing of our community and the growth of our economy– not an impediment to it.

Once approved, the Gerald Desmond Bridge Replacement Project would become one of the main economic engines in the area. This investment of \$1.2 billion into new bridge construction would ultimately generate \$2.8 billion in economic growth for the Southern California economy, and provide an average of 4,000 much-needed jobs per year for five years. The benefits would not just be the immediate and significant economic boost to Long Beach and the region from construction, but we will benefit for decades from the improved traffic safety, increased efficiency, and reduced congestion on the new bridge.

There is no doubt we need to replace the Gerald Desmond Bridge **now** for the safety and economic wellbeing of our community. Anything that requires a diaper definitely needs to be changed.