



REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Wednesday, December 2, 2015, 4 - 8 PM

Location: Raymond Library, East Hartford

Subject: Public Meeting

1. Meeting Schedule and Attendance

The public meeting took place on Wednesday, December 2, 2015 from 4 to 8 PM. The meeting consisted of an open house where members of the public could obtain information and talk with project staff about the I-84 corridor and study process. There were informational boards set up around the room and a computer station that allowed participants to see a 3-D simulation of the corridor with select alternatives. The project team gave a formal presentation to the general public at 6 PM, which was followed by a question and answer period.

Thirty four (34) members of the public signed in at the public meeting.

2. Boards

Several boards were placed around the perimeter of the room. They included:

1. I-84 Study Area Map
2. Program Overview (a flowchart of the overall project schedule)
3. Mainline Alternatives: Vertical Alignment
4. Mainline Alternatives: Horizontal Alignment
5. Mobility: Bicycle and Pedestrian Analysis
6. Potential Building Impacts
7. Options that Perform Well (7 options / boards)
8. Broad Street rendering
9. Sisson Avenue rendering
10. Sigourney Street Rendering
11. Asylum Avenue rendering
12. Capitol Avenue rendering
13. Preliminary Traffic Analysis (4 alternatives / boards)

3. Presentation

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone and introduced himself.

Project Background

R. Armstrong began his presentation by providing a history of the project and defining the study limits. He said that the study limits extend from roughly Flatbush Avenue to the I-84 / I-91 interchange, whereas the project limits extend across a two-mile corridor slightly south west of the existing Sisson Avenue on / off ramps to High Street. He noted that the existing highway was designed not to impact the rail line, and that it was planned and constructed prior to the enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). He said that it was quickly

determined after construction that although the highway solved many transportation concerns, it produced several community issues.

R. Armstrong explained the purpose of the I-84 Hartford Project, which is to address the bridge's structural deficiencies, operational and safety deficiencies, and mobility deficiencies. He said that \$60 million has been spent on maintaining the viaduct since 2004. He explained that I-84 was expected to carry 55,000 automobiles per day, but currently services 175,000 per day. He stated that the project presents opportunities for improving bicycle, pedestrian, and transit conditions as well as increasing safety across all travel modes.

Overview of Alternatives

Dave Stahnke, of TranSystems Corporation, next provided an overview of the mainline alternatives. He stated that there are generally four vertical alignments and a number of horizontal alignments. He gave an overview of the necessary impacts and opportunities related to each alternative's alignment and associated costs. He said that Sigourney Street acts as the dividing line between western and eastern options and that access ramps at Trumbull and High Streets would necessarily be eliminated in order to reduce weaving and improve safety.

Project Schedule

R. Armstrong said the project is currently in the environmental phase, which includes developing alternatives and preparing documents for NEPA. He said that construction will begin sometime in the early 2020s.

Alternative Screening Process

Dave Stahnke next discussed the alternatives screening process. He described the process of examining how each alternative moves traffic, looking first at the mainline, followed by interchanges. He reviewed the three major components of the project's purpose and need (bridge deficiencies, traffic and safety operations, and mobility). He overviewed traffic analysis results for the existing conditions, and for one sample of each of the elevated alternatives, lowered alternatives, and tunnel alternatives.

D. Stahnke described that the team has learned a number of things related to the mainline analysis, including that there are too many ramps and that poor intersection operations affect the mainline. He stated that closing the Trumbull Street and High Street ramps would improve traffic conditions. The intersection analysis shows that the Sigourney Street ramps are needed and that the Broad Street and Asylum Street ramps should be relocated or reconfigured to improve traffic operations.

Alternative Screening Process

D. Stahnke next presented the preliminary screening results. He described how a matrix assesses 25 options according to the project's three main needs using a color ranking system (red, yellow, green, and black), in addition to criteria that require further study (white). He noted that each purpose and need criterion is scored for each option and assigned a color. Red denotes poor performance for that criterion, yellow denotes moderate performance for that criterion, and green denotes good performance for that criterion. A cell that has the color black has a critical flaw for its respective criterion. A cell that has the color white has yet to be assessed for that criterion.

D. Stahnke explained that the lowered highway performs best for interchange operations. He said that the tunnel option presents obstacles to maintain the Sigourney Street exits without

significant building impacts. He stated that the team has developed a new tunnel alternative that can satisfy traffic needs, but necessitates significant property impacts and high construction costs. Many of the lowered highway options perform well against the purpose and need criteria, though they include more building impacts associated with the relocated railroad.

D. Stahnke explained that many well-performing options included opportunities for building new local roads and increasing redundancy in the roadway network. He said that ramps should be relocated from Asylum and Broad Streets because they threaten bicycle and pedestrian conditions in that well-traveled corridor, and that the project team is incorporating complete streets design standards into their process as well as the East Coast Greenway.

R. Armstrong said that the lowered and tunnel highway alternatives would perform poorly for traffic and/or cause extensive property impacts. He added that the tunnel would be extremely expensive. Regarding the lowered highway alternative, he said it presents strong opportunities for both improved mainline traffic and local street operations. He said that the lowered highway requires relocating the railway and that it potentially impacts a number of buildings, particularly those in the Asylum Hill neighborhood.

R. Armstrong walked the group through how a realigned lowered highway would look, including opportunities for developable land, possible ramp configurations, potential building impacts, new streets, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements, including the East Coast Greenway. He displayed artist renderings of Capitol Avenue, Asylum Avenue, and various intermodal opportunities throughout the corridor and surrounding street network.

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R. Armstrong closed the presentation by stating that public input is critical to the process. He encouraged members of the public to visit the I-84 Hartford Project's interactive webpage and provide comments.

4. Question and Answer Period

One member of the audience asked what the highway grade would be entering the tunnel traveling eastbound. D. Stahnke said it would be about four percent.

One person asked how many lanes would I-84 be in Hartford under the proposed alternatives. R. Armstrong outlined the number of lanes under existing conditions and pointed out what constraints require the corridor to switch between two and three lanes at certain points. He said that under all alternatives, the area within the project limits would include three full lanes in either direction, but that constraints to the east of the project area, including the flood wall, Bulkeley Bridge, and railroad prevent three full lanes from continuing over the Connecticut River. He said that the project team would be very happy with three continuous lanes of traffic throughout the corridor.

There was a question asking how many vehicles currently travel through the corridor and how many the project team is planning for. R. Armstrong said that roughly 175,000 vehicles travel through the corridor each day on average, and that the project team is planning for less than one percent growth in the corridor.

One person asked if there would ever be a bypass around the city to alleviate traffic. R. Armstrong said that the project team has looked into options like bypasses around the city, but that the majority of traffic in the corridor either originates or terminates in Hartford. He said

that even if an I-291 bypass road were fully constructed, it would only remove three to ten percent of traffic from the study area. He said this was not a significant volume.

One member of the audience asked if maintenance costs would be considered when selecting an alternative. He said that selecting the lowered alternative over the tunnel could be considered an investment in the long run. R. Armstrong said that the project team has not yet considered maintenance costs, but that the individual was correct in pointing out that there would be additional costs when elevated or tunnel structures required replacement. He said that a lowered highway would be comparatively less expensive to maintain.

A member of the public asked if increased vehicle traffic headed to Union Station as a result of commuter rail service was considered in traffic calculations. D. Stahnke provided an overview of the Hartford Line and its anticipated service. He said that increased rail service would not take vehicles off the road in the short term but would do so in the long term, and that those calculations were incorporated into the I-84 design process. N. Mandler said that the project team analyzes traffic demand, and has done so to include the impact of rail as well as CT *fastrak*. He said that the project team has a good idea of how much vehicle traffic currently travels to Union Station and is building roads to address increased traffic.

One person asked about diverting traffic from the project area to other such corridors as Route 44, I-691, and Route 2, suggesting that these other routes are at capacity and need improvements as well. R. Armstrong said that the governor has proposed a robust \$100 billion, 30-year transportation plan of which the I-84 Hartford Project is a priority. He said that there are several other projects on that list, including improving traffic flow over the Charter Oak Bridge. He noted that there is not currently enough funding for every project on the list, and that money should be spent on projects that most greatly improve mobility.

An individual asked what the timeline of the project was. R. Armstrong said that the project team is taking public involvement into account because they want help in finding a solution to the region's transportation issues. He said that they hope to have identified an alternative by the end of 2016, at which time they can start refining engineering and examining fine details. He said that the NEPA documentation process would begin in 2017, followed by the identification of a funding source. He said that final design and property acquisition would take three-to-four years and could not occur until a funding source was identified. He concluded that if all goes according to plan, construction could begin in the 2020s; construction could take several years but the project team will look to shorten that duration as much as possible.

One person said they originally believed that the project area was a three-mile stretch. R. Armstrong said that the study area extended from Flatbush Avenue to the I-84 / I-91 interchange, an area of roughly three miles, but that the actual project area was closer to two (2) miles.

An individual asked if it made sense to develop anything in Hartford pending the immediate traffic impacts to the area. R. Armstrong said that development is always supported and that this project could make available several acres for development, in addition to new transportation modes like rail, CT *fastrak*, and bicycling and walking.