

Report of Meeting

Date and Time: Tuesday, June 16, 2015, 8:30 AM

Location: The Lyceum, 227 Lawrence Street, Hartford

Subject: Public Advisory Committee Meeting #7

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1. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Rich Armstrong welcomed everyone to the 7th PAC meeting for the I-84 Hartford Project. He provided an overview of the meeting agenda. He stated that the purpose of the meeting is to provide a recap of the Open Planning Studio to the members and follow up on some of the design takeaways from the Studio. In addition, the Project Team planned to provide an update on the tunnel alternative and discuss the topic of maintenance of traffic during construction.

R. Armstrong also introduced new PAC members and thanked them for joining the group.

2. Presentation

Open Planning Studio Recap

Mike Morehouse provided a recap of the Open Planning Studio. He discussed the public outreach, describing it as a success of the event. He noted that through the various TV and radio news programs, website, and social media, the project reached a greater audience than ever before. He said that most (66 percent) of the website visitors during the week of the Studio were new visitors. He provided a summary of each day's events and attendance. He also played the media highlights video clip that was presented at the Saturday Public Meeting of the Studio.

Design Takeaways

Dave Stahnke presented the design takeaways from the Open Planning Studio. He first discussed the suggestion of an East – West Boulevard from Sisson Avenue to Asylum Street. He stated that there was another suggestion to create a similar boulevard from Sisson Avenue to Hawthorn Street. In addition, he stated that the Project Team is studying the concept to split a diamond interchange between Broad Street and Asylum Street. If this option were constructed, each street could be friendlier to bicyclists and pedestrians compared to some other options.

D. Stahnke discussed the suggestion to create a High Line type trail on one of the existing Sisson Avenue ramp bridges. He noted that while this may not be possible at this location, the concept is a good one and worth looking at elsewhere in the corridor. There was a suggestion to preserve the granite wall that supports the existing Amtrak rail at the edge of Bushnell Park, which the Project Team is looking into. D. Stahnke described a suggestion to convert I-84 into a tree lined boulevard, noting that a similar alternative was considered in the HUB study and dismissed because of its inability to carry the current traffic volumes. Finally, he discussed the interest and on-going analysis to maintain a connection across I-84 at Myrtle Street.

Alternatives Screening Process

D. Stahnke next discussed the alternative screening process, noting that 75 alternative combinations were presented at the Open Planning Studio. In terms of mobility, the Project Team is beginning to analyze traffic operations for the interchange options. D. Stahnke stated that up until now, the Project Team has largely assessed the traffic analysis on the I-84 mainline only. Moving forward, the Project Team will begin assessing traffic on the interchange ramps and local roads as well.

Other important considerations, such as transit options, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, and parking issues will also be evaluated. He stated the Project Team is assessing five mainline alignment options in detail: 2a, 3a, 3b, 3c, and 4c. The other tunnel alignments (4a, 4b) are not moving forward at this time because they would cause significant property impacts.

Toni Gold asked D. Stahnke to point out the details of the maps on the presentation slide, specifically calling out the color of each alignment. D. Stahnke highlighted these details.

D. Stahnke discussed the traffic analyses of interchange option combinations.. He said that the Project Team is grouping together some of the interchange options for analyses, because certain options will have similar characteristics and effects on traffic.

Tunnel Alternative

D. Stahnke next provided an update on the tunnel alternative, reiterating that only Alternative 4c will be further assessed in the traffic analysis. Alternatives 4a and 4b will not move forward at this time, because they will have significant property impacts. He reminded the group that the Sigourney Street interchange is not feasible as part of the tunnel alternative. The Project Team is unsure how this alternative will fare as related to local road congestion.

Mike Riley asked where the tunnel limits would be. D. Stahnke answered that the tunnel would be constructed from about Laurel Street on the west to High Street on the east. He stated that the construction process would be similar to the tunnel construction in Boston.

D. Stahnke presented the construction costs of the tunnel, noting that they have been trending up as development of the tunnel alternative has progressed. He described the process of structural underpinning, noting that this involves removing the supports and temporarily carrying them outward so that a new road / tunnel can be built beneath the highway itself.

Maintaining Traffic during Construction

D. Stahnke described the differences in on-alignment vs off-alignment designs (e.g. 3a and 3b are off-alignment, 3c is on-alignment). He stated that designs which are on-alignment require more creative approaches for construction, as maintaining traffic is more difficult. He also discussed conventional and accelerated construction, noting that conventional construction typically has longer durations and needs temporary structures. Accelerated construction has shorter durations, and often has fewer impacts (to businesses and the natural environment) and lower costs. The recent I-84 bridge replacement in Southington is an example of accelerated construction. The roadway, or a portion of the roadway, is typically closed during accelerated construction. The Project Team wishes to explore the feasibility of accelerated construction and various traffic management scenarios to see what might be possible. D. Stahnke stated that improving local road connections and promoting transit options would have to occur before I-84 could be partially or fully closed for any length of time.

D. Stahnke presented the case study of *SmartFix40*, which has similar attributes to I-84 in Hartford. For this project, the Tennessee Department of Transportation closed the highway for 14 months. If the project were to be construction conventionally, it would have taken three years.

Other Items / Next Steps

M. Morehouse next discussed the interactive alternatives analysis webpage. He stated that the Project Team is planning to email a beta link out to the PAC for their feedback within the next few weeks. Marcy Miller described the recent stakeholder meetings and upcoming community events.

3. Additional Discussion

There was a question on where the railroad would be in the tunnel alignment. D. Stahnke answered that the rail can move a little bit to the north in this alternative, but it cannot be located underground. M. Morehouse discussed the 3D model stating that it would be placed on the alternatives analysis web page. This is a great place to look at vertical and horizontal differences in the alternatives. D. Stahnke stated that the existing highway 3D model is on the current website as well.

There was a question on the number of parking spaces that would be impacted from each of the alternatives. D. Stahnke answered that the impact will be between 3,000 -5,000 spaces, depending on the alternative. He stated that many of these spaces are leased spaces from CTDOT. T. Gold stated that she thought there were 25,000 spaces impacted. D. Stahnke answered that 25,000 spaces currently exist along the corridor, but not all of them will be impacted.

M. Riley reminded the group that I-84 is an interstate highway and this needs to be used by all types of motorist, included freight carriers. He suggested a stakeholder meeting with the trucking industry. He stated that UPS and Fed Ex would likely be interested as their deliveries are time sensitive. D. Stahnke acknowledged M. Riley's suggestion as a good one and stated that the Project Team is also looking for another AAA PAC representative (Aaron Kupec no longer works for AAA).

T. Gold stated that she feels the working groups have been successful and questioned whether they will continue. D. Stahnke stated that yes, they will reconvene in the fall of 2015, once the Project Team has additional information from the alternative analyses.

Aaron Gill suggested shutting down I-84 if it is the cheapest and shortest way to rebuild the highway. D. Stahnke said the Project Team is considering this, largely because of the huge user cost and safety benefit. A lot of factors, however, need to be determined first to make this a viable option. One of these factors is determining how people will get around during construction. M. Riley noted that there are no east-west alternatives to I-84.

Jackie McKinney stated that the Project Team needs to be clearer about how much traffic goes through this corridor. Nick Mandler presented some traffic comparisons for the group. He said that I-84 carries three times as much traffic as the busiest section of the Berlin Turnpike and 45 times as much traffic as West Boulevard on the Hartford/West Hartford line.

David Morin stated that business organizations need to be considered as they generally cannot be serviced by CT**fastrak**.

J. McKinney stated that when looking at rerouting traffic, the I-84 to I-691 interchange needs to be improved. D. Stahnke stated that the Project Team will consider these other bottlenecks when looking at how to best reroute traffic.