



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

**Date and Time: Tuesday, November 10, 2015, 1 - 3 PM**

**Location: CTDOT, Newington**

**Subject: Freight Roundtable**

### **1. Meeting Schedule and Format**

The roundtable discussion took place on Tuesday, November 10, 2015 from 1 to 3 PM. The meeting consisted of presentations by Dave Stahnke of TranSystems Corporation and Colleen Kissane and Stephanie Molden of the Office of Policy and Planning at Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), and was followed by a roundtable discussion between members of the Connecticut freight community and a panel of state and project officials. The panel included:

- Mike Morehouse, moderator (Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.)
- Jennifer Carrier (Capitol Region Council of Governments)
- Rich Armstrong (CTDOT)
- David Elder (CTDOT)
- Tim Ryan (TranSystems Corporation)
- D. Stahnke (TranSystems Corporation)
- Nick Mandler (TranSystems Corporation)

There were information boards set up at the back of the room displaying the results of the alternatives assessment and preliminary traffic analysis and PowerPoint presentations about the I-84 Hartford Project as well as the Connecticut Statewide Freight Planning Program.

Attendees were also given printed copies of the meeting's agenda, suggested discussion questions, and question / comment sheets.

Forty-two (42) members of the freight community attended the roundtable discussion.

### **2. I-84 Hartford Project Presentation**

R. Armstrong, of CTDOT, welcomed everyone and introduced himself. He asked each member of the audience to introduce themselves by name and agency/institution.

R. Armstrong gave an overview of the day's agenda and introduced D. Stahnke to present an overview of the I-84 Project. D. Stahnke explained the purpose of the I-84 Hartford Project, which is to address the bridges' structural deficiencies, operational and safety deficiencies, and mobility deficiencies. He presented aerial images of the corridor and demonstrated its relationship with the railroad and its impact on the local street system. D. Stahnke explained that I-84, at 175,000 vehicles per day, carries three times its anticipated capacity as designed for in the 1950s. Drivers are competing to get on and off the highway, which causes them to weave from lane to lane and results in an average of two collisions per day.

D. Stahnke provided a history of the project, and noted the study limits. The project area extends from approximately Flatbush Avenue to the I-91 interchange. He also reviewed the project schedule and said the project is currently in the environmental phase, which includes developing alternatives and preparing documents for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

D. Stahnke next provided an overview of the mainline alternatives. He stated that there are generally four vertical alignments and a number of horizontal alignments. He continued on to describe the various interchange options on the eastern and western portions of the corridor. He described the range of costs for each of the four mainline alternatives. He then addressed how different vertical alignments effect the railroad, including the need to increase elevation in the case of an elevated highway in order to meet federal rail standards and the possibility of electrification along the Harford Line.

D. Stahnke next discussed the alternatives screening process. He described the process of using the purpose and need to narrow the 150+ possible alternatives to a more manageable number. He reviewed the three major components of the purpose and need (bridge deficiencies, traffic and safety operations, and mobility). Regarding mobility, he described how the team analyzes mainline operations first then ramp and local road intersection operations second. He briefly reviewed a number of alternatives, spending time on the traffic analysis results for the existing conditions, and for one sample of each of the elevated alternatives, lowered alternatives, and tunnel alternatives.

D. Stahnke explained that the team has learned a number of things related to the mainline analysis, including that the existing highway has too many on- and off-ramps and that poor intersection operations affect the mainline. He explained that the project team is looking to improve cycling and pedestrian access.

D. Stahnke displayed various traffic models for intersection operations respective to each mainline alternative. He described that there are three color rankings (red, yellow, and green) denoting the intersection's capability to move traffic under various alternatives, whereby red denotes poor performance, yellow denotes moderate performance, and green denotes good performance at that intersection. He discussed the elevated options in detail noting that many of them perform poorly for traffic. He transitioned to the lowered highway options, introducing new possibilities for local streets and improved highway access ramps. He discussed the tunnel options in detail, noting that many intersection operations are colored red because they perform poorly for traffic and exhibit greater challenges for on / off ramps, particularly at Sigourney Street, an integral access point.

D. Stahnke presented the preliminary screening results. He noted that the preliminary screening results show that the lowered highway alternatives produce very positive results. The primary negative impact of a lowered highway is building impacts in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. D. Stahnke provided a graphical overview of characteristics for seven options that are performing well. He displayed the existing mainline and ramps, proposed mainline, ramp closures, proposed local roads, and potentially available land, on the western and eastern portions of the corridor.

D. Stahnke provided an overview of the project team's construction considerations, including the possibility of closing portions of the highway to accelerate construction. He addressed the possibility of improving mass transit, bicycle and pedestrian travel, and encouraging carpooling.

D. Stahnke closed the presentation by stating that public input is critical to the process. He encouraged attendees to visit the interactive webpage, 3-dimensional model, and Open Planning Studios.

### **3. Connecticut Statewide Freight Plan Presentation**

C. Kissane introduced the multi-modal freight plan currently under development at CTDOT and Office of Policy and Planning. She explained the planning process, which includes an analysis of maritime pipeline transportation, rail and air freight, as well as safety, resiliency, congestion management, infrastructure improvement, and coordination.

C. Kissane outlined federal mandates (MAP-21) for the freight planning process before introducing S. Molden for a presentation on how freight moves through the Hartford region. S. Molden displayed graphs depicting the top 10 commodities that move through the Hartford region. She said that 88.5 percent of all freight in Hartford moves by truck.

S. Molden explained that Connecticut has seven of the top 100 bottlenecks in the nation, two of which are in Hartford. The Hartford bottlenecks are the I-84 / I-91 interchange in downtown Hartford and the I-91 / U.S. Route 15 interchange at the Charter Oak Bridge. She also gave the example of the I-91 / I-95 interchange in New Haven as another Connecticut bottleneck.

S. Molden introduced the *Let's Go CT* initiative. She said that Hartford falls in the Hartford to Springfield area of the initiative. She stated that according to research conducted for CTDOT, the value of the Charter Oak Bridge post-construction reductions in traffic congestion would be worth \$880 million dollars over 25 years. She said that the State is finishing the Hartford Line, looking to expand CT*fastrak*, and making changes to Bradley International Airport to improve freight and commercial travel.

### **4. Discussion**

One attendee asked about the possibility of closing the highway or limiting highway access during construction. R. Armstrong explained that the project team would look at the feasibility of closing the highway to shorten the construction duration. He is uncertain whether it is possible, but the team would assess if it is a viable option.

The same attendee commented on the project's failure to improve through put on I-84 and eliminate the three-lane to two-lane choke point over the Bulkeley Bridge. R. Armstrong answered that the traffic analysis shows that congestion can be improved within the traffic limits by modernizing the highway design.

One commenter remarked that soon the public will be asked to pay more money for the governor's \$100 billion transportation proposal, including via congestion pricing. He said that it doesn't make sense to pay more money to sit in congestion and that this project will not address the bottleneck. Another commenter said that in Washington D.C. a new toll road had been built for those willing to pay to get around traffic. T. Ryan said that such a high occupancy toll (HOT) lane would be unrealistic along this corridor due to its narrow nature and the high number of on / off ramps.

M. Morehouse said that due to the fact that freight carriers are at the whim of their customers' availability for pickup / delivery, the freight industry would be unable to switch operating times to avoid construction. He asked if there were any alternative routes that freighters could take, and R. Armstrong asked if there were any places they currently avoided. One carrier said that there are already many places from which they are restricted from driving and that finding additional alternative routes would be difficult. Another person answered that the states of

New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts allow overweight permits to carry loads over 80,000 pounds on many roads, unlike in Connecticut; as a result, freight companies are forced to add trips to Connecticut to make up the difference. He said that the trucks can carry additional weight but it is a matter of politics why they cannot carry that much in Connecticut.

One attendee said that if you push freight off the highway, many constituents would be very unhappy. Another attendee asked if the project team was looking at the capacity of local streets. D. Stahnke said he was surprised how many people get on the highway just for one or two exits. He noted that adding redundancy in the local road network can improve congestion on those roads.

One audience member asked how the increase in commuter rail would impact freight rail access. D. Stahnke said that the current Hartford Line project is restoring double tracking pulled up in the 1990s and improving freight access to Hartford as well as Springfield. He said that they are also looking at improving and increasing sidings to allow for improved operations of commuter rail and freight trains. M. Morehouse said that the Federal Rail mandate required the project to account for projected freight and commuter traffic. D. Stahnke said that they are looking at building a new passenger rail annex, a third bypass line, and at improving track geometry and grade in Hartford at Union Station.

One attendee offered that the project team should keep in mind that freight will divert to I-91 and I-691 in the event of an I-84 closure. He said that cars on the Merritt Parkway already back up on to I-691. He said that this would be very dangerous and increase congestion. R. Armstrong said that a project was already underway to improve the Charter Oak Bridge, and that another was on the way to improve the I-91 / I-691 interchange.

One person asked if the project team accounted for the growth of container traffic in the Port of New Jersey. S. Molden of CTDOT said that Connecticut does not take many containers from the port of New York / New Jersey (only 5-10%). She said that the majority goes by rail to inland ports further west. She added that containers do not come directly to Connecticut from the port of NY / NJ, as they have already been emptied and resorted elsewhere due to existing congestion. She said the number of containers in CT is not projected to increase.

M. Morehouse asked the panel if they were projecting an increase in freight in the state. N. Mandler noted that the project team is anticipating a 0.2% increase in freight. He noted that freight drops during peak hours as a percentage of vehicles, but that is primarily due to the increase in commuters. One commenter said that the freight industry responds to customer demands; people want freight in the morning and the evening, at the same time that more people are on the roads, increasing traffic.

M. Morehouse asked if there were policies elsewhere that allowed carriers to capitalize on unused road capacity. Two commenters said that there never is extra capacity, and that their expenses increase in order to deal with extremely bad congestion, construction, etc.

Another commenter said that his company keeps trucks staged at his plant to avoid travelling onto local roads, instead opting to travel at night. Another man added that if the state implements a truck ban between 1-5 AM, all trucks that avoid congestion by traveling at those times will have to start on the road with commuters at rush hour.

One commenter responded to a previous statement regarding a successful public referendum to close the highway in St. Louis. He voiced that such a referendum seemed unfair to those road users who live outside of the state or are unable to vote.

N. Mandler asked if air rights developments or a lowered or elevated highway would produce any restrictions for the freight community. The audience indicated that in other states, such as Massachusetts, you cannot travel with hazardous material through a tunnel.

One attendee asked what the boundaries are for potential railroad relocation. T. Ryan said the boundaries lay between Laurel Street and Walnut Street. J. Carrier said that CRCOG and the City of Hartford are looking to realign the intersection of North Main Street and Albany Avenue; doing so would involve evaluating the rail tunnel there. The commenter said that there was a height and width restriction at that tunnel. He stated that the tunnel was originally double tracked and that there is a bottle neck where several different railroads come together. He said that double tracking would improve conditions, though the existing tunnel has extensive height and width restrictions as well as poor drainage.

M. Morehouse asked if I-84 was the most congested point in the state. The audience said that it depended on the time of day. M. Morehouse said that the highway's lack of shoulders meant that there was no area to pull out of traffic in the case of accidents, and their addition would reduce congestion resulting from collisions.

One commenter said that over-dimension shipments cannot travel along I-95. As a result, all east-west over-dimension traffic must travel over I-84. If I-95 could take over-dimension shipments, some pressure could be relieved off of I-84. He also said that I-84 is bad because of the hills, particularly in Tolland and Southbury and during snowstorms. He said that Conway, FedEx, and UPS all run twin-load vehicles, except for when it snows. He also said that there is no safe place to sit back and rest in those areas.

D. Elder said that there are financial incentives for having a state freight plan and a state freight advisory committee. He asked who would be interested in serving on that committee, meeting every three months in the evening for two years. About 10 people raised their hands. One commenter said that as an intermodal plan it would need intermodal representatives. D. Elder agreed.

One commenter asked if there was a projected start and completion date for the project. R. Armstrong said that the project would start in the early 2020s, assuming funding is available.

D. Elder said that CTDOT will work with the freight community to identify industry best practices employed in Connecticut and will work with logistical providers to improve access and communication. He asked for the audience to give the project team suggestions as to best practices.

J. Carrier said that the Federal Highway Administration requested that CRCOG develop a freight plan. She is looking to collaborate with CTDOT, and develop a freight plan more expansive than the Capitol Region.

M. Morehouse encouraged the audience to stay involved with the process and to review project literature and the website.

## **5. Other Informal Comments/ Discussions at the Meeting**

- Appreciate the information and involvement
- Project team gratitude for the freight community's insight and knowledge
- Unwillingness to pay for a tunnel or elevated highway.
- Several years of nighttime construction will result in several years of nighttime freight congestion

- It is worth looking at the response of the freight community to highway closures in St. Louis and Knoxville
- Digital highway signs informing motorists of delays work well

6. Written Comments Received at the Meeting

- Plan for over-length freight during construction? Many of our loads carry steel up to 60' long.