

bridges crossing the AICW, in order to balance the needs of mariners and motorists transiting in and around Chesapeake. Bridge openings at peak traffic hours during the weekdays cause considerable vehicle traffic backup. The City of Chesapeake is seeking to reduce the amount of vehicular traffic congestion during the weekday morning and evening rush hours. The City of Chesapeake is also seeking to change two of their drawbridges; Dominion Boulevard and Centerville Turnpike bridges, from opening on signal to opening on the hour and half hour between peak traffic hours. The following bridges would be affected by this proposal:

#### *Jordan Bridge*

The current regulations require the Jordan Bridge across the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, at AICW mile 2.8, to open on signal at any time for public vessels of the United States, vessels in distress, commercial vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas or other harmful substances, and commercial and/or public vessels assisting in any emergency situation. From 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. and from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays, the bridge need not open during rush hour closure periods for the passage of certain recreational craft or commercial vessels and it need not open during rush hour restrictions for commercial cargo vessels, including tugs and tows, unless 2 hours advance notice has been given to the Jordan Bridge Office at (757) 545-4695. At all other times, the draw opens on signal.

The City of Chesapeake, through a Resolution submitted by the Chesapeake City Council, has requested changes in the regulations governing the Jordan Bridge. They requested a change in the hours the draw would open during the morning and evening rush hours to 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and to 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. This change would extend the morning closure period by one hour and the evening closure period by a half hour. The provision allowing vessels in distress, public vessels of the United States, and commercial and public vessels assisting in any emergency passage through the bridge at any time would be removed since this provision is addressed in 33 CFR 117.31. Vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas and other hazardous materials would still have unimpeded access through the bridge at any time.

The proposal to continue to allow vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas or other hazardous materials unimpeded

access through the bridge at any time was made based on the hazards involved in shipping liquefied flammable gas and to maintain safety along the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River. The Coast Guard Marine Safety Office, Hampton Roads, issues safety zones each time liquefied flammable gas is transported through the Port of Hampton Roads.

Since tugs and tows have no place to tie up in the proximity of the bridge to wait for a bridge opening, it is proposed to continue to include them in the 2-hour advance notice requirement as well as commercial cargo vessels requiring high tide to transit. During the spring and fall months, the flow of recreational vessels is constant due to vessel owners that are referred to as "snow birds". Owners of these recreational vessels are either transiting north to south towards a warmer climate in the fall or south to north towards a cooler climate in the spring and this can result in excessive bridge openings during rush hour due to their numbers. The proposal to continue to restrict recreational vessels during the morning and evening rush hour is based on the need to limit the openings of the draw during these hours to aid in relieving highway congestion currently being experienced at this bridge.

The request for the change to the regulations is based on increasing area highway congestion, the lengthy delays to cross bridges due to area growth that is resulting in more motorists on the highways. The area's bridges and bridge-tunnel complexes are experiencing increasing congestion which can be partially remedied by extending the bridge closure periods during peak traffic hours to help keep the main highway arteries free flowing. The Jordan Bridge is a vital link between the cities of Portsmouth and Chesapeake used widely by motorists that work at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, other Federal agencies located within the shipyard as well as within Portsmouth, and other industries and businesses in Portsmouth and Chesapeake.

The City's request to extend the morning and evening hour closure periods Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays, is based on the need to reduce traffic congestion. The current schedule has been successful; however, it needs to be expanded since the last time the regulations governing the operation of the Jordan Bridge were updated was in the summer of 1990. A Final Rule (58 FR 16122) was published March 25, 1993. Since then the current closure periods have not been sufficient

to accommodate the increase in vehicular traffic crossing this bridge.

Weekday vehicular traffic submitted by the City of Chesapeake revealed that approximately 825 vehicles cross over the bridge during the morning rush hour and approximately 2500 cross over the bridge during the evening rush hour.

The Coast Guard studied the City of Chesapeake's drawlogs for the Jordan Bridge for 2001, Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays, between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. to determine how often the draw opened for the passage of vessels. The logs revealed that during the requested extended rush hour closure periods, the draw opened a total of 637 times for 2001. April had the highest number of openings; 92 times during the morning and 72 times during the evening. Recreational vessels requesting opening during the requested hours of extension totaled 30 for May 2001, 365 for October 2001, and 167 for November. Based on the frequency of bridge openings and the increase in vehicular traffic, the City of Chesapeake's request to extend the morning and evening rush hours appears reasonable.

#### *Gilmerton Bridge*

Current regulations require the Gilmerton Bridge across the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, AICW mile 5.8, to open on signal at any time for public vessels of the United States, vessels in distress, commercial vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas or other harmful substances, and commercial and/or public vessels assisting in any emergency situation. From 6:30 a.m. to 8 a.m. and from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays the bridge need not open during rush hour closure periods for the passage of certain recreational craft or commercial vessels and need not open during rush hour closure periods for commercial cargo vessels, including tugs, and tugs with tows, unless 2 hours advance notice has been given to the Gilmerton Bridge at (757) 545-1512. The draw opens on signal at all other times.

The City of Chesapeake, through a Resolution submitted by the Chesapeake City Council, has requested changes in the regulations governing the Gilmerton Bridge. They requested a change in the hours the draw would open during the morning and evening rush hours to 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and to 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. This change would extend the morning closure period by a half hour and extend the evening closure period by a half hour. The