

# McGreevey finds \$135M for new Driscoll Bridge

Turnpike Authority to fund Parkway span

BY JOE MALINCONICO  
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

In a unique deal brokered by Gov. James E. McGreevey, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority will kick in \$135 million to help officials at the Garden State Parkway build a new span for the Alfred E. Driscoll Bridge over the Raritan River.

Rebuilding the Driscoll Bridge — used by 80 million vehicles a year — has been at the top of the Parkway supervisors' wish list for years, but officials had been unable to figure out how to finance the massive project without in-

creasing highway tolls.

But state officials announced an agreement yesterday to pay for the project in Middlesex County by using money from the Turnpike, which is flush with extra cash after increasing tolls in 2000, with another increase planned in 2003. Officials said they were justified in using Turnpike money on the Parkway job because about 25 percent of vehicles on the Driscoll Bridge are heading to or from the Turnpike.

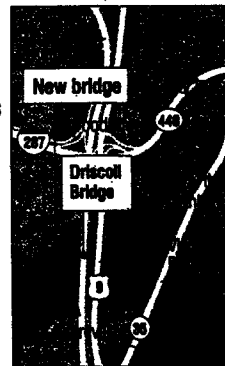
The Turnpike money would

## New span across the Raritan river

	NO. OF LANES	WIDTH OF LANES	SHOULDERS
Driscoll (currently)	12	10 ft.	No
New bridge (2005)	7	11 ft.	Yes
Rebuilt Driscoll	8	11 ft.	Yes

The Driscoll will remain partially open when it is rebuilt after the new bridge is completed.

THE STAR-LEDGER  
 SOURCE: New Jersey Highway Authority



## Turnpike Authority funding new bridge

cover most of the \$175 million price tag for the new span. Construction would begin this summer and be completed in 2005, officials said. Under a second phase, costing \$50 million, the Parkway would rebuild the existing bridge, which is 48 years old and has had chunks of concrete fall off in recent years.

"The existing bridge is clearly structurally deficient and functionally obsolete," McGreevey said. "Replacing this bridge would prevent accidents while providing congestion relief for the operators of 80 million vehicles that use the bridge a year."

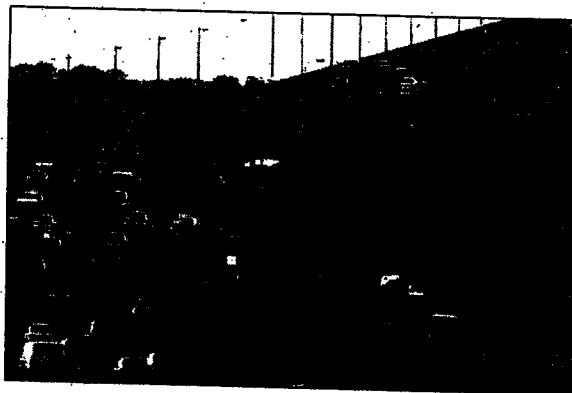
Once both phases are completed, the two bridges will carry eight lanes of traffic northward and seven toward the south — compared with six lanes in each direction now. Also, the new bridges would include shoulders, for emergency use, something lacking on the existing span.

Officials said the extra lanes will reduce some of the bottlenecks at the bridge.

McGreevey touted the deal as "an unprecedented level of collaboration" between the agencies that run the Turnpike and Parkway. Officials said the agreement illustrated the benefits that eventually may come from the Governor's plan to consolidate the agencies that run the Turnpike, Parkway and Atlantic City Expressway.

"For too long, there has not been enough of a unified vision," state Transportation Commissioner James Fox said.

The Driscoll Bridge project had



2000 STAR-LEDGER FILE PHOTO

Thanks to a \$135 million infusion from the Turnpike Authority, the Driscoll Bridge, which handles 80 million vehicles a year, will be rebuilt.

stalled because of state officials' reluctance to increase Parkway tolls. Fox said the financing deal unveiled yesterday negated the need to raise tolls to pay for the project.

The announcement drew praise even from groups that tend to find fault with the state highway hierarchy.

"The actual idea for the Turnpike to pay for the Parkway's bridge makes more sense than some of the other proposals for the use of Turnpike money," said Steve Carrellas, coordinator of the New Jersey chapter of the National Motorists Association.

"With this bridge only a few miles south of the Parkway's connection to the Turnpike, this serves Turnpike users who connect to the Parkway," he said. "With the new span to become the southbound bridge, there will be an even greater impact for Turnpike users. The summertime backup after leaving the Turnpike tolls in Woodbridge to head south on the Parkway will be relieved with the greater capacity of the new bridge."

Turnpike Executive Director

Michael Lapolla said none of the major projects planned for the highway would be affected by the shift of \$135 million to the Parkway.

The Turnpike will tap three sources for the \$135 million. About \$46 million will come from a debt reserve fund. Additionally \$44 million will be diverted from the Turnpike's regular payments into the state's Transportation Trust Fund in 2004 and 2005. Finally, a \$51 million supplemental capital fund, normally used to pay for medium-size construction projects, would provide the rest.

The Parkway, meanwhile, will tap its capital project fund for \$40 million over the next three years to come up with its share of the \$175 million first phase. Officials said they were not sure whether the highways would share the cost of the \$50 million second phase or where that money would come from.

"We'll find that money somehow, some way," Fox said.

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## Plan for new bridge will ease drive to shore

### Span to double number of parkway lanes

By PAT R. GILBERT  
STAFF WRITER

Construction will begin in mid-summer on a new \$175 million Driscoll Bridge for southbound traffic, the first phase in a plan that will double traffic capacity on a major link for New Jersey shore-bound drivers and commuters.

The new bridge on the Garden State Parkway, expected to be finished in 2005, will be financed un-

der a unique funding pact that relies on the New Jersey Turnpike Authority to foot most of the tab. The rest will come from the New Jersey Highway Authority and the state's general fund.

Under the second phase of the total \$230 million plan, the existing Driscoll Bridge will be reconstructed and used for northbound traffic. That job is expected to cost \$50 million of the total, and is es-

## Bridge: New span for parkway

timated to be finished by 2009.

Transportation Commissioner James P. Fox said there will be no reduction in travel lanes during construction because the new bridge will be built next to the existing span.

"Repairing and replacing the bridge will reduce accidents while providing congestion relief for the 80 million vehicles that use the bridge every year," said Governor McGreevey, who announced the plans Monday.

Located over the Raritan River in Middlesex County, the existing 12-lane bridge has fewer lanes than approaches, which creates an hourglass effect that is a larger source of congestion for shore traffic than the Raritan toll plaza at the base of the bridge.

When both phases are complete, both bridges will be reconfigured to provide eight wider travel lanes northbound, seven lanes southbound, and shoulders in both directions.

Built in the 1950s, the nearly mile-long Driscoll Bridge is considered structurally deficient and functionally obsolete. It has 10-foot lanes and no shoulders, with difficult merges onto major highways, including Route 440, which leads to Route 287.

**"Repairing and replacing the bridge will reduce accidents while providing congestion relief for the 80 million vehicles that use the bridge every year."**

GOVERNOR MCGREEVEY

"We know more capacity is needed," said Steve Carrellas, state chapter coordinator of the National Motorists Association. "I get to watch the northbound traffic every morning, and I've also watched on summer Fridays when the traffic tries to get off the turnpike [at Interchange 11] onto the parkway, and it's backed up. The extra capacity will help."

McGreevey said the plan marks a major step in interagency cooperation. It also is likely to spare drivers toll increases on the cash-poor Garden State Parkway because it lacked the money on its own to pay for the bridge project — its largest capital construction program.

"There's no need for any toll in-

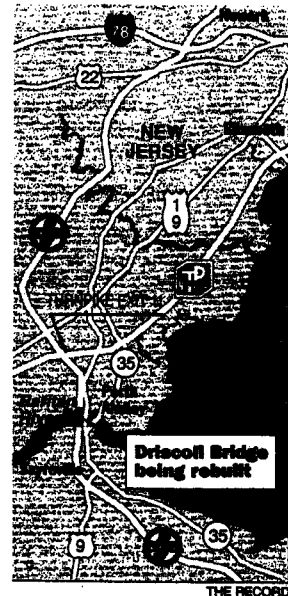
crease on any road because the money is there," Fox said.

The money is identified for the first phase of the project, but not the second phase.

"We're working on that," said Fox, "but we can get the bulk of [the project] done. We'll find that money somehow, somewhere. We have four years to do it."

The first phase includes \$40 million from the Highway Authority, which runs the Garden State Parkway, and \$135 million from the Turnpike Authority, with \$91 million coming from its general capital reserve funds. The remaining \$44 million comes from the Turnpike Authority's annual payment to the Transportation Trust Fund for 2004 and 2005. But the state's general fund will repay the Trust Fund for those two years.

"The idea of money coming from the general fund makes perfect sense because we've always said taxes and fees by motorists have been going into the general fund," Carrellas said. "So we're happy to hear those taxes and fees are coming back. But you kind of scratch



your head. Will the governor be accountable to make sure that that money is there at that late date?"

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