

**Statement from Mayor Robert Craft regarding ALDOT's decision
on the Waterways Bridge Project**

September 2, 2022

I am glad to learn that the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has refused a proposal that would have placed the transportation fate of Alabama's beaches in the hands of a foreign bridge company for the next 50 years. Thirteen months of negotiations between ALDOT and the toll bridge owners culminated in a proposal that would enforce a 50-year restriction on building any new, free, public bridge across the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) between State Highway 59 in Gulf Shores and State Highway 161 in Orange Beach. This 50-year restriction would remain regardless of future growth, traffic conditions, or any other justifiable need. Proponents of the toll bridge company's plan have focused on their proposal to provide Baldwin County residents toll-free passes. However, any deal that would allow a foreign bridge company to control access and dictate the expansion of transportation infrastructure in any part of Alabama is a bad deal.

I am encouraged that ALDOT is planning to begin advertising to accept bids on its long-proposed Waterways Bridge project, which will provide a new, free route to and from Alabama's beaches for everyone. While some try to make this a "Gulf Shores project" or a Gulf Shores versus Orange Beach debate, it is not. This project was designed by ALDOT as their solution to traffic congestion on State Highway 59. The proposed bridge begins in Gulf Shores and lands in Orange Beach. The project has received overwhelming public support from local residents, tourism officials, hospital leaders, and elected officials, including Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon and me. Mayor Kennon and I even released a joint letter to the editor in 2018 which referenced this project as "our bridge to the future." When constructed, the Waterways Bridge project will immediately improve traffic conditions on State Highway 59, provide an additional evacuation route off the island and create a foundation of new transportation infrastructure that is critical to accommodate the continued growth and success of Alabama's beaches.