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LOCAL NEWS

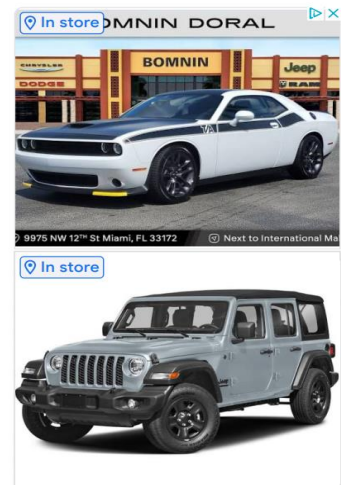
## Prospective builder of new Key Bridge envisions span as ‘symbol of renaissance’



Maryland officials are reviewing proposals from potential builders of the next Key Bridge. Webuild, an Italian civil engineering company, has pitched its concept for a new cable-stayed bridge, including this screenshot of a rendering in a news release. (Webuild/Handout)



By HAYES GARDNER | hgardner@baltsun.com  
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A new Francis Scott Key Bridge would be cable-stayed, have support piers far from each another to reduce the risk of shipping accidents and serve as a “symbol of renaissance” for Baltimore, according to a plan outlined by one of the prospective builders.

Webuild, an Italian industrial company, and its U.S. subsidiary, Lane Construction, are among the entities that have teamed up to submit proposals to rebuild the Key Bridge. The builder of the new span, who will also be in charge of demolishing the remaining portions of the former bridge, will be selected by the Maryland Transportation Authority by the end of the summer.

While other potential builders declined to comment as to whether they submitted a proposal by the June 24 deadline for the project, expected to cost \$1.7 billion, Webuild released a “pro bono” vision for the span in May. The original Key Bridge, opened in 1977, was decimated by a cargo ship on March 26, collapsing the structure and killing six road maintenance workers.

“It’s more than a simple infrastructure collapse,” Webuild CEO Pietro Salini told The Baltimore Sun in a video interview from Rome. “It’s like having a scar into the flesh of the people, the inhabitants.”

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He did not share specifics of the team’s proposal – “It’s just more elegant not to go into details,” he said – but reaffirmed that a cable-stayed bridge is the “optimal solution.” Cable-stayed bridges can be more cost-effective than other options and their design places support piers farther apart from one another than other types. That means the piers are farther from a potentially wayward vessel. Such a design has been the consensus prediction among bridge experts.

During a U.S. Senate hearing Wednesday, Maryland Secretary of Transportation Paul Wiedefeld discussed the potential of building piers farther from the shipping channel – and in waters that are 10 to 20 feet deep, providing natural protection from large ships that often require 30 or more feet of depth.



Webuild and Lane recently launched an American ad campaign, placing a full-page ad in Wednesday’s editions of The Sun with the tagline “webuild what America needs” alongside a picture of a cable-stayed bridge the company worked on. That structure, the Long Beach International Gateway Bridge, opened in 2020 in California.

Salini emphasized his company’s history in the Sun interview, noting that Lane Construction was established in the U.S. in 1890. In recent years, Webuild worked on a project to expand the Panama Canal and helped rebuild a fallen bridge in Genoa, Italy, in 15 months.



Pietro Salini is CEO of Webuild, one of the companies that has submitted a proposal to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge. The Maryland Transportation Authority will select a builder by the end of the summer. Photo provided by Webuild.

In the past century, Webuild Group was responsible for more than 630 miles of bridges and viaducts, Salini said. The company is also among the builders of a proposed bridge that would connect Sicily to mainland Italy over the Strait of Messina. If completed, the ambitious project – which has long been contemplated, but never completed – would be the longest suspension bridge in the world.

Joining Webuild and Lane in their combined Key Bridge proposal is the TYLin Group, an engineering firm, and Jacobs, an architectural group.

Webuild's initial news release in May called for the new bridge to have a vertical clearance of 213 feet – 28 feet higher than the felled structure – with a main span measuring 2,300 feet, almost twice as wide as before. It also suggested widening the bridge to six lanes of traffic, but Salini said Monday that their proposed span would be four lanes, which is consistent with the transportation authority's request.

Although some observers have wondered whether increased traffic over the next several decades (the bridge is envisioned to last at least 75 years) would demand more lanes, the transportation authority has said the bridge will be four lanes. There will be “no increase to capacity as the new bridge will be a replacement structure,” a transportation authority spokesperson said in a statement.

If the new bridge was not designated as a replacement, it could require additional environmental permitting, which would likely increase the timeline for construction. The transportation authority’s goal is for the bridge to be open to traffic by October 15, 2028.

Salini said Webuild could meet that deadline and could potentially offer “substantial time savings.” The request for proposals (RFP) from the authority stated that “incentives” are expected to be offered for earlier completion.

“These are two things that we should do and look at very carefully,” Salini said. “That feeling of safety and the feeling of pride of being a citizen of a city which was able to come out from that occurrence with something which is not only useful, but also beautiful.”