

provision allowing vessels in distress, public vessels of the United States, and/or 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 be given access through the bridge at any time.

The proposal to continue to provide vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas or hazardous materials unimpeded access through the bridge at any time with no restrictions 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 Hampton Roads Marine Safety Office issues safety zones each time a liquefied flammable gas carrier is transiting the Port of Hampton Roads. Also, since tugs, and tugs with 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 provision, 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 "snowbirds". 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 closure periods due to their numbers. The proposal to expand the closure periods for 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 and lengthy delays across bridges due to area growth that is resulting in more motorists on the highways. The Gilmerton Bridge is another vital link between the cities of Portsmouth and Chesapeake and is 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 closure periods Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays, is based on the need to reduce traffic congestion. November 1994 was the last time the regulations governing

the operation of this drawbridge were updated. A Final Rule (60 FR 37365) was published July 20, 1995. Since 1994, area growth has continued and the current closure periods are not sufficient to accommodate the increase in vehicular traffic crossing this bridge. Weekday vehicular traffic counts submitted by the City of Chesapeake revealed that during the morning rush hour, approximately 2200 vehicles cross the Gilmerton Bridge. During the evening rush hours, approximately 3000 vehicles cross over this bridge.

The Coast Guard studied the City of Chesapeake's drawlogs for the Gilmerton Bridge for the year of 2001, Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays, between the hours of 8 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. to 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 half-hour extension of the morning and evening rush hours, the draw opened a total of 223 times in the morning and 235 times in the evening. The highest number of openings occurred during the spring months and the fall months. The lowest openings occurred in February when vessel traffic is at its lowest due to the cold weather. Based on the number of vehicles that cross this bridge during the morning and evening rush hours and the frequency of bridge openings during the same time, the City of Chesapeake's request to extend the morning and evening rush hours by a half-hour appears reasonable.

Dominion Boulevard

Current regulations require the Dominion Boulevard Bridge across the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, AICW mile 8.8, to open on signal except from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays, the drawbridge need not open for the passage of recreational vessels. Vessels in an emergency involving danger to life or property shall be passed at any time.

The City of Chesapeake, through a Resolution submitted by Chesapeake City Council, has requested changes in the regulations governing the operation of the Dominion Boulevard Bridge also known as the Steel Bridge. This request would change the rush hour restrictions to 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and to 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. This change would extend the morning rush hour by a half hour at the beginning and reduce it by one half hour at the end. The evening rush hour would begin an hour later and last an hour later. A new provision would be added to change on demand openings to opening on signal

on the hour and half-hour, between 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. The provision to allow vessels in an emergency involving danger to life or property would be removed since this provision is addressed in 33 CFR 117.31. The City of Chesapeake also requested that new provisions be included allowing vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas or other hazardous materials access through the bridge at any time, tugs and tugs with tows and commercial cargo vessels access through the bridge with a 2-hour advance notification, and delaying the draw for 10 minutes for an approaching vessel or vessels waiting to pass through the drawspan. Recreational vessels would continue to be subject to the closure periods during the morning and evening rush hours. At all other times, the draw would open on signal.

The proposal to allow vessels carrying liquefied flammable gas or hazardous materials unimpeded access through the bridge at any time with no restrictions 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 a liquefied flammable gas carrier is transiting the Port of Hampton Roads. Also, since tugs and tugs with 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 provision, 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 referred to as "snowbirds". 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 restrictions 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 and lengthy delays at the Dominion Boulevard Bridge. The Dominion Boulevard Bridge is one of the vital links to those who live and work in the Great Bridge area of Chesapeake. Bridge openings during rush hours severely disrupt vehicular traffic. The need to extend bridge