

Report of Meeting

Date and Time: Tuesday, June 17, 2014, 4-8 PM

Location: Hartford Public Library

Subject: Public Meeting #1

1. Meeting Schedule and Attendance

The public meeting occurred on Tuesday, June 17, 2014 from 4 to 8 PM. The meeting began with an open house where members of the public could obtain information and talk with project staff about the I-84 corridor and study process. There were six station areas set up around the room, each addressing a differing aspect of the corridor or planning process. In addition, a 30-minute presentation was given two times during the evening, first at 5 PM and again at 7 PM. Each presentation was followed by a 30-minute open microphone question and answer period.

Ninety-nine members of the public and nine Public Advisory Committee (PAC) members attended the meeting.

2. Stations

There were six station areas set up around the room. The stations included:

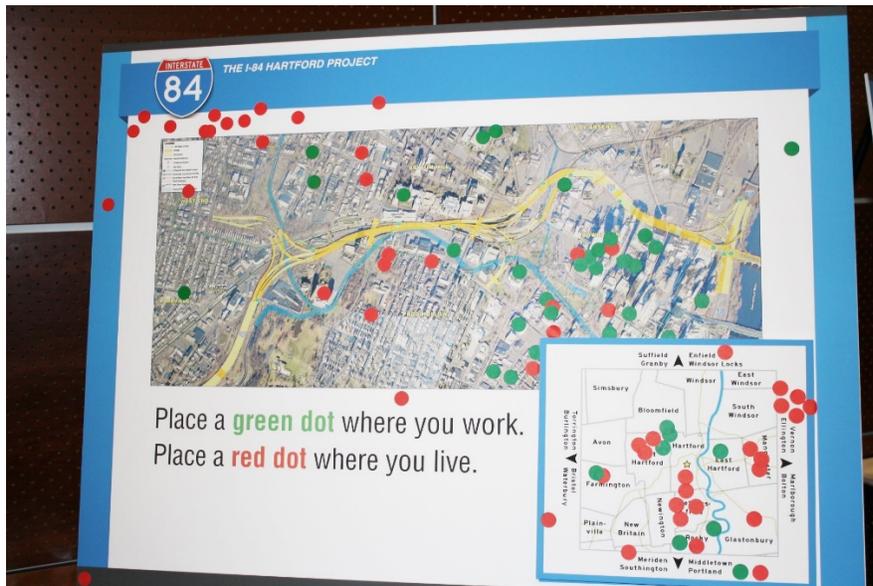
- Station 1: Welcome
- Station 2: History of I-84 in Hartford
- Station 3: Why is the I-84 Hartford Project needed?
- Station 4: What will I-84 look like in the future?
- Station 5: What will we consider as we improve the corridor?
- Station 6: What are NEPA and CEPA?

At the stations, project staff engaged with attendees to answer questions about the I-84 project, solicited feedback, and directed the public to available resources for continued public involvement. The list below is a summary of the prevalent topics of discussion at the stations.

Activity: Where do **you** live and work?:

- About two thirds of the attendees who visited this station engaged in the exercise. A summary of the responses follows and is displayed in Figure 1:
 - Most lived and worked within the City of Hartford
 - Most Hartford residents lived in the Asylum Hill, Downtown, and West End neighborhoods
 - The majority of workers in attendance worked Downtown; Asylum Hill employees represented the next largest group
 - Most non-Hartford residents in attendance lived in the Greater Hartford region

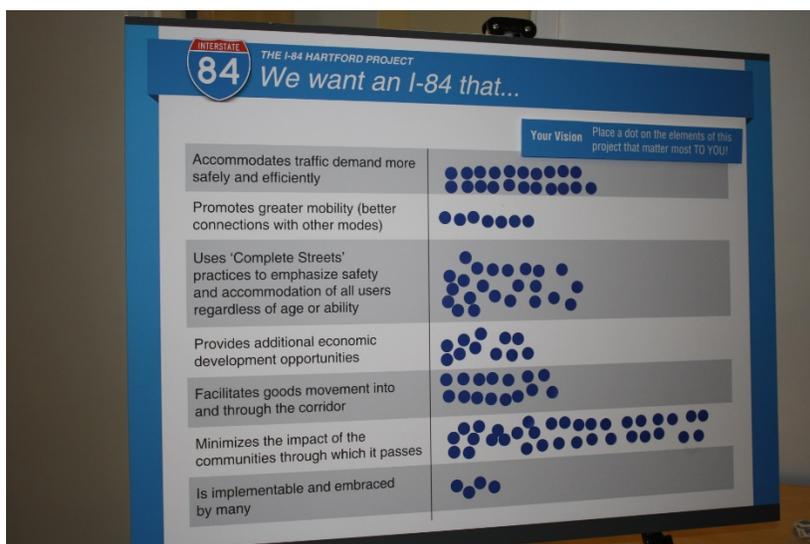
Figure 1: "Where do you live and work?" board responses



Activity: What's **your** vision?:

- This board listed each component of the vision. Each attendee was given three dots, to be placed near one or more of the vision components that he/she felt are most important to consider. The most prevalent vision component selected was the minimization of the impact to the communities through which I-84 passes, followed by using Complete Streets practices to emphasize safety and accommodation of all users regardless of age and ability. The third most popular choice was accommodation of the traffic demand more safely and efficiently (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Vision board responses



Procedural/engineering questions and comments:

- A number of people thought that the preferred alternative had already been developed and that it is an at-grade alternative
- Duration of design and construction phases
- Process of developing future traffic volumes
- Using simulation of future traffic to aid in determining preferred alternative from the set of alternatives
- Projected mode shift to **CTfastrak**

Safety questions and comments:

- Confirmation that bridges are safe
- Majority of people agreed that significant safety and operational challenges exist on the project segment
- Questions regarding how accident rates can be reduced through operational changes – one attendee suggested simulating an accident in VISSIM
- Exiting the existing platform/tunnel (west of the I-91 interchange), a number of people mentioned feeling blinded by the sun or having difficulty with the difference in illumination from the tunnel

Congestion patterns questions and comments:

- Duration and extent of the traffic congestion
- Anecdotal corroboration of the traffic congestion heat maps – PM peak has significant delays on I-84 project segment

Coordination with other modes questions and comments:

- Confirmation that the I-84 project will coordinate with **CTfastrak**, Union Station improvements, iQuilt, and the proposed stadium
- I-84 construction impacts on **CTfastrak**, iQuilt, and existing bike paths

Alternatives questions and comments:

- A large number of people prefer a tunnel alternative (Boston or Seattle mentioned frequently) and wanted confirmation that a tunnel is still on the table
- Remove some of the ramps (High Street or Trumbull Street) but keep Sigourney Street and Asylum Avenue/Capitol Avenue
- A few attendees proposed a new alignment to remove “the bump” between Myrtle Street and Trumbull Street
- One property owner to the northeast of Union Station (450 Church Street) was concerned about his building being impacted
- One attendee proposed keeping the existing I-84, or a portion thereof, as a bicycle/pedestrian skyway (like the NYC Highline)

Improvements questions and comments:

- Utilize electronic signage to provide drivers with information on congestion/accidents and bypass routes
- If tunnel option selected, ensure GPS will work in it
- A few mentioned that they would like to see shoulders
- One person noted that CTDOT should consider minimizing the impact to the environment during all stages of construction and would like to see more discussion on this topic
- A large number of attendees want to reconnect local neighborhoods with pedestrian access

Bypass routes questions and comments:

- A large number of attendees suggested bypass routes, whether north or south of the city
- A number of attendees want a portion of the beltway built in conjunction with I-84 improvements
- One proposed alignment for a bypass – connect north of Clay Arsenal/North End with I-291 and other roads (Routes 6, 9, 44, etc.)

Multi-modal connections questions and comments:

- Reinstate the Griffin Rail Line to connect airport users and also connect with CT**fastrak**
- More bike path connections in all directions to main points in Hartford and employment centers
- An attendee proposed geographic expansion of the commuter rail network beyond the planned NHHS service

Economic development questions and comments:

- A large number of people encourage development along (and above) I-84 to support the local economy
- One attendee asked why there are no buildings on top of the existing tunnel/platform

Financing questions and comments:

- How much will the reconstruction cost the citizens of Hartford and the state?
- How significant is cost amongst the other performance measures in evaluating alternatives?

Graffiti and vandalism questions and comments:

- Anti-graffiti materials exist to ease remove of graffiti as has been used on the East Hartford noise barriers

Historical considerations:

- Promote the historical significance of buildings near the I-84 viaduct, such as buildings near/at High Street, Asylums Street, Union Place
- Return the river conduit to the surface – at minimum portion through the park
- How does the relocated rail line impact Union Station?

3. Presentation

Michael Morehouse, of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc., welcomed everyone and introduced Rich Armstrong, of Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT). Mr. Armstrong thanked everyone for coming to

learn about this important and exciting project. He noted that, for this section of I-84 in Hartford, there are prevalent concerns in the following areas:

- Structural deficiencies and conditions
- Safety
- Traffic congestion

Mr. Armstrong stated that the study team has been collecting large amounts of data on the existing conditions and are nearing the completion of the analysis of existing conditions. He stressed the importance of fully understanding existing conditions before proposing solutions. He also stated that the public outreach process is underway, with several meetings of the Public Advisory Committee (a large group of community stakeholders) already having already occurred.

Finally, Mr. Armstrong stated that the purpose of this meeting is to provide the public with information and allow members of the community to ask questions. The meeting will not involve the presenting of design alternative concepts. That will occur over the next several months.

Mr. Armstrong introduced Tom Deller, of the City of Hartford, and Lyle Wray of the Capitol Region Council of Governments to say a few words. Mr. Deller and Mr. Wray each briefly discussed the purpose of the project and its significance to the City, Region, and State.

Mr. Morehouse discussed the I-84 Hartford Project through a PowerPoint presentation, which can be accessed on the study website at <http://i84hartford.com/public-meetings.html>. In particular, he discussed:

- The history of the corridor,
- Why the project has been initiated,
- What the project will entail,
- The project schedule and status,
- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) / Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) processes,
- Potential project costs, and
- How the public can continue to be involved.

4. Question and Answer Period

Questions and comments that were voiced during the meeting include:

General Questions and Comments:

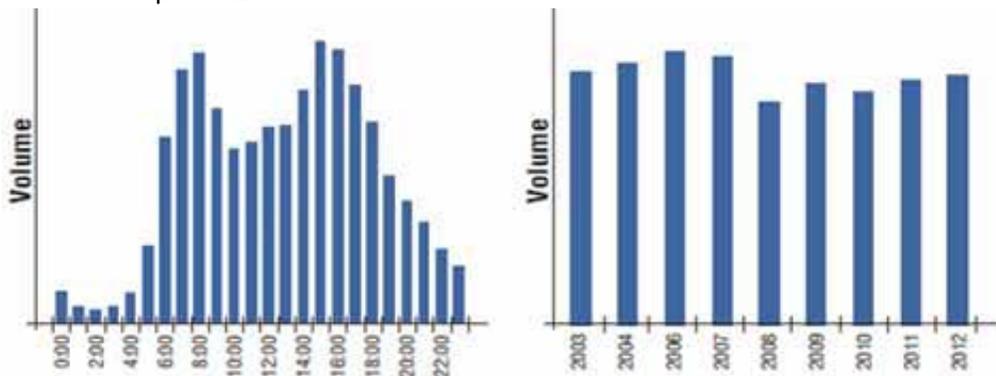
- Question: How much of this reconstruction will the federal government pay for? Answer: The federal government typically covers about 80 percent of reconstruction, and the other 20 percent would likely come from the state.
- Question: Will this project serve as a catalyst for others? Answer: This study is going to be looked at as a corridor project that includes many interrelated projects. This study is looking to enhance opportunities for different modes.

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- **Question:** How can we know that the next highway will not have such a negative effect on the communities through which it passes? **Answer:** NEPA and CEPA, which did not exist when the freeway was constructed, require public disclosure of all alternatives and impacts, and the public's input is essential to the decision making process.
- **Comment:** Thank you for presenting this information to the public tonight. **Answer:** Thank you for your comment.
- **Comment:** This meeting was very information and the study team should consider conducting similar meetings in West Hartford and East Hartford. **Answer:** Thank you for your comment and this is a good suggestion.

Questions and Comments about Current Conditions and Forecasts:

- **Question:** Can you provide information on how many users are traveling through Hartford on I-84? **Answer:** About 25 percent of all vehicles travel 'through' Hartford on I-84. It is important to note that some percentage of the other 75 percent are traveling beyond Hartford via I-91.
- **Comment:** Please do not assume that there will be continued growth in the corridor. Average daily traffic has been declining for the past 10 years. **Answer:** This is correct (for CT statewide per capita VMT reduction); however, traffic on I-84 through Hartford has increased slightly over the past few years. The study team will consider VMT trends when developing performance measures to prioritize the alternatives.

*Comments and Questions on Alternative Preferences and Considerations:*

- **Comment:** Most existing mass transit technologies are going to be out of date by the time a new I-84 highway is reconstructed. Please consider autonomous vehicles as an alternative. **Answer:** The study team is working to understand trends in transportation and will consider a variety of transportation options. There is a strong desire to not overbuild the corridor when it is reconstructed.
- **Comment:** I-84 is a part of the interstate highway system. This project needs to consider needed improvements to freight. **Answer:** Goods movement is indeed important to the state of CT, as well as to New England and beyond. This study will consider the mobility needs of all users of the highway.

- Comment: This was a very information presentation. Please consider the issue of safety. Answer: The study team appreciates and will certainly consider this comment. Weaving traffic patterns and lanes drops are real safety issues in the corridor.
- Comment: This study should consider a public education campaign to inform the public on what a solid line means. Drivers cross solid lines all the time in this corridor. Answer: Thank you for your comment.
- Comment: The at-grade option will not reconnect neighborhoods that have been divided from one another. Answer: The goal is to make the future highway a significantly better neighbor than it is today.
- Question: What challenges are involved with tunneling? Answer: There is currently not enough data to comment on whether tunneling is a feasible option in this corridor. Financing the cost of a tunnel will be a challenge.
- Question: How much more expensive is the tunnel option? Answer: The cost to construct a tunnel will likely be 2-3 times more expensive than any other alternative, as cited in the HUB study. This means a complete tunneling of I-84 under Hartford could be \$9 billion or more to construct, and would also have high annual maintenance costs.
- Comment (four times): The tunnel is the best option as it holds special opportunities. The cost alone should not limit this as a viable alternative. Answer: At this time, the tunnel is still an option under consideration. However, there are considerations other than cost that can preclude the tunnel from being the preferred alternative. These can include high maintenance costs, delays for emergency services, and bypassing drivers through the city, without giving them the ability to view and visit its landmarks.
- Comment: Please consider incorporating high-speed fiber optics into any construction alternative. Answer: Thank you for your comment.
- Comment: Please do not put a special toll in place to pay for this highway. Answer: Thank you for your comment.

Comments and Questions on Other Routes, Studies, and Projects:

- Question (two times): A highway bisecting a city is not unique to Hartford. Is there a comparable city that has dealt with this? Answer: There are many cities (e.g. Milwaukee, San Francisco, Boston, Syracuse, and Providence) with such highways, but none have the exact same issues as Hartford, and while we can learn from those places, I-84 will certainly require unique solutions.
- Question: Has the study team considered changing the interstate to follow I-84, to Charter Oak Bridge, to Route 5, to Route 15, to Route 72? Answer: Changing the route of the interstate system is not a consideration for this project.
- Question (two times): Why is the state not considering constructing a beltway? Answer: One of the primary reasons I-84 is being studied is because of the deteriorating condition of the viaduct. A beltway was last considered in the 1970s, and was dismissed by the public over environmental impacts. Even if a beltway were to be considered again, the state will still have to reconstruct I-84 because of the deteriorating bridge conditions and the fact that a majority of traffic on I-84 begins or ends somewhere in Hartford.

- Question: How will CT**fastrak** impact the traffic congestion heat map? Answer: This study has not conducted that analysis at this time, but the effect of other transportation systems such as CT**fastrak** and the NHHS Commuter Rail service will be evaluated in this project.
- Question: How much of the CT**fastrak** development will be coordinated with the I-84 Project. Answer: This is a challenge, but this coordination is important to the I-84 Project team.
- Question: Is it true that the rail bridge in this corridor needs to be replaced? Answer: Yes, there is another study that is beginning to look at potential alternatives for the replacement of the rail viaduct at Union Station and the two studies are coordinated with one another. It is truly one transportation corridor.
- Question: What is the lifespan on the improvements to I-91? Answer: We are not sure of what segment of I-91 you are referring to, but modern bridges, with regular maintenance, typically last 75 or more years. Pavement is continuously being maintained on I-91 and all other roads governed by CTDOT to maintain a state of good repair.
- Question: What is the distance between Hartford and Middletown? Answer: The distance between Hartford and Middletown is about 15 - 20 miles.

Questions and Comments about Bidding / Construction:

- Question: How long will it take to reconstruct the highway? Answer: It will take a minimum of five years to reconstruct the highway, but that is once the project gets through the NEPA environmental process and is designed, which can take several more years.
- Question: Will there be traffic delays during construction? Answer: Yes, there will likely be some delays, but the impacts will depend upon the alternative that is selected for construction.
- Comment: It is important to support local businesses and hire local firms to the extent practicable. Answer: This is important to the Department, however, certain federal and state laws prohibit local favoritism and conducting non-competitive bidding practices. As we develop the project's design, we'll look for opportunities to break the construction into as many construction contracts as is feasible. As with CT**fastrak**, even if some of the successful bidders are contractors from out of state, they often use local laborers, subcontractors, suppliers, and vendors. We will also be proactive in providing information about the project before it goes to construction, so that construction businesses are prepared to pursue participation during construction.
- Question: How will congestion be addressed during construction? Answer: Attempts will be made to maintain all traffic lanes in the corridor during construction. The impacts to congestion will vary, depending upon which alternative is selected.
- Question: What will the City of Hartford's role be in managing local traffic near ramps? Answer: The City will have a role in this, and when the planning gets to this stage, CTDOT will coordinate with the City.

5. **Written Comments**

Written comments that were submitted and via mail at the meeting include:

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- I would like to commend you on an excellent presentation. I'm especially impressed at your mindfulness of the placemaking considerations this project entails. I agree that I-84's replacement offers significant opportunities to facilitate Hartford's continued revitalization.
- Whatever design alternative is selected, all of the following should be part of it:
 - Extension of CT **fastrak** eastward, as part of the highway, across the river on the Bulkeley Bridge;
 - Extension and widening of the pedestrian walkway on the Bulkeley Bridge to accommodate bicyclists;
 - A new access to the Riverfront, over the dike, at the Bulkeley Bridge (this would not be difficult) for pedestrians and bicyclists. Could be a branch off of the previous bullet.
- Hi Everybody! Thanks so much for this meeting! Safety please! First and foremost!
- Finish the beltway! Use local / express lanes. Finish stub ramps at Farmington to get traffic off viaduct.
- Hybrid-at grade and below local streets.
- The best idea for I-84 through Hartford is to demolish it! As an alternative route traffic around the city: There are bridges to the south of the city, the Putnam Bridge in Wethersfield/Glastonbury, and to the North, the Dexter Coffin Bridge connecting to Windsor to South Windsor. Both bridges presently lead to I-84 on the East Side of the River. Connections should be on the West side of the river. We in Hartford have had 50 years of intrusion from I-84. Now is the time for the suburbs to share the burden, after all it is the suburbanites who use the highway.
- Mr. Mike Morehouse of FHI public relations firm in Rocky Hill spoke quite well! I also wish to commend all the others who put a lot of effort into this public forum - the first of many. It will take several years of "blood, sweat, and tears" to get the I-84 Viaduct Removal Project a reality. It is an exciting time to be a resident of the Capital City (indeed, I daresay, of the entire Nutmeg State as a whole). By the year 2030, the infrastructure of Hartford will be vastly different than it is today – I revel in that fact!