



## REPORT OF MEETING

**Date and Time: Tuesday, September 4, 2016, 12:30 PM**

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

**Subject: Public Advisory Committee Meeting #13**

### 1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
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## 2. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone to the 13<sup>th</sup> Public Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting for the I-84 Hartford Project. He welcomed new PAC members and said that this PAC meeting would focus on specific strategies to better integrate the highway into the city and lessen its impact on the community. He stressed the value of the PAC's input at this stage of design. He welcomed Mike Morehouse, of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI), to begin the presentation.

## 3. Presentation Part I

### Introduction

M. Morehouse began the presentation by reviewing the meeting's agenda items: a recap of the June and September Open Planning Studios (OPS), urban design elements, stakeholder collaboration on east-end corridor design, the I-84 / I-91 interchange study, an environmental documentation update, and public outreach.

### OPS Recap

M. Morehouse said that the Project Team held two OPS's since the last PAC meeting. He noted that the second day of the June 15-16 OPS at the Arroyo Center in Pope Park was conducted entirely in Spanish, with all boards and presentations available in Spanish and delivered by Spanish-speaking CTDOT staff. He said that the September 13<sup>th</sup> OPS at Immanuel

Congregational Church in Asylum Hill was well attended with over 85 participants, and that Urban Design and Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Transit Working sessions were productive.

### Urban Design

M. Glass next provided an overview of the challenges to integrating I-84 into the city, including mitigating noise and visual impacts and creating attractive and comfortable streets for cyclists and pedestrians. Referring to sections of the interstate that could be lowered to at grade or below, he cited capping, expanded decking, landscaping, topography, and noise and visual screening barriers as some of the potentially available tools for reducing the visual and noise impacts. He presented a few examples where decks or caps over urban highways have been constructed for open space or small scale development, effectively reducing the presence of the highway. Some local examples include the Mortensen Riverfront Plaza in Hartford and the Downtown Hartford Public Library.

M. Glass said that the project team hopes to recommend strategies for hiding the highway within three to four months, meaning public feedback is critical at this point. He said that as part of the Lowered Highway alternative, the Project Team strongly recommends capping over the highway in the area of Asylum and Broad Streets, whereas they do not recommend fully capping the area between Broad and Sigourney Streets. He asked the PAC to provide feedback and focus their attention on strategies for hiding the highway in the areas west of Broad Street.

Reviewing strategies for overcoming the impact of the highway in the area between Broad and Sigourney Streets, M. Glass reminded the PAC of how the potential elevated multiuse trail could use screening walls, landscaping and topography to shield the sight and noise of the highway. He said that such a facility could include a connection across the highway at either end of Flower Street to reconnect that thoroughfare to pedestrians and cyclists. He also suggested expanded decking at Broad and Sigourney Streets in order to hide the highway for passersby. He then presented cross-sections and ground-level perspectives depicting the relationship of local streets to the lowered highway at Sigourney and Flower Streets.

M. Glass next focused his discussion on the area between Sigourney and Park Streets. He explained how topography, landscaping or screening barriers in the vicinities of Laurel Street and Capitol Avenue could effectively hide the highway. Turning towards capping opportunities, he asked the PAC to keep in mind the potential for economic development, structured parking, or public park space adjacent to and overtop the cap. He said that private development over the cap would be highly unlikely given the ample availability of land elsewhere in the city and the serious cost consideration of air rights development. He said that the cap could support approximately 650 surface parking spaces, but that this would be undesirable from an urban design perspective. He concluded that although the cap could serve as park space for active recreation, the absence of adjacent commercial or residential development could discourage appropriate use.

Briefly highlighting the eastern section of the corridor, M. Glass said that the project would include the reconstruction of the Ann and High Street bridges and the opportunity for expanded bridge decking. He said that this could help support economic development potential, and stressed the importance of this area in tying together Downtown and Downtown North.

Continuing his discussion, M. Glass said that a cap between Broad and Asylum Streets would be transformational in connecting Downtown to Asylum Hill. He said that this would strengthen Asylum and Broad while also integrating a multimodal transit hub and potential new development. He said that the Project Team would study the configuration of potential development parcels in its next steps. He noted the existing rail embankment adjacent to Bushnell Park, which could be adapted as a pedestrian and bicycle facility. He said that it is an

historic resource that could remain or removed in order create a new gateway into the city at Bushnell Park.

#### Case Studies: World Class Trails

M. Glass presented two examples of world class trails in the USA. He gave an overview of The 606, a 2.7 mile east-west linear park along a former elevated railroad line in Chicago. He compared the role of the railroad line as a barrier between neighborhoods to I-84 in Hartford, and the potential to adapt or create a new facility to bring communities together. He also provided an overview of the High Line in New York City, another disused elevated railroad turned into a major destination and engine of economic development. He noted that the multiuse trail in Hartford would be accessible to cyclists, unlike the High Line. He requested the PAC's feedback on the prospect of such a facility.

#### **4. Discussion**

M. Morehouse requested that each PAC member comment on capping the highway, as well as other techniques to hide the highway including berms, landscaping, the elevated multiuse trail, and noise and visual screens.

- Two people said they liked the idea of noise and visual screens
- Four people said they liked the idea of berms and landscaping
- Three people said they liked the idea of expanded decking over the highway
- Six people said they liked the elevated multiuse trail concept
- 14 people said they supported capping the area between Broad and Asylum Streets
- Four people said they support capping in the western portion of the corridor
- Four people said they did not support capping in the western portion of the corridor
- One person said they support capping the highway further north
- One person said they support tunneling the highway
- Three people expressed concern over the adequacy of neighborhood connections
- Three people expressed concern over the operation, safety or maintenance of capping
- Two people expressed concern over the future of Union Station as a transportation hub
- Two people expressed parking concerns

#### **Presentation Part II**

##### East End Design Collaboration

Casey Hardin, of TranSystems Corporation, said that the Project Team is working with stakeholders in Asylum Hill to refine design solutions associated with the Lowered Highway alternative. He provided an overview of the challenges and opportunities in Asylum Hill, including the relocation and tunneling of the railroad below Farmington and Asylum Avenues. He noted potential impacts of relocating the railroad and realigning the highway. He highlighted the removal of the Trumbull and High Street ramps and their replacement with a continuous frontage road system alongside the highway.

C. Hardin explained how lowering the highway would necessitate the closure of Myrtle Street where it connects to Spruce and Church Streets, which could be potentially mitigated by a new connection over the highway slightly further east. He said that The Hartford has been collaborating with the Project Team in identifying a solution that does not negatively affect the operations of their loading dock on Cogswell Street, greatly increase traffic volumes on Cogswell Street, or divide the Cogswell Building from the rest of The Hartford campus. He outlined an alternative design presented by The Hartford that would place the highway ramps on Edwards Street with Cogswell Street realigned to the south of the existing buildings on Myrtle Street.

Discussing concerns held by AHNA and the Ashley Street Block Watch, C. Hardin said that The Hartford's alternative design may redirect traffic destined to Saint Francis Hospital from its existing route down Collins Street onto Ashley Street, a quieter residential thoroughfare. He then presented a second alternative design with ramps terminating at Garden Street and a realigned Cogswell Street. He said that this option would direct traffic away from The Hartford's loading dock and direct hospital-bound traffic via Collins Street. He said that the Project Team would continue to evaluate these and other designs with Asylum Hill stakeholders, and assess their suitability for a rail station annex and other development.

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

C. Hardin stated that the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study was officially underway, with the Project Team evaluating the feasibility of eliminating the I-84 / I-91 bottleneck in Downtown Hartford. He said that with 275,000 vehicles each day is one of the worst bottlenecks in the region and the country. He said that the Project Team is evaluating means of addressing the bottleneck, including expanding the existing river crossing at the Bulkeley Bridge, rerouting I-84 to the south or north, or rerouting I-91 into East Hartford with a new I-84 / I-91 interchange east of the Connecticut River. He concluded that the study would last approximately 18 months.

#### Environmental Documentation

Christine Tiernan, of AECOM, said that the Project Team is awaiting review and concurrence from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on the Level 1 Screening Report. She said that the report recommends removing the elevated and tunnel alternatives from further consideration because neither meet the project's purpose and need, and because the tunnel is cost prohibitive. Post meeting correction: Three out of the 4 Tunneled Highway alternatives would not meet the project's purpose and need.

C. Tiernan said that the Project Team has published a Notice of Intent in the federal register and is beginning the environmental impact statement (EIS). She said that a combined EIS and environmental impact evaluation (EIE) would identify a reasonable range of alternatives and meet National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) requirements. She said that the Draft EIS would be available in the middle of 2018 with a public hearing in the summer of 2018. She said that the final EIS would be completed in spring of 2019 and include all public comments and responses. She concluded that the Record of Decision would be available in 2019 and would determine the preferred alternative.

#### Public Outreach

Marcy Miller, of FHI, discussed public outreach related to the project. She said that the Project Team has been collaborating with a magnet School in Hartford to develop a bulletin board and programming relevant to the project. She said that the school serves 200 Hartford families and 27 suburban families. She welcomed the PAC's suggestions for other community events or groups to engage.

### **5. Other Comments**

Mary Rickel Pelletier, of the Park Watershed Association, expressed concerns about routing a road through Bushnell Park and removing historic rail trestles. She said that strong design utilizes the history of the area and advocated for a design alternative that would maintain the rail embankment and trestles adjacent to the park. M. Morehouse clarified that the proposed road between Capitol Avenue and Asylum Street does not directly impact Bushnell Park. He said that there are compelling reasons for both maintaining the embankment and removing it. He said that no decisions have been made regarding the embankment or the existing granite wall.

There was a discussion on how to prepare for development adjacent to and over the cap between Asylum and Broad Streets. A number of PAC members expressed concern that the area may lay empty after highway and rail construction is complete. Dennis Goderre, of the City of Hartford, said that the City would collaborate with the Project Team over the next few months to analyze potential development parcels.

A number of PAC members expressed concern over the adequacy of connections over the highway between neighborhoods. PAC members were concerned about decking widths, landscaping and screening walls, and the slope of local streets passing over the highway relative to view sheds. Particular interest lay in Laurel and Sigourney Streets.