



REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Wednesday, April 20, 2016, 12 PM

Location: Parker Memorial Community Center, 2621 Main Street, Hartford

Subject: Public Advisory Committee Meeting #11

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS		
Anne Hayes	Travelers	aihayes@travelers.com
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2. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone to the 11th PAC meeting for the I-84 Hartford Project. He provided an overview of the meeting agenda. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss updates to various alternatives and hear the PAC's feedback. He invited Mike Morehouse, of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI), to give the presentation.

3. Presentation

Introduction

M. Morehouse began by reviewing the previous Open Planning Studio (OPS) in February. He highlighted project working groups and the attendance of University of Hartford students.

Working Groups Updates

Mitch Glass, of Goody Clancy, stated that the Urban Design Working Group focused on the importance and feasibility of transit-oriented development (TOD). He said that the group discussed how to realize development once the highway project is complete. He said the group suggested updating Hartford's One City One Vision plan.

M. Morehouse reviewed the February meeting discussion of the Bike, Pedestrian and Transit Working Group. He said that the group focused on the East Coast Greenway (ECG), as well as improving bike and pedestrian facilities throughout the city. He said that bus stops are often difficult for traffic flow and bicyclists, and that these amenities must be thoughtfully included

in the project's design. Tim Ryan, of TranSystems Corporation (TSC), provided an overview of the February Traffic and Parking Working Group. He said that there would be challenges to parking and that the team recommended centralized parking in a few high-level areas. He said a parking plan must be developed for during and after construction.

M. Morehouse next discussed the Public Safety Roundtable. The discussion focused on the tunnel and concerns as to access, evacuation, and ventilation. He said there was interest in shortening the duration of construction, including accelerated bridge construction, closing segments of the highway, and limiting traffic access. He concluded that the roundtable reviewed ramp closures recommended by the project team, namely those at Trumbull and High Streets. He said there were no major objections to these closures.

Design Updates

M. Morehouse then reviewed the project's status. He said that the project team believes Alternatives 2 and 4 to have significant challenges. Alternative 2, the elevated highway, fails to address congestion or safety concerns, and would also require extensive maintenance. Alternative 4, the tunnel, would be incredibly expensive. For these reasons, he said the project team recommended eliminating Alternatives 2 and 4 from further consideration. He explained that the Governor and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will ultimately make this decision. He noted that the project team may be required to continue to study Alternative 2 because it mandates the fewest building impacts.

M. Morehouse then asked T. Ryan to discuss updates to the capped highway alternatives, which he explained were developed to appease the public's desire for a tunnel and its perceived benefits. T. Ryan said that the team has always discussed capping over the area between Asylum and Broad Streets as a critical feature. He explained that at a length of about 1,000 feet and costing \$300-400 million, it would be the most practical capping option. He reviewed the two other primary capping options, those terminating prior to impacting the Park River Conduit as well as the option extending as far as Sigourney Street. He said that extending the cap to Sigourney Street and relocating the Park River Conduit would be extremely challenging, although it would afford a north-south connection via Flower Street and an additional east-west connection between Sigourney and Broad Streets. He pointed out that this longest capping option would cost \$1.3-1.6 billion.

T. Ryan presented two new capping options. The first new option would extend between Sigourney and Laurel Streets. He said that there would need to be a discussion on what benefits this cap might bring and its actual value. He explained that the second new capping option would extend between Capitol Avenue and Laurel Street. He noted that although this second option would be structurally feasible, the cap in this section would greatly protrude above ground level and serve as an additional physical and visual barrier.

M. Morehouse said that the team studied these capping options in order to achieve the benefits of a tunnel but at a lower cost. He said there is indeed a need for a better east-west connection, which could contribute to the economic health of the city, as well as shield Hartford neighborhoods from the highway's site and noise pollution. Evaluating the various capping options, he said that the cap as far as Sigourney Street would realize this new east-west connection, but that any additional north-south connection would still be limited by the railroad, CT *fastrak*, and private property lines. He pointed out that crossing points over the highway would be the same as they currently are, with the exception of a reconstructed connection in the Flower Street vicinity. He emphasized, however, that there would be an opportunity to rebuild and widen the existing bridges over the highway, like those at Sigourney and Laurel Streets.

Citing the cap's cost of \$400 thousand per linear foot, he said that the project team is still evaluating the structure from a cost-benefit perspective, and asked if there were other ways to minimize the highway's impact. He reiterated that a cap in the Asylum and Broad Streets area would have the best return on investment. He noted that a cap to the west of Broad Street could not support built development, and that there isn't a market in Hartford strong enough to support extensive air-rights development. He explained how this portion of the cap could be utilized for open space, parkland, or parking. He emphasized that although much cheaper than the tunnel, an extensive cap would still be extremely expensive.

East Coast Greenway

M. Glass next presented an overview of the ECG, pointing out that it passes directly through the I-84 Hartford Project corridor. He said that the project team envisions the ECG in Hartford as an elevated linear park running through the city and serving pedestrians, cyclists, commuters, and recreation. He said that this linear park facility could realize connections to the north, south, east, and west, as well as to connect major parks, the suburbs and downtown. He noted that such a facility would run from Bushnell Park to Sisson Avenue and cost \$200-240 million.

Turning to the specifics of the structure, M. Glass said that the elevated greenway would run parallel to the highway on the south side. The first elevated option would cantilever the greenway over the highway, and the second would consist of a dual-supported structure built atop the parking lots behind Capitol Avenue. He pointed out that this elevated option could make connections to Aetna to the north and Flower Street to the south via a ramping system on either side. He explained that both of these options would be between 30 and 60 feet wide. He noted that an at-grade alternative with a wall screening the highway from site and noise was also possible. He cited other precedents, including the Mortensen Riverfront Plaza over I-91 in Hartford, NYC's High Line Park, and Chicago's 606 Bloomingdale Trail. He concluded that the elevated linear park would have all the same benefits of connectivity as the full cap to Sigourney Street.

M. Morehouse invited the PAC to view the linear park alternatives on the 3-D model. He explained that the project team is focusing extensively on urban design because they believe to have identified a preferred alternative. He concluded that although the technical analysis has not finished, the project team is beginning to examine details like how local roads look, and how travelers move about them.

New Data and Tools

Dave Stahnke, of TSC, explained how the project team used signal and traffic analyses to create a tool to calculate existing and potentially revised travel routes during and after construction. He said that this new tool would be available on the website shortly.

D. Stahnke stated that the project team and the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) are currently conducting several surveys. He explained how 40 temporary employees from the Hartford area have been gathering demographic, trip frequency, origin and destination data via iPad as part of the Onboard Transit Passenger Survey. He concluded that the survey will finish at the end of May, prior to the end-of-year release of the transportation demand model. He noted that CRCOG will have access to all data gathered for future projects and improvements.

Public Involvement

Marcy Miller, of FHI, next discussed the project's public involvement activities. She reiterated that the project team is working to identify a solution that everyone can accept and benefit from. She thanked the PAC for their input and reiterated that their concerns have greatly influenced the project team's design over time. She noted that there are still populations in

Hartford that the project team is struggling to reach. She stated that 40% of Hartford residents are Hispanic / Latino, and that 16% of city residents have limited English proficiency, and speak Spanish in the home and daily life.

M. Miller explained how translating project material into Spanish would not be sufficient for engaging the city's Hispanic / Latino communities. She said that after several and still ongoing meetings with local stakeholders, the project team has come away with many important lessons and suggestions for refining their message. She recognized I-84's role as a major point of division within the city, and the project's various opportunities to reconnect communities across the highway. She suggested that many community members wish to see greater economic development in their city, but remain cautious. M. Miller said that the project team will travel to several events this spring and summer, including the Head Start Spring Fling and the CICD Puerto Rican Day Parade.

Closing Remarks

R. Armstrong presented a calendar of events for the year 2016. He said that public meetings and Open Planning Studios would be held periodically. He stated that the project team hopes to have identified an alternative by May 2016. M. Morehouse then opened up the floor for questions and comments.

4. Discussion

Joe Scully, of the Connecticut Motor Transport Association, asked what the project team meant by a shorter construction duration, and if that included closing I-84 entirely. M. Morehouse said that it would be likely unrealistic to entirely close the highway, but that certain lanes or sections could be closed for various durations. He acknowledged that other states have closed their interstates during major construction projects, but that the lack of alternative routes in Greater Hartford make a similar closure very challenging. J. Scully commented that the project does not increase mainline capacity. D. Stahnke acknowledged that the project would not completely eliminate congestion due to congestion at the I-84 / I-91 interchange.

Mike Reilly asked what percent of the project would receive federal funding. R. Armstrong said that the project would qualify for 80% federal funding, though not all of those funds are necessarily available. He stated that unless funding strategies change federally and statewide, the state will not be able to afford all of the necessary infrastructure projects on the Governor's *Let's Go CT* transportation plan. David Nardone, of the FHWA, added that CTDOT must create a financial plan in order to move into the final design phase of the project.

M. Reilly stated that the project does not belong to Hartford and should not be treated as an urban renewal project, suggesting that greenways and improvements to the rail line were unnecessary additional expenses. He added that the project did not address constituents' concerns as to congestion relief. R. Armstrong explained that the project team has analyzed several alternatives that will address structural deficiencies, improve safety, eliminate obsolete designs, improve operations, and reduce congestion. He said that some of these alternatives will be a drastic improvement on existing conditions. He emphasized that the project focuses on one two-mile section of I-84, and that the I-84 / I-91 interchange, the primary source of congestion, will be examined as a separate study. He concluded that the project team is addressing M. Reilly's concerns and has been as responsive as possible. M. Morehouse explained that many cyclists and pedestrians also own vehicles and pay taxes. He said that the state needs a modern transportation system that preserves highways for through traffic and freight. He emphasized that design elements like an elevated greenway could make a significant difference at a comparatively marginal cost.

J. Sculley asked how the project team would limit cost overruns. R. Armstrong said that the I-84 Hartford Project team will apply many lessons learned during the Big Dig, including a cost-risk analysis. He explained that the team presents costs in a range because the cost estimate at this point is not precise. He concluded that the risk management analysis will continue.

Aaron Gill, of the Frog Hollow NRZ, stated that there is no other project in the state with such beneficial opportunities. He said that individuals and companies are moving to cities that are eliminating or obscuring their highways. He concluded that the I-84 Hartford Project will move the state forward, and cautioned only focusing on the concerns of motorists.

Jackie McKinnie, of the ArtSpace Residents Association, said that the city has not developed economically since the highway was first built. She said that the PAC and the City should concentrate on realizing economic development. She questioned the practicality and value of the cap if it cannot be built upon. She acknowledged that an elevated greenway may promote economic development, but that it wasn't certain. M. Morehouse said that similar amenities in other cities had produced major upticks in development. He explained that there is a need for additional bike and pedestrian connections in the corridor. Mike Marshall, of Aetna, said that the New York City High Line Park has spurred tremendous development and improved the quality of life in the area.

Sandy Fry, of the Greater Hartford Transit District, said that her association had understood the new rail station to be a single multimodal facility connected to the existing Union Station. She was concerned that the project team was no longer considering such a facility. M. Glass answered that there are many opportunities for connecting Union Station and the rail annex, and that a central gathering space and centralized parking were likely. Vicki Shotland, of the Greater Hartford Transit District, added that her association was in the process of developing a master plan of the Union Station area. M. Morehouse said that the project team can design and visualize but needs public feedback.

Amy Parmenter, of the American Automobile Association (AAA), asked if the project team was accounting for rapidly advancing technology and changes in travel behavior. M. Morehouse said that it is unclear how the future will look, but that the project team is not designing I-84 in the same way that interstates were planned 50 years ago. He concluded that new technologies and preferences will mitigate the need for new cars on the road.

Tim Bockus, of the Town of East Hartford, said that he hopes the project team considers the sustainability and maintenance of an elevated linear park. R. Armstrong said that maintenance responsibility of such a facility was still to be determined. He suggested that the CTDOT would maintain the physical structure whereas a local entity would be sought for surface maintenance.

V. Shotland asked how many motorists were expected to transition to rail once the Hartford Line begins operation. D. Stahnke said that he did not have those estimates on hand, but that beginning in 2018 there would be some 16 daily trains between New Haven and Hartford, and 12 from Hartford to Springfield.

Brandon Martin, of CEDECA, said that his company is preparing for a \$5 million project to replace buried fuel oil tanks and would like to know whether or not the I-84 Hartford Project will progress. R. Armstrong said that he cannot provide a definite answer at this time. He said that he may not be able to answer that question until 2018 when a funding strategy is established.