



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

**Date and Time: Wednesday, May 11, 2016, 6 PM**

**Location: Parkville Community & Senior Center, Hartford**

**Subject: Stakeholder Meeting with Parkville NRZ**

### **1. Attendees**

Rich Armstrong, Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)  
Dave Stahnke, TranSystems Corporation (TSC)  
Tim Ryan, TSC  
Casey Hardin, TSC  
Marcy Miller, Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.  
25 members of Parkville NRZ and public

### **2. Welcome / Introductions**

David Morin, of the Parkville Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ), welcomed everyone and asked each person to introduce him or herself. After introductions, D. Morin provided the ground rules for the meeting. D. Morin led the NRZ through their regular business before turning the podium over to the I-84 Hartford Project team.

### **3. Presentation**

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), thanked the Parkville NRZ. He provided an overview of the presentation agenda. The purpose of the presentation was to provide information on the I-84 Hartford Project and potential improvements in the City of Hartford, particularly to the Parkville neighborhood.

R. Armstrong discussed the history of the I-84 corridor in Hartford as well as the purpose and need of the project. He discussed community concerns noting that the Department is aware that the highway divided neighborhoods within the city when it was constructed. The upcoming reconstruction is an opportunity to fix some of those past mistakes. He added that there is an opportunity to open up a considerable amount of land for potential future development. R. Armstrong then turned the presentation over to Tim Ryan, of TranSystems Corporation (TSC), to discuss the roadway network and traffic under a variety of scenarios.

T. Ryan began discussing the existing conditions of the Parkville neighborhood road network, noting that there is a lack of redundancy in the east-west roadway connections. He described the geometry of the existing ramps. He also provided an overview of the existing traffic operations and bicycle and pedestrian conditions.

T. Ryan presented the four main alternatives. The three build alternatives, (Elevated, Lowered, and Tunnel) vary according to their vertical alignment. R. Armstrong discussed the cost ranges for the No-build and each of the three build alternatives.

T. Ryan described the western interchange options that were presented at the August 2015 Open Planning Studio held in the Parkville Community & Senior Center. At that time, there were nine western options presented. Based upon the discussion in August, the project team then added another western ramp option.

T. Ryan described Option W7, which would include rebuilding the ramps in a configuration similar to the existing Sisson Avenue interchange. Similar to the existing interchange, the traffic operations on the mainline would be poor, especially in the eastbound direction. T. Ryan explained that this interchange configuration does not provide access to Capitol Avenue, whereas other western interchange options do. Providing access to Capitol Avenue on the western and eastern sides of the project provides drivers with better choices and distributes traffic in a more efficient manner. Option W7 is also more expensive than other western interchange options because of the number of bridges that would need to be built to cross the highway and the railroad.

He next described Option W3-3, an interchange option that performs well from a traffic and cost perspective. He used a series of traffic analysis diagrams to compare how the mainline and local road networks perform for the existing and two build western interchange options.

T. Ryan next showed members of the NRZ the travel paths and distances for the existing interchange versus interchange option W3-3. The distances for each of the I-84 ramps were measured from a common point on I-84 to the intersection of Sisson Avenue and Park Street, which is the geographic center of Parkville. The travel distances for each of the trips using the ramps associated with W3-3 were identical to the existing travel distances, with the added benefit of drivers having travel path choices under the proposed design options that don't exist today

T. Ryan then presented a graphic that illustrated potential building impacts in the western portion of the corridor. He also showed and described a series of streetscape renderings for the existing and lowered highway alternatives at Capitol Avenue looking east, Park Street looking east, and an aerial view of the Sisson Avenue interchange area.

R. Armstrong concluded the presentation by providing background information on the East Coast Greenway. He described a plan view of a possible East Coast Greenway alignment. The facility would be an east-west multiuse trail on an elevated structure or at-grade through the study corridor.

#### **4. Discussion**

There was a question whether the team knows the travel times, in addition to the travel paths, for the scenarios presented. T. Ryan acknowledged that the travel times are important, though the team does not have these at this time. He added that the travel times could be shorter in some instances because the proposed changes to the mainline and ramps will improve the traffic operations and reduce congestion. He also stated that Option W3-3 would give truck drivers choices to avoid the deficient railroad bridge over Park Street.

There was a comment that Park Street seems a lot more congested than Capitol Avenue since CT *fastrak* opened.

There was a suggestion to keep the ramps at Sisson Avenue, as this is a gateway into Parkville. T. Ryan questioned if it is easier to use the Sisson Avenue ramps or the Prospect Street ramps to access Parkville. The attendees said the Sisson Avenue ramps are easier due to the congestion on New Park Avenue.

There was a question regarding the amount of available land for potential development. T. Ryan reviewed the aerial highlighting the land that could be available for future development. There was also a question about the amount of developable land that can be available on the south side of Capitol Avenue. T. Ryan answered that he suspected there would not be a lot of land available here because of grade.

There was a question on whether the rail would remain on the same alignment for Option W3-3. T. Ryan said the rail alignment would be shifted to the west to make room for the new interchange. The rail line would also be lowered to increase the vertical clearances under the crossing streets.

There was a question on whether any of the existing Sisson Avenue ramp bridges could be repurposed as a bike path connecting to Elmwood (West Hartford). R. Armstrong answered that the team did explore reusing the ramp bridges and concluded that they needed to be removed in order to build the new highway. He added that the proposed multiuse trail could be extended to the west to provide additional connections.

There was a question concerning the proposed bike lanes depicted in the renderings. The NRZ member wanted to know if they could be separated from the vehicle travel lanes with a barrier. R. Armstrong stated that they would ideally be separated, especially if space allows. Separating the bike lanes would depend on vehicular volumes and available space.

There was much discussion about the I-84 over Park Street bridge rendering. D. Morin stated that this is a high crash location. Motorists hit the center island because they do not see it. Simply adding the light shown in the rendering could prevent many of these crashes. Other attendees also voiced support for adding lighting to improve safety and security.

There was a question on whether it is feasible to relocate I-84 underneath Park Street. T. Ryan answered that the team has looked at this and there are challenges. These design challenges include the North Branch of the Park River Conduit and the high water table. T. Ryan added that there could be an opportunity to lengthen the overpass spans and open up area in between to let sunlight in. This could alleviate some of the discomfort people experience walking under the Park Street bridge.

An attendee expressed appreciation for the project team's emphasis on walkability. The lack of safety and security are deterrents to walking in Hartford. R. Armstrong acknowledged that other Hartford residents expressed similar concerns. This attendee also commented that it appears that Hartford High School would have better neighborhood connections with the W3-3 option.

D. Morin asked if it was feasible to add a new interchange at Park Street. T. Ryan stated that current highway design guidelines suggest that urban interchanges should be spaced no closer than one mile apart. This allows the highway interchanges to operate independently and, therefore, more efficiently. T. Ryan displayed a graphic that depicted the number of interchanges between Trout Brook (Exit 43) and Sigourney Street (Exit 47). Adding a new interchange at Park Street, if it were warranted, would likely negatively impact the traffic on the mainline as well as on Park Street. He further discussed the challenges of putting ramps on Park Street, citing the close proximity of the Park Street rail underpass, the Park River, Pope Park, and Pope Park Highway intersection.

D. Morin referenced the amount of "development potential" on the eastern side of the study corridor map and noted that he does not see the same attention the western side. R. Armstrong answered that the opportunities and land available on the eastern side are very different than

western side. For example, with the lowered highway alternative and the tunneled alternative, the new rail station would be located on the eastern side of the corridor, which presents an opportunity for transit oriented development (TOD).

There was a question on whether additional capping over the western portion of the highway is feasible. R. Armstrong stated that the project team investigated capping the highway on the western end of the project. However, at a cost of \$400,000 per linear foot, there does not seem to be many connectivity benefits due to the adjacent railroad to the north and limited development opportunities to the south.

There was a suggestion to build a store or other community destination under the I-84 overpass at Park Street. R. Armstrong answered that he is not sure if this is possible due to security concerns. T. Ryan noted that this type of development occurs where space is typically at a premium.

There was a question whether the Exit 44 interchange would be affected. T. Ryan answered that this interchange would remain unchanged as part of this project.

There was a question on when construction will begin. R. Armstrong stated that a decision will be made on an alternative in 2018. Construction will likely begin in 2021-2022.

D. Morin closed by asking if the proposed interchange at Sisson Avenue (Option W7) will be eliminated from further consideration. R. Armstrong replied that, although the proposed W7 would maintain the same connection to Sisson Avenue, it performs poorly with respect to mainline traffic operations, local connectivity, safety, and cost. He added that other ramp options could provide better traffic operations and additional benefits to the community. Attendees appeared to understand the limitations of rebuilding the western interchange at Sisson Avenue. These attendees had positive reactions when they were shown and described the potential benefits of the W3-3 interchange.