

## Summary

With over 110 miles of scenic shoreline and beaches, Dare County (otherwise known as the Outer Banks) is home to approximately 33,000 year round residents and attracts over 300,000 visitors each week during the prime summer season. The unique geography of our barrier islands can be challenging to navigate and bridges are lifelines to numerous communities. One of the most iconic bridges on the Outer Banks, the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge, connects the 7 villages on Hatteras Island to the northern beach communities. Opened to traffic in 1963, the Bonner Bridge helped stimulate growth on Hatteras Island communities and is credited with helping establish Hatteras Island as one of the East Coast's premier beaches. Today, Hatteras Island is one-third of the economy in Dare County and plays a vital role in the county's and state's economics and tax base. However, the original architects and planners did not anticipate the decades of storms, shifting sands and turbulent currents degrading underwater spans. The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) worked hard to provide regular maintenance, spending an estimated \$50 million between 1987 and 1999 to repair the bridge and keep it open for locals and visitors. Bonner Bridge however, became notorious for closures. In 2007, it made national news when it received a safety rating of 2 out of a possible 100. In August 2007, the deadly collapse of a Minneapolis bridge raised new concerns Bonner Bridge could collapse into the tumultuous waters of Oregon Inlet. For over 30 years NCDOT struggled to get permitting for a new bridge - following a series of environmental studies and lawsuits from environmental groups. Finally, construction began in 2016 on the replacement. In response to the uncertainty over the bridge replacement and negative publicity regarding the safety of the bridge for drivers and mariners who travelled the waters beneath it, we saw an opportunity to inform residents and visitors on construction of the new bridge through a series of Bonner Bridge replacement project video updates. The video updates would also equip viewers with accurate timely details regarding the project, lane closures, and closures of navigation spans to mariners.

## Research

In order to create accurate reliable and engaging video updates, we conducted primary research by doing a thorough media analysis to get a snapshot of public perceptions. This included reviewing newspaper, television, social media and print features up to 15 years old regarding the safety of Bonner Bridge. This research indicated the need for transparency regarding project details. Constituents had become frustrated with a lack of transparency from NCDOT especially while the replacement project was in litigation. We realized to create effective videos, our staff needed to develop a close relationship with the project engineer to facilitate timely and accurate information from NCDOT for use in the video segments. Our government channel producer spent weeks researching the project through in depth phone interviews with NCDOT staff as well as PCL, the bridge construction company. During the interviews he inquired about the project scope, details, and timeline and the idea of a regular video series providing updates on the construction and its impacts was formed. We analyzed data from previous produced videos including average number of minutes watched and concluded a short production would be best suited for social media audiences.

## Planning

While conducting research, our CurrentTV producer established great relationships with the NCDOT project engineer, Pablo Hernandez, as well as staff from the construction company, PCL. After many discussions with NCDOT and PCL officials, they agreed to work collaboratively with our agency to produce the video updates. After a little safety training, our videographer was granted unprecedented access to a major construction site with the caveat both agencies had final approval over every video. Based off research interviews it was concluded a new video would be produced every 6 weeks or with the completion of major milestones. When the first few videos of this series were a success, we decided to use the video series as a tactic to increase social media followers for CurrentTV. The channel had recently undergone a rebranding and was creating all new social media channels. The goals of the campaign included;

- To increase awareness of lane and mariner navigation span closures at the project site for residents, business owners, nonresident employees, visitors and accommodation providers through a series of *Bonner Bridge Replacement Project Video Updates* resulting in at least 100,000 views of the entire series and 4,000 social media shares.

- To increase awareness of the Bonner Bridge Replacement Project among visitors during June 2017 by acquiring at least 10,000 views in the first 10 days of a video release as a result of location based social media marketing.
- To increase the number of followers of CurrentTV by acquiring at least 1,000 social media likes as a result of social media sharing of Bonner Bridge Replacement Project videos during the first year after the launch of the CurrentTV FaceBook page.

### **Implementation**

The Bonner Bridge Replacement Project Video updates have been ongoing and are still being produced today. Our government channel producer and videographer coordinated with NCDOT engineers and scheduling shoot dates and locations. Sometimes leaving to catch a boat at the crack of dawn and other times filming in the middle of the night - because of the trusting relationship established between agencies, our videographer was granted unprecedented access to the construction site. The relationships also resulted in being given access to internal aerial footage shot for agency use for use in the video. To reach our goals - with the release of each video update, we analyzed data from previous video releases and making changes to targeting in social media advertising and even the length of the videos themselves. All of the video production was produced in-house. There was no budget available for this project although, we did have to purchase a hard hat and safety vest for our videographer. When CurrentTV launched their FaceBook page in April 2017, we began using the video updates as a tool for attracting followers to the page. After the great success with our social media goals throughout 2017, in March 2018 we decided instead of embedding the video within FaceBook we would share a link to the video embedded on CurrentTV's website. This resulted in the lowest number of FaceBook views, reactions, shares and comments since the video series began with only 56 users clicking through to the website. Since then we have gone back to our original strategy. From January 2017 to June 2018, the Bonner Bridge Replacement Project Video Updates were viewed 221,293 times. The videos were shared on YouTube and FaceBook over 5,000 times. We exceeded our goal of

## Bonner Bridge Replacement Video Update Links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bS5CfASblxo&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBkV4coQorQ&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXENk8l1n14&feature=youtu.be>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQjgtw4k\\_aY&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQjgtw4k_aY&feature=youtu.be)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD4cSa\\_F5Ag&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD4cSa_F5Ag&feature=youtu.be)