REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Monday, February 11, 2016, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Location: Grace Lutheran Church, Hartford

Subject: Stakeholder Presentation to Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association

Attendees
Rich Armstrong, Connecticut Department of Transportation
Dave Stahnke, TranSystems Corporation
Tim Ryan, TranSystems Corporation
Mitch Glass, Goody Clancy
Michael Coulom, Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
About 10 members of the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of the presentation was to provide an update on the I-84 Hartford Project to members of the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA). This is the first presentation to AHNA. Attendees were invited to take bilingual project information folders containing English and Spanish copies of I-84 Hartford Project business cards, overview pamphlets, fact sheets, and the 10th edition of the project newsletter.

Boards

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

1. Options that Perform Well (3 options / boards)
2. Potential Building Impacts (updated February 2016)
3. Urban Design Analysis
4. Potential East Coast Greenway Alignment
5. Asylum Street Visualization (1 board)

Presentation

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone and introduced himself. He asked the rest of the project team to introduce themselves.

R. Armstrong began his presentation by pointing out the limits of the project area. He said that the area is about two miles long and runs from the existing tunnel in Downtown Hartford to shortly behind the Sisson Avenue interchange. He explained that the highway was built on elevated structures to avoid impacting the railroad, which it passes over in two locations. He said that 80% of the project area, or roughly 30 acres, is built on elevated structures.

R. Armstrong provided a history of the I-84 corridor. He said that the railroad was built in the corridor in the 1830s, with the idea of an East-West Expressway conceived after WWII and realized as part of the Eisenhower Administration's interstate highway program. He said that I-84 was designed in the 1950s to carry 55,000 automobiles per day, but currently services 175,000 per day. He noted that the highway was built before the enactment of NEPA, and cited

a study completed shortly after the highway opened and finding that I-84 was overwhelming to local communities.

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 reviewed the project schedule and said that the project is currently in the environmental phase, at which time the project team evaluates alternatives. He said that a preferred alternative would be established by 2018.

R. Armstrong invited Dave Stahnke, of TranSystems Corporation (TSC), to provide an overview of the mainline alternatives. D. Stahnke stated that there are generally four vertical alignments and a number of horizontal alignments. Outlining each alternative, he said that the no-build was a requirement of the NEPA process and included studying the corridor without the effects of constructing the project through the year 2040. He said that the elevated highway alternative would be higher in some locations than the existing highway, although it could be routed below Sigourney Street. He explained how the lowered highway alternative would require the relocation of the railroad to the north and west of the highway and create a new rail annex in Asylum Hill. He said that this option would also place the highway below all local roads which cross the interstate. He said that the tunnel alternative would extend from Asylum Avenue to Laurel Street.

D. Stahnke continued his presentation by stating that there are numerous ramp configurations; generally 10 options west of Sigourney Street and 15 options east of Sigourney Street. He stated that closing the Trumbull Street and High Street ramps would improve traffic conditions. He described the range of costs for each of the four mainline alternatives.

D. Stahnke emphasized that the project team is also evaluating pedestrian, bicycle, and transit conditions in the corridor. Using Alternative 3B as an example, he explained how the lowered highway presents opportunities for an improved local road network and the construction of complete streets. He explained the traffic analysis for each alternative and stated that the lowered highway performs best from a traffic and mobility standpoint. He noted that the lowered highway would include some building impacts, particularly in the area of Asylum Hill.

D. Stahnke invited Mitch Glass, of Goody Clancy, to discuss the project's urban design considerations. M. Glass noted his family history in Asylum Hill and explained the important role of urban design in connecting communities and contributing to economic success. He likened the I-84 Hartford Project to Boston's Big Dig, if not in scale and alternative selected, but rather in terms of stitching together the urban fabric and creating conditions for economic growth.

M. Glass explained how existing conditions in Asylum Hill were inhospitable to pedestrians and cyclists, and dangerous for motorists. He said that the existing highway takes up valuable land and isolates Asylum Hill from Downtown and other important areas in the city, including Union Station. He said that he would like to see the ongoing restoration of historic buildings in downtown extend into Asylum Hill. He suggested that a continuous urban fabric could connect Hartford's neighborhoods of Asylum Hill, Frog Hollow, Parkville, and the West End.

M. Glass explained the concept of Transit Oriented Development (TOD). He said that the project would seek to make all roads in the I-84 corridor complete streets, and incorporate context sensitive design. He presented graphics of new potential development parcels made available as part of a lowered highway alternative. He noted improvements to local streets and the addition of new ones. He said that some 45 acres could be made available for development as part of a lowered highway.

Continuing on the topic of TOD, M. Glass explained the difference between traditional development and development over air rights. He said that air rights development was not guaranteed, but was strongly recommended by the project team. He said that air rights development would be most practical over the highway in the area between Asylum and Broad Streets, in order to maximize street activity and economic opportunity. He stressed that parking should be hidden from the street, with a continuous urban fabric over the highway between Downtown and Asylum Hill. He presented graphics of various development scenarios over a lowered highway.

M. Glass next introduced the concept of the capped highway. He said that the cap between Asylum and Broad Streets would cost between $325-400 million. He explained how extending the cap to just beyond Flower street and providing a connection between the Aetna campus and Capitol Avenue could nearly double that price. He concluded that a cap extending as far as Sigourney Street would cost approximately 1.5 billion dollars, inclusive of the cost of relocating the Park River Conduit. He said that the cap west of Flower Street would be suitable for park land, open space, or vehicle parking.

M. Glass said that one idea for providing a greenway in the project corridor at a much lower cost than the cap would be an at-grade or elevated or cantilevered structures for the East Coast Greenway. He presented visualizations of such a structure and explained how its use as a pedestrian and cyclist bicycle corridor would make it similar to New York City's extremely successful High Line park. He noted that the elevated or cantilevered structures could act as a visual and sound screen between the highway and pedestrians at ground level. He then presented several renderings of improved local streets as part of a lowered highway alternative.

R. Armstrong invited the audience to visit the project website and learn more. He informed them of the upcoming Open Planning Studio (OPS) on April 20th and 21st, and said that the project team would hold an OPS every other month throughout the remainder of 2016.

<u>Discussion</u>

There was a question over whether the highway was originally narrower. D. Stahnke said that the highway originally included shoulders, which were eliminated when the highway was restriped in order to increase capacity. R. Armstrong said that I-84 was just one piece of a more extensive highway network that wasn't built. He said that 1950s-planned spurs through Bushnell Park and from Sisson Avenue to Bloomfield were expected to carry some of the traffic currently on I-84.

One person asked if the section of Hawthorne Street between Forest and South Marshall Streets would be closed should West Boulevard be extended to connect with Hawthorne Street. M. Glass said that the project team had not yet considered those details, but he did not see a reason why that section could not remain open.

There was a conversation about the realignment of CT*fastrak.* D. Stahnke said that a portion of the busway's alignment would have to change. He said that one realignment option would carry the busway below the lowered highway, connecting to a new street on the west side of Bushnell Park. He said that another option would follow the realigned railroad to the north and west of the highway and connect to the new rail annex.

One audience member asked what the lifespan of a highway cap would be. D. Stahnke explained that the cap was essentially a bridge, and could last for 70 to 100 years. T. Ryan said that a longer cap would require regular maintenance and updates to mechanical facilities and ventilation systems.

One person asked how much the elevated greenway would cost. D. Stahnke said that an elevated greenway running from Broad Street to beyond Sigourney Street would cost $100 million, or a tenth of the cost of the full cap to Sigourney. An audience member said that this would also reconnect Asylum Hill and Frog Hollow via a similar alignment to Flower Street.

There was a discussion about continuous development up Asylum Street towards a new rail annex. M. Glass noted that development up Asylum would be as important as park-front development along the proposed new boulevard referred to as Bushnell Park West. One person said that there had been an earlier discussion about an enclosed walkway connecting bus and rail facilities over the highway. They said that they were in favor of multimodal facilities, and that Europe had accomplished this decades ago.

An individual commented that, as a neighborhood resident, they were concerned about traffic volumes on local roads during construction. R. Armstrong said that the team was in the process of developing traffic routings for various alternatives and would focus more on this going forward in 2016.

One audience member suggested closing I-84 completely and finishing construction in a year. R. Armstrong explained the differences between accelerated and traditional construction. He said that complete highway shutdowns had occurred in St. Louis, Missouri and Knoxville, Tennessee. He said that he thought closing the highway completely was unlikely, but that it may be possible to close some portions.

One individual asked how much traffic traveled through Hartford as opposed to traffic originating in and terminating in Hartford. R. Armstrong said that the team developed its traffic models based on rush hour traffic. He said that during rush hour, 80% of traffic is destined for or leaving Hartford. Tim Ryan, of TSC, said that the broader the traffic study area, the greater the percentage of traffic originating in or terminating in Hartford. The individual said that I-691 could eliminate most traffic seeking to travel through Hartford. There was a follow-up discussion of additional routes and means of getting traffic off the highway.

T. Ryan said that recently completed and ongoing surveys would assess existing and potential travel patterns. He said that this data would be used to prioritize other improvement projects in the I-84 corridor, like to CT***fastrak***, or bicycle facilities.

R. Armstrong compared the I-84 Hartford Project to the I-84 Waterbury Project. He said that a five-year construction period would not be a short-term impact. He said everything must be done to reduce the time and impact of construction, even if it involves spending more money.

There was a question about CT***fastrak*** performance. R. Armstrong said that CT***fastrak*** was currently exceeding ridership expectations. He said that he hopes that one result of the I-84 Hartford Project will be that people will try new forms of transportation and never go back to commuting by private vehicle. He said that the project presents opportunities for investment in other modes of transportation, like the expansion of CT***fastrak***, or park and rides. D. Stahnke added that Hartford Line commuter rail service will be operational by 2018.

One person asked how the project would be funded. R. Armstrong said that the Quinnipiac River Bridge replacement program had previously been the state's largest transportation infrastructure project. He said that at $4-5 billion, the I-84 Hartford Project would be much bigger, and was the second biggest project on the governor's Let's Go CT transportation plan. He said that the largest project was the replacement of the I-84/Rt. 8 "Mixmaster" in Waterbury. He explained that if the state continues with its existing transportation funding methods, they will not be able to fund the 30 largest projects of Let's Go CT. He said that if the people want

to see investment in transportation infrastructure, they should write their local legislators and encourage them to support the governor's transportation plan.

There was a conversation about tolls. R. Armstrong said that the State may evaluate tolls as a funding mechanism for this and other projects, as well as increases in the gas tax and innovative financing. He said that a design will be settled on and NEPA documentation completed in two years, at which point the project must identify additional funding to continue. He stressed that as time goes on, inflation increases and the project will become more expensive.

There was a question about reconfiguring access ramps on Asylum Avenue. T. Ryan said that the existing conditions of the Asylum Avenue ramps were very poor. He said that there were three ramps in the area, inhibiting the development of a bike and pedestrian-friendly corridor. He said that the project team proposed rerouting the ramps to Cogswell Street and the new local boulevard, Bushnell Park West. He explained how doing so would improve the local road network and expand travel options.

One audience member asked if the project team had considered rotaries. They said that rotaries worked very well in Massachusetts and Europe. T. Ryan said that the project team had considered roundabouts, but that they require lots of land and are limited by traffic volumes. He said that although roundabouts would not be suitable for ramp exits in Asylum Hill, they may be more suitable in the West End. He noted that a roundabout will be developed at the intersection of Sigourney Street and Park Terrace. R. Armstrong said that the CTDOT now favors roundabouts for their efficiency and safety. There was a comment that they must be designed consistently so that drivers know what to expect.

An individual commented that while they appreciate routing ramps to Bushnell Park West because it is not a residential street and can accommodate more traffic, they believe that ramps to Cogswell will make that road very messy. T. Ryan said that it is a difficult balance to identify the appropriate number of lanes at an intersection. He explained how intersection size must be managed to facilitate the movement of both cars and pedestrians.

One person asked how much traffic moves into and out of Hartford each day, and how the project team would prepare for increases in traffic in 10 years' time. T. Ryan said that the team's comprehensive traffic demand model predicts traffic volumes up until 2040. He said that, taking into account employment and economic growth and changes in population and travel mode, the model only predicts a 0.5% growth rate until design year 2040. R. Armstrong concluded that predicting traffic demand can be very difficult.

R. Armstrong asked the audience for their opinion on the elevated East Coast Greenway. He said that the elevated structure could shield the highway, connect neighborhoods, improve the east-west corridor, and cost less than the cap or tunnel concept. All members of the audience indicated that they supported the greenway.

There was a discussion about building impacts. R. Armstrong said that building impacts depended on the alternative selected. One audience member suggested crafting a land swap agreement with existing property owners, in order to both obtain necessary property for construction as well as provide compensation. R. Armstrong said that property owners would be compensated and that their tenants would receive some kind of relocation assistance. D. Stahnke said that a building like the Capitol View Apartments would need to be acquired very early on, and that it would be logistically challenging to compensate the owner with land later on, considering the lengthy construction period.

There was a discussion about impacts to properties on Spring Street. T. Ryan said that one of the potentially impacted buildings was historic.