



PRESS RELEASE

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DRBA Celebrates Completion of Ship Collision Protection System and 75th Anniversary of the First Span of the Delaware Memorial Bridge

NEW CASTLE, Del. - On Wednesday, August 12, 2026, the Delaware River and Bay Authority (DRBA) officials joined with federal, state, and local officials along with local community, business and civic leaders to celebrate two significant milestones: the recently completed, innovative \$89 million Ship Collision Protection System (SCPS) alongside the 75th anniversary of the First Span of the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The ceremony, which more than 200 people attended, took place at Veterans Memorial Park in New Castle, Delaware, adjacent to the new Wall of Remembrance.

The event featured two video compilations, one showing a time lapse video of the construction of the SCPS that protects the critical twin-span crossing for generations to come while the second honors three-quarters of a century of regional connectivity and economic growth.

"Completing this Ship Collision Protection System ensures that this iconic structure remains safe, resilient, and fully protected for the millions of travelers and commercial carriers who depend on us every single day," said **Joel Coppadge, Executive Director of the DRBA**. "As we reflect on 75 years of connecting our states and fueling regional commerce, this investment guarantees the Delaware Memorial Bridge will continue to serve our communities safely for decades to come."

"The Delaware Memorial Bridge is a vital economic lifeline for the entire mid-Atlantic region," said **U.S. Senator Chris Coons**. "I'm proud to continue working to secure federal investments like the \$22.25 million BUILD grant that will modernize the bridge and secure it against potential ship collisions so that we can protect not only the millions of commuters who cross it each year, but also the supply chains that keep our regional economy moving forward."

"The Delaware Memorial Bridge serves as one of the gateways to the First State. It is a critical piece of infrastructure for the economy of our state and region, and I'm proud to celebrate its 75th anniversary," said **U.S. Senator Blunt Rochester**. "As regions across the country look to

fortify their roads and bridges, the unveiling of the bridge's new ship collision protection system is an important step toward ensuring the bridge is prepared to take on the challenges of the next 75 years."

"For 75 years, the Delaware Memorial Bridge has been more than a fixture of our skyline — it has been a vital link for our regional economy, connecting communities, families, and commerce," **said U.S. Representative Sarah McBride**. "As we celebrate this anniversary, we're also marking the completion of the new Ship Collision Protection System. Thanks in part to federal funding, this investment will help protect one of our region's most critical transportation links, strengthening the bridge's resilience and ensuring it can continue safely and reliably connecting our communities and supporting our economy for generations to come."

To protect the structural integrity of the bridge from larger, commercial vessels, the DRBA successfully completed the instillation of eight massive, solid-fill dolphin cells— each measuring 80 feet in diameter. The \$89 million SCPS project reached substantial completion in late 2025 and was supported by a \$22.25 million U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant.

A healthy, reliable infrastructure network is vital for economic growth and prosperity. Millions of people rely on DRBA transportation facilities, most notably the vital Delaware Memorial Bridge, for the transport of goods and services, family vacations, or daily work commutes.

75 Years of Growth and Regional Economic Prosperity

The story of the Delaware Memorial Bridge began in April 1945 when construction was authorized to build the first bridge connecting Delaware and New Jersey. Although initial 1932 estimates for a crossing were \$12 million, final construction costs for the single, four-lane suspension bridge totaled \$44 million. The landmark structure officially opened to paying traffic at 12:01 a.m. on August 16, 1951, when Omero C. Catan of Teaneck, New Jersey, paid the very first toll.

Within five years of opening, annual traffic reached nearly 8 million vehicles, which was almost double original projections. To manage this unprecedented volume, a second identical span opened in 1968, making the crossing the world's second longest twin suspension bridge. Today, the bridge records approximately 50,000 tolls per day (collected southbound) and carries an estimated 100,000 daily vehicles, translating to more than 36 million vehicles annually. Since its inception, the Delaware Memorial Bridge Twin Span has handled nearly 2 billion vehicles, serving as a massive economic catalyst for the region.

Two long-time E-ZPass discount plan holders who rely on the crossing daily received special recognition. Delaware Governor Matt Meyer and U.S. Senator Chris Coons presented Dorothy

Ray of Newark, Delaware, with a ceremonial check for \$250 that will be credited to her E-ZPass accounts. Marta Smith of Pennsville, New Jersey, received her \$250 prize that will be credited to her account from New Jersey State Senator John Burzichelli and New Jersey Assemblyman David Bailey, Jr.

During the ceremony, officials also dedicated a flowering Sweet Tea tree in honor of six construction workers who tragically lost their lives while building the First Span: James Austin White, William Church, George Fisher, Mack Smith, David Sarvetick, and Owen P. Stuckley. The Sweet Tee Tree will be planted this fall when the temperatures and weather conditions are more hospitable and conducive to the tree's initial adaptation.

"Known for its endurance, deep roots, and tough, weather-resistant bark, the Sweet Tea represents nobility, perseverance, and strength—the very qualities exhibited by these workers," **said Joel V. Coppadge, Executive Director.** "Just as their sacrifice built something lasting that stands against time and tide, this sapling will stand firm, bloom each summer, and grow stronger with every passing year."

About the Delaware River and Bay Authority

The DRBA, a bi-state governmental agency created by Compact in 1962, owns and operates the Delaware Memorial Bridge, the Cape May- Lewes Ferry, and the Forts Ferry Crossing. The DRBA also manages corporate and aviation properties through its economic development powers - two airports in New Jersey (Millville Airport and Cape May Airport) and three in Delaware (New Castle Airport, Civil Air Terminal and Delaware Airpark). All DRBA operating revenues are generated through the bridge, ferry and airport facilities. For more information, visit www.drba.net.