



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

**Date and Time: Wednesday, February 17, 2016, 10 - 11 AM**

**Location: Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc., 416 Asylum Street, Hartford**

**Subject: Stakeholder Meeting with Capitol Region Development Authority and Global Spectrum**

### Attendees

Kim Hart, Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA)  
Chris Lawrence, Global Spectrum  
Casey Heverling, Global Spectrum  
Rich Armstrong, Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)  
Phil McLellan, CTDOT  
Tim Ryan, TranSystems Corporation (TSC)  
Marcy Miller, Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)  
Michael Coulom, FHI

### Meeting Purpose and Format

The purpose of the meeting was to provide the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) and Global Spectrum, the company managing Rentschler Field and the XL Center, with background information on the I-84 Hartford Project. The meeting was also held to gather the concerns and suggestions of CRDA and Global Spectrum regarding the project.

The meeting consisted of a presentation on the I-84 Hartford project followed by a brief discussion period. Attendees were given project folders containing I-84 Hartford Project business cards, English and Spanish language copies of the seventh and eighth editions of the project newsletter, bilingual project overview pamphlets, bilingual fact sheets, and bilingual business cards.

### I-84 Hartford Project Presentation

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone and asked each individual to introduce her / himself. He gave an overview of the I-84 Hartford project and thanked the CRDA and Global Spectrum for their time. R. Armstrong provided an overview of the project and noted the study's limits, needs and purpose. He explained that the project is currently in the environmental phase, during which time the project team develops and reviews alternatives. He said that construction was not anticipated to start until the early 2020s, and that the duration of construction would depend on the alternative and construction means chosen.

R. Armstrong provided an overview of the mainline alternatives. He explained that the tight nature of the corridor leaves little room for variation in horizontal alignment. He said that the elevated highway performed poorly and would thus not likely be further considered. He said that although the tunnel was popular among some community members, many of those who attended project public meetings and Open Planning Studios have come to support the

lowered highway alternative after hearing the engineering and financial challenges of the tunnel.

R. Armstrong explained that the highway access points at Trumbull and High Streets would be closed under all alternatives. He said that the proximity of these ramps to each other and the I-91 interchange contribute to congestion and create unsafe weaving movements across the highway. Chris Lawrence, of Global Spectrum, expressed concern over the closure of these two exits. Tim Ryan, of TranSystems Corporation (TSC), acknowledged C. Lawrence's concern but said that modifications to the highway included changes to the local street network as well, increasing redundancy and optimizing traffic lights at intersections. He said that this would improve traffic flow in the area of the XL Center. C. Lawrence acknowledged that unsynchronized lights in the downtown area contributed greatly to congestion and discouraged people from visiting the XL Center venue.

R. Armstrong continued along the theme of local street network improvements by stating that the project sought to implement walkable and bikeable corridors through the city. He said that a well-functioning mainline required ramps at Sigourney Street. R. Armstrong also stated that the mainline could be improved while likewise improving traffic movements in the local network. He presented several renderings of local city streets under lowered highway alternatives and featuring improved bike and pedestrian facilities.

Focusing on east-side options, R. Armstrong explained that there are four (4) well-performing options for the highway and local street network to the east of Sigourney Street. Addressing C. Lawrence's concern regarding the closure of the High and Trumbull Street exits, T. Ryan pointed out options that would create new frontage roads to the north and south of the highway, better connecting principal north-south downtown routes, increasing redundancy, and improving traffic flow. C. Lawrence was pleased with these mitigation efforts. R. Armstrong presented renderings of Asylum Street under lowered highway alternatives, highlighting reduced traffic and improved conditions for cyclists and pedestrians.

R. Armstrong next introduced the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study, explaining that I-84 and I-91 are reduced to two through lanes in each direction due to the constrained location of the interchange, making this area a major bottleneck. He said that the study involved evaluating existing traffic conditions, developing congestion relief strategies, and considering a relocation of I-84 and its interchange with I-91. He presented images depicting I-84 relocated to the north. Relocating I-84 would allow the Bulkeley Bridge to become a multi-modal boulevard connecting Hartford and East Hartford and better incorporating the Downtown North area into the rest of Downtown. C. Lawrence commented that I-84 rerouted to the north, as depicted, would cut through the XFINITY Theatre in the North Meadows. R. Armstrong said there is a lot of work to do on the highway alignments and possible interchange configurations.

R. Armstrong concluded his presentation and offered that more project information was available on the project website. He asked those in attendance if they had any questions or comments.

#### Additional Discussion

C. Lawrence asked how long construction was anticipated to last. T. Ryan said that the duration of construction depended on the alternative and the method of maintaining traffic. He said that more information on construction methodologies will be known by the end of 2016.

Casey Heverling, of Global Spectrum, asked if closing the highway for the duration of construction would be considered. R. Armstrong said that closing the highway, or portions of the highway, was being considered in order to accelerate construction. He asked if Global

Spectrum and the CRDA would prefer the highway to be closed completely, with construction completed in a year or so rather than an estimated seven years. C. Lawrence said that he would prefer the highway closed for a year in order to accelerate construction. He asked if the project would be comparable to construction work on I-84 in Waterbury. T. Ryan said that the I-84 Waterbury project is simpler than the I-84 Hartford project. Although the highway alignment is changing, that project does not have the complexities of changing the vertical elevation between an elevated highway and an at-grade highway.

C. Lawrence said that the XL Center is considering investing hundreds of millions of dollars in updating the facility, and that he is concerned about traffic impacts coinciding with the opening of a new facility. He said that traffic impacts could disrupt people's usual routes and where people usually park. He said that Global Spectrum had conducted an independent study, finding that the area in the vicinity of the XL Center had capacity for two and a half times the number of visitors to the XL Center, but when people drive into the city for an event they try to park in the same area each time, and they get frustrated when there are no spaces available in that area.

C. Heverling said the first few years for a new venue are critical to its success because that is when the venue builds its reputation. He said that if the opening of the new venue coincided with seven years of construction, traffic impacts could negatively impact the success of the new venue. For this reason, he said he supported closing the highway entirely and accelerating construction. T. Ryan said that closing the highway entirely could also have a psychological effect, whereby entire closure would allow a foreseeable construction endpoint and something to look forward to. He said that traditional construction could have the opposite effect, whereby visitors, anticipating heavy congestion as a result of traffic, could start to avoid the area entirely.

R. Armstrong said that it was worth studying traffic numbers and patterns to the XL Center.

T. Ryan said that highways had been closed for the duration of construction in Knoxville and St. Louis. He said that these projects had been considered largely successful. He added that I-84 could be an easier construction process than these examples because it would not require the construction of additional viaducts.

R. Armstrong asked Kim Hart, of CRDA, how successful *CTfastrak* had been in attracting visitors to Rentschler Field. She said that in its first year of operation and with limited advertising and promotion, numbers had been very low. R. Armstrong followed up by asking what percentage of Rentschler visitors travelled to the venue from west of the Connecticut River. K. Hart asked Phil McLellan, of CTDOT, what their traffic numbers were. P. McLellan said that roughly 60% of visitors travel eastbound on I-84 and cross over the Bulkeley Bridge to East Hartford, and an additional 20% drive north along I-91 and U.S. Route 15, crossing the Charter Oak Bridge into East Hartford. This accounts for a combined 80% of travelers. C. Lawrence said that he would expect most visitors to come from areas west of the Connecticut River.

K. Hart said that CRDA and Rentschler field were currently exploring East Hartford development opportunities in the vicinity of Burnside Street, in the north, down to Goodwin College, in the south. She said that any rerouting of I-84 would greatly affect their development planning.