



REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Wednesday, June 29, 2016, 1 PM

Location: Center for Latino Progress

Subject: Stakeholder Meeting with the Center for Latino Progress

1. Attendees

John Dudzinski, Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)
Debra Goss, CTDOT
Randal Davis, CTDOT
Marcy Miller, Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Michael Coulom, FHI
Yanil Terón, Center for Latino Progress (CPRF)
Tony Cherolis, CPRF
Kimberly Flint, CPRF
Samantha Slade, CPRF

2. Welcome / Meeting Purpose

Marcy Miller, of FHI, welcomed everyone and introduced herself. She said that this stakeholder meeting had two goals. The first was to connect the project team and the Center for Latino Progress, formerly called the Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum (CPRF). The second was to seek CPRF's advice and ideas as it relates to jobs and training.

3. Presentation

M. Miller gave an overview of the project. She said that the project area extends from just east of the Flatbush Avenue ramps to the existing tunnel in Downtown Hartford. She said that most of the highway is constructed on bridges. She provided a brief history of the project area. She said that the railroad was first built in the corridor in the 1830s and followed the course of the Park River. She said that the idea for an east-west expressway began in the 1940s, and was later built in the 1960s as I-84, prior to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). She noted that the highway was elevated in order to avoid impacting the railroad, which it crosses over in two locations. She concluded that the highway was designed to carry 55,000 vehicles per day, and that today the highway carries over 170,000 vehicles per day.

M. Miller outlined the project's Purpose and Need. She said that the first need concerns the bridge structures, which have reached the end of their useful life. She said that the second need concerns the operational and safety deficiencies in the corridor. She noted that the left-hand on and off ramps, exit only lanes, and poorly designed curves contribute to unsafe conditions and inefficiencies. She concluded that the third need is mobility. She said that the project aims to improve mobility across multiple travel modes.

Outlining the project schedule, M. Miller said that the project is currently in the environmental and alternatives analysis phases. She added that construction could start as early as 2021.

M. Miller explained each of the four primary alternatives. She said that the No-build alternative would maintain the bridge structures through year 2040. The Elevated Alternative would build new bridge structures over the railroad, adding features to improve traffic operations and safety. She explained that the Lowered Alternative would require relocating the railroad to the north / west of I-84. She concluded by describing the Tunnel Alternative, and the comparative costs for the four major alternatives.

M. Miller said that there are generally 10 ramp options on the western side of the corridor, and 15 on the eastern side of the corridor, with Sigourney Street acting as the dividing line. She said that as part of the Lowered Alternative, the project team aims to reconfigure ramps in the western side from existing interchange at Sisson Avenue to a split interchange at Laurel Street and Capitol Avenue. She said that the Sigourney Street ramps would stay in their existing location, and that ramps in the eastern portion of the corridor would be reconfigured to Cogswell Street and a new boulevard along the western border of Bushnell Park. M. Miller said that this configuration would work well with a capped section over the highway between Asylum and Broad Streets. She noted that property impacts could include the Capitol View Apartments.

M. Miller emphasized that this is more than just a highway project. She highlighted the development of a multi-use trail, refinements to CT *fastrak*, the Hartford Line, a new rail station, and improvements to local streets and bike lanes as other important elements of the project. She added that the project could free up as many as 40 acres of developable land.

M. Miller then presented several aerial views of the area around Asylum and Broad Streets, highlighting public improvements and private development opportunities. She said that the area was envisioned as a new gateway to the city and transit oriented development hub.

Michael Coulom, of FHI, next described past stakeholder meetings with local community organizations. He described the issues and topics that those meetings touched on, including jobs. He said that the project could create between 3,500 to 7,000 construction jobs, which could be both union and non-union labor.

M. Coulom said that there are existing labor shortages on union benches, which will be further strained when the project breaks ground. He said that many other heavy and highway projects will soon begin across the state and region, straining existing human resource shortages.

M. Coulom outlined activities that may be helpful in training and employing Hartford residents. He mentioned the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Ladders to Opportunity program, student programs, jobs fairs, and local hiring preferences as some of these activities.

4. Discussion

Tony Cherolis, of CPRF, asked about alternative transportation modes during construction. M. Miller said that modifications to CT *fastrak* and the Hartford Line would be completed prior to direct highway construction, ensuring those modes as reliable transportation when the highway is impacted. She said that these projects would constitute groundbreaking in 2021 or 2022. She said that the project team would also examine making improvements to other transit services prior to construction.

Yanil Terón, of CPRF, asked for clarification on how CT *fastrak* would be impacted by the lowered highway. Randal Davis, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), said that the lowered highway would impact the last half mile of CT *fastrak*. He said that the state was aware of this when building the busway, but that funding for the I-84 Hartford Project was not yet certain at that time. He concluded that the busway would still terminate near Asylum Street.

Y. Terón said that a selling point to the project could be a seamless connection over the highway between the northern and southern ends of the city. M. Miller said that the project team has discussed this possibility extensively with representatives of the Asylum Hill neighborhood. She said that a cap over the highway in the area of Asylum and Broad Streets could help achieve this, and would also be the most affordable alternative.

T. Cherolis asked if development around the cap could include underground parking. John Dudzinski, of CTDOT, said that poor soil conditions and a high water table make underground parking difficult in Hartford. He said that any parking built as part of the project would likely be done above ground.

Debra Goss, of CTDOT, asked how the city's population trended after the highway was finished in 1970. M. Miller said that demographics began to change prior to the highway's construction. She stated that significant Hispanic and African American populations had begun concentrating in northern and southern portions of the city in the 1940s. J. Dudzinski said that many white people began moving to the suburbs at this same time, providing the impetus for the east-west expressway. R. Davis said that the city's population peaked in 1955, after which many white people and affluent African Americans began moving to the suburbs.

Y. Terón remarked that she read an article finding that many U.S. highways were built to divide communities. R. Davis said that earlier highway acts included provisions for blight clearance, and to move traffic through cities as efficiently as possible. He said that the I-84 Hartford Project is managed very differently than highway projects of the 1960s and 1970s, and that the project team aims to reconnect communities, in addition to addressing traffic concerns.

T. Cherolis requested more information on the proposed Bushnell Park West boulevard on the western edge of Bushnell Park. J. Dudzinski said that although this road would carry significant traffic, the reconfiguration of ramps to Cogswell Street, Capitol Avenue, and Laurel Street would better distribute traffic throughout local roads. He added that other new roads, like the West Boulevard extension to Hawthorne Street, and frontage roads along either side of the highway in Downtown, Asylum Hill, and Clay Arsenal, would increase redundancies and travel options in the local road network.

Y. Terón asked if the linear park would connect to the riverfront. T. Cherolis said that it would connect to Bushnell Park, from where it would continue along the iQuilt path to the riverfront.

T. Cherolis asked how major employers would encourage their employees to shift to alternative modes of transportation, given the significant investment in bus, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. R. Davis said that the CTDOT public transit department meets regularly with major employers to discuss existing alternative transportation modes and those under development.

T. Cherolis asked how the Ladders of Opportunity program is administered. M. Coulom said that it is a federal program that the State would need to apply to. D. Goss said that CTDOT receives money to assist with providing training opportunities, and is interested in working with community organizations. She said that existing job training programs at the Capitol Workforce Jobs Funnel target vertical construction, but that other programs were necessary for heavy

and highway construction. She asked if CPRF would be interested in this type of program development. In addition, D. Goss said that USDOT Secretary Anthony Foxx has given approval for local hiring considerations and targets. She said that she would like to certify more Hartford firms as DBEs. She said that although local non-profits do not qualify for DBE certification, they could provide services and DBE certification workshops. She added that the CTDOT would be interested in working with CPRF in organizing a DBE support services.

Y. Terón asked about union shortages. D. Goss said that unions are concerned about future labor shortages. She said that some trades may take up to 5 years to complete the apprenticeship training.

Y. Terón said that Capitol Community College (CCC) has a construction management program. D. Goss asked if CPRF or the Jobs Funnel could develop a heavy and highway construction training program. She asked how the CTDOT could use its resources to support CPRF. Y. Terón said that she would look into CCC programs and organize a meeting with the Jobs Funnel.

There was a discussion of student programs. D. Goss said that the CTDOT has mentoring and on the job programs for high school and college students. She said that students placed with contractors and consultants had a 90% hire rate with those firms. T. Cherolis was interested in CTDOT engineering teaching modules. D. Goss said that these teaching modules could be ready in the fall, and would be interested in working with CPRF to institute the program.

D. Goss agreed to set up a meeting with Y. Terón and Shari Pratt, of CTDOT, to discuss student programs, job training, and pre-apprenticeship classes. She said that this arrangement between CTDOT and CPRF could be mutually beneficial.

There was a discussion of CPRF's Best Chance Initiative, which provides customer service training and math classes to the incarcerated and recently released. Kimberly Flint, of CPRF, said that CPRF has developed a successful ongoing program that could be taken anywhere that computers are available.

Y. Terón discussed developing a "welcome back" package for those recently released from prison. D. Goss agreed this would be a good idea.