



I-84 HARTFORD PROJECT

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I-84 Vision: Not Your Typical Highway Project



Urban design and potential development opportunities abound. Reconfiguring the existing I-84 on/off ramps (left) and constructing a new lowered highway could free up city land for public and private development, open space, and other transportation improvements.

In the 1960s, I-84 was built to move vehicles quickly. Though moving traffic is still important, these days we focus on moving people, not just vehicles. The new vision for I-84 balances mobility for *all* modes, including walking, biking, and transit.

It's important to make the I-84 corridor area more active and attractive by providing safer and more functional city streets. It's also important to improve neighborhood connections and vitality by blending the highway more sensitively into the urban environment. I-84 is not just a highway reconstruction project!

Exciting Possibilities

Hartford has a long history of great neighborhoods. When I-84 was built, many of these neighborhoods – especially Parkville, the West End, Frog Hollow, Asylum Hill, and Upper Albany – were disconnected from Downtown and from each other by looming highway overpasses, large expanses of parking, and abandoned land.

The I-84 Hartford Project seeks to repair these connections using current practices in transportation and urban design. Ideas include lowering the highway and screening it from view, improving nearby streets to be friendlier to pedestrians and bicyclists, promoting new greenways and open spaces that can energize the city, and laying better groundwork for development (see *Faces & Places*, page 2).

These changes could position the area for more housing choices and employment opportunities, along with uses such as retail, dining, and local businesses.

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The I-84 Project Team has been sharing many specific design approaches with the public to gain feedback.

For example, relocating the I-84 on/off ramps that currently draw traffic directly onto Asylum and Broad Streets would allow these two primary thoroughfares to be redesigned as comfortable, tree-lined streets with generous sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes.

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¿Habla usted español? Una versión de este boletín está disponible en español a i84hartford.com.

Faces & Places of the Corridor

Welcome to Faces & Places of the Corridor, profiles of people who live, work, run businesses or lead groups, as well as notable places, within the I-84 study area. Know someone or some place that should be featured? Share your ideas!

Exploring Hartford's Future Development with Sara Bronin

The City's Planning & Zoning Commission Chair Champions a Modern Form of Zoning

As Chair of the Hartford Planning & Zoning Commission, Sara Bronin spends much of her time imagining how future projects will change Hartford.

"We've got a lot of large-scale projects in the pipeline - including the I-84 Hartford Project - which present exciting opportunities," Ms. Bronin says.

Since the beginning of her term in 2013, Ms. Bronin led the Commission through the process of adopting a new Zoning Code. This highly public and collaborative process involved over two years of focus groups, visual preference surveys, and public meetings in every Hartford neighborhood.

The new code is a blueprint for future development in the city, showing what can be built and where. It regulates the appearance of new buildings and how they fit into the surrounding neighborhood.

Ms. Bronin notes that this focus on context and the environment promotes a city that is both thriving and sustainable.

The former code allowed too many parcels to be used as surface parking lots, strip malls or gas stations, which were out of character with Hartford's historic neighborhoods.

"Most exciting is the possibility to improve connectivity on existing and new local streets, which can stitch neighborhoods back together."

This is not surprising, given that the old code was adopted 50 years ago, shortly after cars and highways became the dominant mode of travel.

To improve the character of Hartford's future development, the code requires commercial buildings to be more inviting from the street, welcoming pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as motorists.



As Chair of Hartford's Planning & Zoning Commission, Sara Bronin presents throughout the city on the character of local development. She also teaches Land Use at UConn Law School, and is working on a local climate change initiative. Ms. Bronin is married to newly elected Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin.

The new Zoning Code includes a chapter on street design, which embraces Complete Street principles. These aim to improve how streets accommodate drivers, bikers, and walkers.

With the I-84 Hartford Project underway, Ms. Bronin is eager for the opportunities that this project brings.

"Most exciting is the possibility to improve connectivity on existing and new local streets, which can stitch neighborhoods back together," she says.

Any developable land turned over to the city will be subject to the code. As Bronin explains, "The new Zoning Code gives the Planning & Zoning Commission the right tools to ensure that the redevelopment of land is a positive for the city."

Not Your Typical Highway Project, continued

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This artist's rendering illustrates the potential East Coast Greenway and multi-use greenway connection to Flower Street, behind the Hartford Courant building.

Possible relocation of the rail line provides great opportunity to redesign on/off ramps, freeing up city land for other uses, including open space and transit oriented development (TOD).

Furthermore, the I-84 Hartford Project Team is exploring a new multi-use greenway as a 1.5-mile linear park and bikeway. The park, which could run parallel to the I-84 corridor from Bushnell Park to Sisson Avenue, has the potential to carry a portion of the 2,900-mile East Coast Greenway that stretches from Maine to Florida.

A new greenway linking points west and surrounding neighborhoods to downtown could provide a world-class park and daily destination for recreation, as well as pedestrian and bike commuting. It would allow thousands of residents and visitors to experience Hartford in a whole new way!

Although these urban design elements are still in the conceptual stages, and subject to public review and comment, these **public** improvements could enhance the look and feel of Hartford's urban environment. However, they may also encourage development by the **private** sector that could bring more activity and vitality to the city.

Where Are We Now?

The Project Team continues to assess the effects and impacts of the many options that remain on the table. Equally important to the technical review is the continuing input from the public as the options become defined in greater detail. The project has been shaped from the beginning by public input.

A more functional highway AND a more attractive city? What could be better than that? It all contributes to a healthier and more diverse economic environment in Hartford and the Capitol Region.



A multi-use greenway, with an elevated portion of a bikeway and linear park, is being considered as part of the I-84 Hartford Project. It could stretch from Bushnell Park to Sisson Avenue, parallel to the I-84 corridor. Above, one possible view from the elevated greenway, looking east towards Downtown Hartford.

Decoding the Environmental Process



Bushnell Park is one of the region's cultural, historic and recreational gems. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will assess the potential impacts to the park as well as to many other resources.

An Environmental Impact Statement is being prepared for the I-84 Hartford Project. It's been mentioned throughout the project, but just what is the *environmental process* that the project must follow? While it is a complex regulatory process, at its heart, it's really quite simple.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was passed by Congress in 1969 to promote better decision-making in projects that involve federal action or investment*. NEPA requires:

- clarification of the project's purpose and need,
- consideration of all reasonable alternatives,
- documentation of anticipated impact to the built and natural environment,
- avoidance, minimization or mitigation of impacts to the extent possible or reasonable, and
- coordination with all relevant regulatory agencies and the public.

What is an EIS?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is NEPA's most intense level of project scrutiny. An EIS is a

detailed statement of impact for projects that are anticipated to have significant impact.

What are *reasonable alternatives*?

Alternatives must satisfy the project purpose and need. They must recognize and respond to the concerns of regulatory agencies and the public. This requires a long process of rigorous analysis and public input.

What is the *built and natural environment*?

The built and natural environment includes:

Built Environment

land use
neighborhoods
historic resources
parks and recreation
traffic
noise
visual effects

Natural Environment

wetlands
water resources
endangered species
geology
topography
air quality
flora and fauna

...and many more!

Once the potential impacts are identified, the team will look for ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impact.

How will a decision be made?

When a Draft EIS has been completed and comments received, a decision on which alternative to build will be made by CTDOT in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The result is called a "Record of Decision". Many factors go into the decision, including how well the preferred alternative meets the project purpose and need, what the level of impact is and how it can be minimized, and the input of all regulatory agencies and public stakeholders who comment.

While NEPA and CEPA require regulatory and public input, the I-84 Hartford Project has gone far beyond the minimum requirements by holding frequent meetings, sharing information broadly, and seeking ongoing public feedback to help develop alternatives.

All want the best possible solution for the replacement of I-84, and there are lots of ideas about what that solution might be. The decision will be based on balanced consideration of all factors in the best overall public interest. The environmental process is a very important step in reaching that decision.

**Connecticut has a similar law (CEPA) for state projects. The I-84 Hartford Project is subject to both NEPA and CEPA, and one document will be prepared to satisfy both processes.*