

## [Parkway span completion expected by October](#)

Posted: Friday, February 5, 2016 5:45 am

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**Ben Fogletto / Staff Photographer**

Work continues on the Great Egg Harbor bridge of the Garden State Parkway. Thursday January 21 2016 (The Press of Atlantic City / Ben Fogletto)

**UPPER TOWNSHIP** — The new Garden State Parkway bridge over Great Egg Harbor Bay will offer pedestrian access, wider lanes and an estimated century-long lifespan when it is finished in October.

The taller, wider span will replace one of two bridges crossing the nearly mile-wide bay between Somers Point and Upper Township.

Once it is completed, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority will demolish the old southbound bridge and rehabilitate the northbound span.

But construction will not affect travel this summer for the more than 3 million drivers who will cross the bridge.

Along with the \$130 million bridge replacement, the authority is making improvements at Exit 0 in Lower Township and widening the highway north of Exit 36, spokesman Tom Feeney said.

“That whole 80 miles of parkway will be like new when all of this is done,” he said.

Authority officials were pleased with the pace of construction.

“The project has been going great,” senior supervising engineer Frank Corso said. “The big challenges are the elements.”

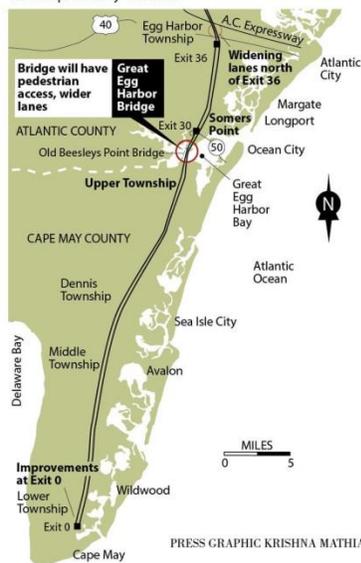
Last year’s cold winter slowed work, but this winter has been better, he said.

“It tends to even out, but not always,” he said.

Supervising Engineer Bill Wilson said the authority had several design goals in mind with the new span.

#### PARKWAY UPDATES: THE GREAT EGG HARBOR BRIDGE

Construction of the parkway bridge over the Great Egg Harbor Bay from Somers Point to Marmora is on schedule for completion by October.



“The main one was to eliminate structural deficiencies on the existing bridges,” he said. “The second was to help evacuation access.”

And the new span will have pedestrian access at either end for people who want to walk across the bridge or fish from it on the Somers Point side.

At the request of the U.S. Coast Guard, the bridge will provide 5 feet more clearance for boats using the navigation channel. This will not have any immediate effect but will help once the authority replaces the northbound bridge at some later date.

Meanwhile, the authority expects the remaining construction to have little effect on drivers, particularly during the summer tourism season.

The authority will dismantle what remains of the old Beesleys Point Bridge this year. And it will seek bids soon on a contract to rehabilitate the northbound span and demolish the old southbound one.

More than 6.8 million drivers paid a toll at the Great Egg Harbor Toll Plaza in 2014. Another 5 million paid the toll at the Cape May toll plaza.

Cape May County is almost exclusively a driving destination for the millions of visitors who spent \$5.8 billion here in 2014.

The parkway remains a critical lifeline for both residents and visitors, tourism officials said.

“The Garden State Parkway is really what opened up the resort communities to tourism when it was built in the 1950s,” said Diane Wieland, director of tourism for Cape May County.

“You saw an increase in visitors to the Wildwoods, Stone Harbor and Avalon and Sea Isle City after it was built.”

Tourism officials rely on traffic counts at the toll plaza as a barometer of how the season is going, she said.

Improvements to this route will make it easier for the 12.5 million visitors who come to Cape May County to explore, she said.

“Having lanes open during construction is important for us. We don’t want to hold up people. We’re also seeing the new overpasses helping to move traffic. Vacationers can get to their destinations faster,” she said.

In the past decade, Ocean City benefited from a new Ocean City-Longport Bridge, a new Route 52 causeway and now a new parkway bridge.

“It is so vital to us,” said Michele Gillian, director of the Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce. “Traffic numbers show how important it is to Ocean City and the rest of Cape May County.”

Gillian said she thinks people will take advantage of the new pedestrian access. The Route 52 causeway is a popular destination for walkers, runners and bicyclists.

“When people visit Cape May County, they want to be outside. They take advantage of these recreational activities,” she said.

The bridge is being built by the same joint venture of Wagman and R.E. Pierson Construction Co. responsible for the Route 52 causeway. But unlike the Route 52 project, the contractors will not get a bonus for early completion of the parkway bridge. The authority said its contract has provisions to collect damages if the completion date is postponed for an unacceptable reason.