



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

**Date and Time: Friday, February 26, 2016, 3:30-5 PM**

**Location: The Lyceum, 227 Lawrence Street, Hartford**

**Subject: Open Planning Studio Wrap Up Presentation**

### **1. Meeting Schedule and Attendance**

The meeting took place on Friday, February 26, 2016 from 3:30 – 5:00 PM. The meeting consisted of a presentation to conclude the two-day long Open Planning Studio (OPS) and inform the public on new project developments and findings. 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 presentation was followed by a question and answer period.

20 members of the public attended the meeting.

### **2. Boards**

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

1. I-84 Study Area Map
2. I-84 Hartford Fast Facts (an infographic)
3. Program Overview (a flowchart of the overall project schedule)
4. Options that Perform Well (7 options / boards)
5. Broad Street rendering
6. Sisson Avenue rendering
7. Asylum Avenue rendering
8. Capitol Avenue rendering
9. Preliminary Traffic Analysis (4 alternatives / boards)
10. 2016 At A Glance
11. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study
12. Sample Refinements to the Lowered Highway
13. Lowered Highway with Capped Section (tunnel)
14. CTfastrak Routing: Alternative 3 W3-E2 (S)
15. Asylum Street Visualizations (2 boards)
16. Park Street Visualization
17. Urban Design Analysis
18. Potential East Coast Greenway Alignment
19. Bicycle Network Opportunities
20. Potential Building Impacts (updated February 2016)

### **3. Presentation**

Mike Morehouse, of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI), welcomed everyone and introduced himself. He explained that the purpose of the presentation was to inform the general public of project updates and to summarize public feedback gathered over the two day OPS.

## Project Background

M. Morehouse explained the history of the project and I-84, noting the intertwined relationship between the highway and the railroad. He said that the highway was constructed on elevated structures in the 1960s to avoid impacting the railroad. He explained how post-World War II suburbanization increased congestion on local roads in Hartford, leading to the call for an east-west expressway through the city. He stated that the highway was built prior to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations, and that upon completion its negative impacts were quickly recognized. He concluded that the I-84 Hartford project team aims to repair some of this damage to the city's urban fabric.

M. Morehouse said that the project team strives not only to address deficiencies in bridge structures, traffic, safety, and mobility, but also to acknowledge stakeholder concerns and input. He noted that much has changed since the highway was built in the 1960s. I-84 was expected to carry 55,000 automobiles per day, but currently services 175,000 per day. Vehicles compete to get on and off the highway, which causes them to weave from lane to lane. He said that \$60 million has been spent on maintaining the viaducts since 2004.

## OPS Summary

M. Morehouse shared some insights from the previous day's various meetings and roundtables. He mentioned a lively conversation between Public Advisory Committee (PAC) members expressing diverging opinions as to design concepts and priorities.

Tim Ryan, of TranSystems Corporation (TSC), summarized the discussion of the Traffic and Parking Working Group. He said that the project could impact up to 5,000 parking spaces, and would require multiple solutions. He outlined the working group's discussion, noting opportunities for structured parking and transit oriented development (TOD) in the Asylum Hill neighborhood.

Responding to a question from the audience, T. Ryan said that a recently completed study of the railroad viaduct determined that it would be beneficial to relocate the railroad west of the highway. He said that this relocation would improve local road interchanges and the street network. He concluded that moving forward, modifications to the railroad would be part of the I-84 Hartford Project.

Mitch Glass, of Goody Clancy, summarized the discussion of the Urban Design Working Group. He said that the group aimed to reconnect the city across the existing highway barrier, including the neighborhoods of Downtown, Frog Hollow, Asylum Hill, the West End and Parkville. He said that private sector development is not a part of the I-84 Hartford Project, although good planning often successfully facilitates private development.

Responding to a question from the audience, M. Glass said that recent updates to the City's planning and zoning code align well with the project team's design goals. He noted TOD and active street design as two elements shared by the planning and zoning code and the I-84 Hartford Project.

M. Morehouse noted how younger people in attendance at the OPS gravitated towards the Bike, Pedestrian and Transit Working Group. He said that one very important issue was incorporating the East Coast Greenway into the corridor.

## Overview of Alternatives

M. Morehouse explained that the project team had evaluated some 150 alternatives. He noted that there are three primary build alternatives, among them an elevated highway (Alternative 2), a lowered highway (Alternative 3), and a tunneled highway (Alternative 4). He said that lowering the highway would require relocating the railroad and would be less expensive than Alternatives 2 and 4.

M. Morehouse said that there are several good options for reconfiguring interchanges, including the closure of interchanges at Trumbull and High Streets.

#### Bicycles

Regarding mobility, M. Morehouse explained how the East Coast Greenway could be incorporated into the project. He presented one image of the Greenway incorporated into a lowered highway alternative. He said the mixed-use trail would consist of a wide green space with some flair outs for resting and enjoying vistas. He noted that the one constraint in the area was along a small stretch of Capitol Avenue. He recognized that the region's cycling community hopes to see other bike facilities incorporated as part of the project, and that on-street and buffered bicycle lanes, as well as cycle tracks, could be installed on other local streets in the project area.

#### Transit

M. Morehouse said that maintaining *CTfastrak* service throughout construction would be very important. He presented one opportunity for maintaining service by routing the busway into a tunnel under the highway prior to construction of the mainline. As for rail, he reiterated T. Ryan's statement that the railroad would be incorporated into the I-84 Hartford Project and likely moved.

#### Urban Design

M. Glass displayed images illustrating existing barriers between Asylum Hill and Bushnell Park. He explained how a lowered highway presented opportunities for opening up access to Bushnell Park and creating new local streets. He took the audience through a series of development investment options in the area of Asylum and Broad Streets. He pointed out possible locations for a new rail head house annex, and the importance of continuous air rights development over the highway in order to maintain a continuous urban fabric.

Referring to earlier comments, M. Glass explained that the existing Union Station could remain active as a bus facility. He also said that parking garages built in the area, potentially on air rights, should be wrapped with commercial space to improve pedestrian conditions in the area. He presented several street visualizations of the Asylum and Broad Streets area. In the western portion of the study area, he explained that townhomes could be built in the area around Sisson Avenue. He offered visualizations of Park Street with I-84 routed both above and below the local road.

#### Capped Highway

D. Stahnke explained how, in response to public support for a tunnel, the project team had developed a new alternative utilizing capping technology to achieve the visual effect of a tunnel but at a much lower cost. He said that the capped highway could cost as little as a fifth of the tunnel option.

D. Stahnke took the audience through three different options for extending the cap. Option 1 consists of a 1,000-foot-long cap between Asylum and Broad Streets and would cost \$325-400 million inclusive of inflation. He said that Option 1 could be topped with park space or vehicle parking. He then explained Option 2, which extends a further 800 feet west of Broad Street. He explained that the cap in Option 2 ceases before impacting the Park River Conduit, relocation of which would require an additional \$45 million. He said Option 2 would cost \$600-

750 million and could provide new north-south access over the highway, accounting for the prior closure of Flower Street. Option 3 extends the cap as far west as Sigourney Street and requires relocating the Park River Conduit and impacting some buildings along Capitol Avenue. Option 3 would cost between \$1.3 and \$1.6 billion.

D. Stahnke said that some working groups concluded that a variation of a linear park and East Coast Greenway could still be incorporated into the project without capping the highway entirely, and at a lower expense.

D. Stahnke concluded that the cap would cost much less than a tunneled alternative but required further investigation. He said conduit relocation required additional building impacts.

#### I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study

R. Armstrong next introduced the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study. He explained that I-84 and I-91 in Hartford are reduced to two through lanes in each direction due to the constrained location of the interchange, making this area a major bottleneck. He said that the study includes consideration of relocating of I-84 and its interchange with I-91. He presented images depicting I-84 relocated to the north. Relocating I-84 would allow the Bulkeley Bridge to become a multi-modal boulevard connecting Hartford and East Hartford inclusive of improved bicycle, pedestrian and transit infrastructure. He noted opportunities for expanded riverfront access.

R. Armstrong reiterated that the project team is unsure where the study may lead, but that they and the Governor recognize the value of improving all modes of transportation in the region. He highlighted events for the year 2016. He said the project team hopes to have identified an alternative by May 2016. He invited the audience to ask questions and make comments.

#### **4. Question and Answer Period**

One person asked when construction would begin. R. Armstrong said that if a funding source was identified, final design could commence in 2018 with construction beginning at earliest 2020 or 2021. He added that the project would cost at least \$4-5 billion for the lowered highway, and that at \$10-12 billion the tunnel would be prohibitive. He offered that that the capped highway may be more financially feasible, but still required further consideration.

One audience member commented that the project must commence because the viaduct will fall down otherwise. R. Armstrong said that the viaduct is safe and will not fall down, although maintenance will become increasingly expensive and intensive. He said that maintaining the safety of the existing viaduct would be possible if funding for reconstruction is not identified. The commenter said the case for redesign should be presented with some degree of drama and urgency. R. Armstrong said the I-84 Hartford Project presents strong opportunity for return on investment, namely the reconstruction and creation of open space, private development, and improvements to other transportation infrastructure. The commenter said that the project team should more prominently present those potential gains.

One commenter stated that the No-Build alternative did a good job illustrating the need for action. R. Armstrong agreed. A further discussion between R. Armstrong and various audience members addressed costs and impacts associated with the No-Build Alternative.

One member of the audience asked where motorists would access the highway if the Asylum Street interchange was closed. David Stahnke, of TSC, said that ramps could be relocated to Cogswell Street and new street adjacent to Bushnell Park (Bushnell Park West) in order to improve pedestrian conditions on Asylum and Broad Streets. He suggested that doing so would diffuse traffic through the existing and expanded local street network.

Another audience member asked if the project team had eliminated the option to lower the highway below Park Street. D. Stahnke explained that lowering the highway to that extent would not allow for a comfortably wide local overpass above the highway, would impact buildings, and places the highway below the water table, requiring expensive and frequent maintenance. He concluded that the project team had developed new streetscape alternatives to improve the pedestrian experience of an I-84 overpass.

One person asked how vehicle traffic along Bushnell Park West would impact the park itself. D. Stahnke said that the project was working to incorporate streetscape amenities and a green buffered bicycle facility. He said there would be one right-turn lane and one left-turn lane exiting the highway onto Bushnell Park West. Physical impacts to Bushnell Park are not anticipated.

One audience member asked if a portion of the Park River Conduit could be opened up in the area behind Capitol Avenue. D. Stahnke said similar projects had been completed in other cities. He noted that the conduit was built to withstand a 500-year flood, and would require a great amount of room not readily available in the project corridor. He said doing so would probably impact all of the buildings in the Capitol Avenue corridor. The audience member said that in the future, having open water in the area would support condominium and other development.

One person asked if it would be possible to retain the conduit but create a new riverbed along the historic route of the Park River, only opening the conduit in the event of high water levels. D. Stahnke said this had been proposed as part of iQuilt. He explained that iQuilt would tap into the Gully Brook Conduit in order to create an above-ground waterway through Bushnell Park. He said that maintaining the Park River Conduit while rerouting some water to an above ground channel would be difficult, as the conduit is some 25 feet below ground and often only carries about a foot of moving water. He said that he did not expect hydraulics to be able to channel water from the conduit up to ground level.

One audience member asked if money would be a deciding factor in choosing the extent of a capped option. D. Stahnke said that money would be a significant factor, but the project team will hopefully identify a feasible alternative that satisfies the community's needs and desires.

Another audience member said it will be important to first identify which alternatives meet the project's needs and purpose. D. Stahnke said the project team is working on an environmental document detailing the project's needs and purpose as well as additional goals and objectives.

One person asked how many floors of development could be built over the cap to offset the cost of construction. D. Stahnke said caps are often built inexpensively as open space and park land. He said that building a cap to support development is much more expensive. He offered the example of the existing cap in Downtown Hartford, stating that a similar structure would cost two to three times more than the currently proposed cap between Broad and Sigourney Streets. He said a cost-benefit analysis would be conducted, but it's often determined that air rights development is not warranted.

Another commenter questioned how pedestrians might access the space above the cap. D. Stahnke said access points to the area above the cap would be critical. He said people may access the space from Sigourney Street, the Aetna Campus and Flower Street, or other areas that the project team will continue to look at. Rich Armstrong, of CTDOT, said the cap would be virtually flat. He said it would be 25 feet above ground level.