

I-84 Danbury Project Public Involvement Plan

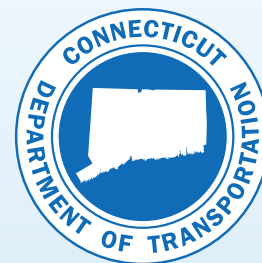


I-84 Danbury
Project



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**CDM
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act
CEPA: Connecticut Environmental Policy Act
CFR: Code of Federal Regulations
CTDOT: Connecticut Department of Transportation
EA: Environmental Assessment
EIE: Environmental Impact Evaluation
EIS: Environmental Impact Statement
EJ: Environmental Justice
LEP: Limited English Proficiency
NEPA: National Environmental Policy Act
PAC: Project Advisory Committee
PEL: Planning and Environmental Linkages
PIP: Public Involvement Plan



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This Public Involvement Plan (PIP) describes the objectives, methods, and expectations for public engagement on the Connecticut Department of Transportation's (CTDOT) I-84 Danbury Project. It is a living document, revisited periodically to ensure engagement with the many and diverse members of the public. The purpose of this PIP is to provide the public, project team, and regulatory agencies with the framework identified to engage with diverse project stakeholders and the public to:

- Identify deficiencies and needs;
- Establish the project's purpose and need;
- Identify, develop and evaluate alternative solutions, including the identification of impacts, for the corridor and select the preferred alternative;
- Review environmental documents pertaining to Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) compliance (i.e., a federal-level Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA), and state-level Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE)) and assist the project team in identifying potential impacts and alternative mitigation measures; and
- Inform the public about progress on the design and construction.

This PIP describes how the project team will engage with (i.e., reach out to inform and seek input from) stakeholders and the public throughout the project. Public involvement is the process by which the views of the public are integrated into the decision-making process. For purposes of this PIP, a member of the public is any person, except a member, agent, officer, or employee of a federal, state, or local agency acting within the scope of his/her membership, agency, office, or employment. For purposes of this PIP, a stakeholder is any person or group 1) expressing interest in, 2) involved in or affected by, and/or 3) having the potential to influence others' opinions or decisions on this project. In this PIP, CTDOT and its consultant team are referred to collectively as the project team.

The program guided by this PIP will utilize a range of strategies or techniques to engage members of the public throughout greater Danbury. Public input will ensure that the project not only addresses I-84's deficiencies and needs in a practical and cost-effective manner, but also considers community concerns, goals, and priorities.

Table 1 displays public engagement activities that the project team plans to employ to fulfill the public engagement process and objectives of the I-84 Danbury Project. Public engagement activities are identified for six general categories of stakeholders and includes: 1) the public; 2) the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), 3) EJ communities, community-and faith-based organizations, and special interest groups; 4) elected officials; 5) other targeted stakeholders;



and 6) the media. These events and tools will be conducted over the full life of the project and are used to both inform and obtain input.

TABLE 1: EXAMPLE STAKEHOLDER CATEGORIES AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Stakeholder Category	Engagement Events	Engagement Tools
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal, Pop-up events • Public informational meetings or workshops • Formal Public Hearing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Website • Social Media • Newsletters and fact sheets • Press Advisories • E-Bulletins • Comment Cards
Project Advisory Committee (PAC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAC meetings • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations • Newsletters and fact sheets • PAC notebooks
Environmental Justice Communities, Community Based Organizations, and Special Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal, pop-up events • Stakeholder interviews or small group meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project website • Social media • Newsletters and fact sheets • Press advisories • E-bulletins
Elected Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal public official briefings and listening sessions • Invite legislators to public informational meetings or workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters and fact sheets • E-bulletins
Other Targeted Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder meetings • Focus group meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters and fact sheets • E-bulletins
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print interviews / coverage • Radio interviews / coverage • TV interviews / coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature articles • Project website • Newsletters and fact sheets • Press advisories • E-bulletins



1.2 Guiding Principles

The goals and objectives of the public involvement effort for the I-84 Danbury Project reflects CTDOT's overall public involvement goals to ensure that early, inclusive, continuing, and comprehensive public involvement opportunities are provided during all stages of the project and to take into consideration the needs of persons who are underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low income, minority, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals and households. Effective public engagement also:

- Provides the opportunity for the public, agencies, and stakeholders to participate in the early stages of the planning process through detailed project development;
- Promotes the shared commitments of the public and the CTDOT to identify transportation and related problems and to participate in finding solutions based upon collaboratively identified criteria;
- Uses various public involvement techniques designed to meet the diverse needs of the public;
- Provides timely information about transportation issues and processes to those who may be interested or affected by this project;
- Provides public notice of public involvement activities and adequate time for public review and comment at key decision points; and
- Provides for a periodic review to ensure that the PIP is effective in engaging the public, particularly groups traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems.

1.3 Compliance

Public projects such as the I-84 Danbury Project are subject to regulatory requirements. Several federal and state statutes or guidance documents call for certain engagement and coordination measures to be taken to ensure that adequate public and regulatory agency input is incorporated into the project. A list of the federal and state laws, regulations, and executive orders that are relevant to public involvement and engagement on state and federally funded projects like the I-84 Danbury Project is provided in Chapter 1 of the CTDOT's *Public Involvement Procedures* plan.¹ While CTDOT seeks to exceed these regulatory directives with a comprehensive and inclusive engagement strategy, it is important that the project team understand and comply with the regulations that exist. While this PIP does not establish any new requirements, the I-84 Danbury Project is subject to:

- Statewide and Metropolitan Planning. 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 450 and 500 and 49 CFR Part 613, February 14, 2007;
- Environmental Impact and Related Procedures and Section 4(f). 23 CFR Parts 771 and 774, October 16, 2001; 40 CFR 1506.6 and Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552);
- Protection of Historic Properties. 36 CFR Part 800;

¹ *State of Connecticut, Public Involvement Procedures, Connecticut Department of Transportation;* dated 2020.
www.ct.gov/dot/pip



- Air Quality Conformity. 40 CFR Part 51, November 24, 1993;
- Management and Monitoring Systems. 23 CFR 500, December 1, 1993;
- *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;*
- *Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898, US Department of Transportation Order 5610.2(a);*
- *Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency; and*
- *FHWA Work Zone Safety and Mobility Rule 23 CFR 630 subpart J.*

These federal regulations require:

- Early and continuing public involvement opportunities during all stages of the planning and programming process;
- Timely information about transportation issues and processes to the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects;
- Reasonable public access to information used in the development of the plans and projects;
- Adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points;
- A process for demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input;
- A process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households; and
- Periodic review of the effectiveness of the public involvement process.

CTDOT values conducting a meaningful and inclusive engagement process for the I-84 Danbury Project. In greater Danbury, this will include activities specifically aimed at reaching traditionally underrepresented populations including low income and minority persons. These are referred to as Environmental Justice (EJ) communities or populations throughout this document. The objective of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 13166, and Executive Order 12898 is to eliminate barriers to public participation in the transportation decision-making process and encourage more diverse voices and people to review and comment on transportation investment priorities. The project team will identify the population and composition of the individuals impacted by the I-84 Danbury Project. CTDOT Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 maps will be reviewed to determine if there are low income, minority, and/or LEP populations in the I-84 Danbury Project area. In addition, the project team will seek to engage those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems and processes such as tribal, seniors, disabled, pedestrian, and bicyclist communities.



2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

A range of techniques, public engagement events and engagement tools, will be utilized as part of the public involvement effort for this project. When appropriate, visualization techniques will be employed to better enable citizens to understand alternative plans and the context of proposed improvements, and graphic illustrations will be used to clarify or replace technical language.

To better reach LEP, minority, and low-income populations, notifications for public informational meetings, public workshops, and formal public hearings will be posted in various media that serve greater Danbury. The team will also post notices in Spanish and Portuguese in non-English print media. In accordance with CTDOT's *Public Involvement Procedures*, the project team will notify various stakeholder groups of upcoming public involvement events. These groups include community leaders; community-based organizations; faith-based organizations; Councils of Governments; organized neighborhood groups; public libraries; schools/universities; Chambers of Commerce; and social service agencies that serve greater Danbury.

When scheduling a public engagement activity, the project team will consider scheduling multiple meetings at various locations and times, if doing so will increase meaningful access and participation. Every effort will be made to locate meetings near public transportation options and all public engagement activities will be held at venues that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible. Once the project team has determined the date, time, and location of the public meeting, the CTDOT Office of Communications will be notified so the event can be added to CTDOT's Calendar of Events and posted on the CTDOT website, in addition to the I-84 Danbury Project website.

Because of COVID-19 and the shift toward virtual meetings, online engagement and virtual meetings will likely continue to replace or supplement live meetings. Digital technology can provide project information to interested parties and the traveling public and allow the project team to conduct virtual meetings using live-streaming or pre-recorded digital, audio/video platforms. Virtual meetings will occur in platforms that support language and ADA accessibility. In addition, a telephone call-in number will be provided for those meeting participants who do not have internet access.

2.1 Project Advisory Committee Meetings

The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) is comprised of representatives from a diverse range of stakeholder groups. The PAC is expected to meet three or four times a year during each phase of the project. The purpose of the PAC meetings is to ensure that specialized interests and local experts are provided an opportunity to share key knowledge of specific transportation issues and opportunities, particularly those that are unique to the project area. PAC members will be selected by CTDOT, with assistance from the project team. The anticipated benefit of these meetings is the incorporation of specialized and diverse knowledge in the final plan and to garner the support of transportation stakeholders representing a wide variety of interests.



2.2 Focus Groups

Two sets of three focus groups will be held in the I-84 corridor to identify issues and concerns of the public. The anticipated benefit of focus group meetings is to: 1) collect informed opinions on this major capital investment and the project's purpose and need; 2) shed light on persistent challenges or problems in the I-84 corridor; 3) gauge public reaction to potential alternatives; and 4) better understand the needs and concerns of a particular group of people.

Individuals will be targeted who regularly use the I-84 transportation corridor but are not already engaged in public dialogue on transportation issues and are not affiliated with organizations involved in planning. The project team will invite participants with various backgrounds, incomes, race/ethnicities, and occupations to participate in the focus groups. Focus groups should have enough participants to provide a diverse set of viewpoints but still be small enough that the conversation feels accessible to all participants. A report of the focus groups will be written and made available to the public.

2.3 Stakeholder Interviews

The purpose of the stakeholder interviews is to gather input and build support from stakeholders who may be unable to attend meetings. The anticipated benefit of these interviews is the one-on-one conversation that may not easily be gathered in other settings.

Interviews with a range of stakeholders will be conducted by the project team to anticipate "hot button" issues and to elicit concerns from special interest groups who may be most affected by the project. One-on-one or small group meetings with interest groups such as truck, rail, and bus transit industry representatives; commuter advocacy groups; economic development interest groups; and environmental and social justice groups will identify how the project benefits the long-term goals of such interest groups.

2.4 Informal Public Engagement / Pop-Up Events

The project team will host a pop-up table at various venues and events. Pop-ups serve to reach people who do not typically attend formal meetings or would not otherwise hear about the project through tools like newspaper notices or website announcements

Pop-up events can increase public participation by meeting people "where they are" rather than expecting them to come to the project team. Often, these events occur during weekend and evening hours and staff can provide translation services to increase meeting accessibility. Pop-up meetings could be staged at local festivals, farmers' markets, highway service plazas, shopping mall concourses and regularly planned events to conduct engagement with the public.

The anticipated benefit of pop-up meetings is to increase participation from underrepresented populations. This includes minorities, low income, women, senior citizens, the young, and those without primary access to the internet or a computer.

2.5 Public Informational Meetings or Workshops

The format of the Public Informational Meetings will include a blend of formal, sit-down presentations with live speakers, informal Q&A sessions, small group break-out sessions, and unstructured, open-house style exhibit areas where attendees can roam and view exhibits at



their own pace and ask questions of meeting facilitators in a one-on-one chat. The anticipated benefit of informal Public Informational Meetings and open house style workshops is that interested citizens, stakeholders and the media can learn more about the project in a casual and comfortable environment and feel free to ask candid questions, express concerns or comments, and offer ideas.

Under established CTDOT procedures, public notices for meetings will also be provided in language(s) to accommodate LEP audiences or stakeholders who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

All meetings room will be ADA accessible and accommodations for individuals who are deaf or hearing impaired will be provided upon request, as indicated in the CTDOT's *Public Involvement Procedures* plan.² Individuals requiring materials in alternative formats, translated materials or language assistance services can request them prior to a public event. If the request is made at the meeting or after the meeting, every attempt will be made to provide the materials within seven days of the request. Attendees making the requests will not be charged for any cost affiliated with the creation of alternate formats of meeting materials.

2.6 Formal Public Hearings

A formal public hearing will be held upon the release of the EA or EIS, and the EIE for public review. The formal public hearing will be conducted in accordance with state and federal regulations and consistent with the procedures established in CTDOT's *Public Involvement Procedures*³ plan. Under established CTDOT procedures, public notices and meetings will also be provided in language(s) to accommodate LEP audiences or stakeholders who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

At a public hearing, the project team will receive and record verbal comments provided by those in attendance. The project team and CTDOT will also be prepared to receive written comments that are hand-delivered at the public hearing, mailed to CTDOT, or submitted electronically to the project team.

The project team will record the proceedings and document comments and questions and will respond to the public as part of formal documentation of the public hearing.

2.7 Public Official Briefings

The purpose of the Public Official Briefings is to inform chief elected officials and other decision makers about the project progress and to provide a forum for input before key decisions are finalized. These sessions will enable the project team to better understand issues and opportunities, coordinate on-going projects among different governmental levels, and provide introductions with key staff or others involved in the provision of transportation or development. The sessions will also inform chief elected and other officials about upcoming

² *State of Connecticut, Public Involvement Procedures, Connecticut Department of Transportation;* dated 2020. www.ct.gov/dot/pip

³ *State of Connecticut, Public Involvement Procedures, Connecticut Department of Transportation;* dated 2020. www.ct.gov/dot/pip



public events or report releases to allow them to alert their constituents to the availability of new information or to the schedule of public events.

The anticipated benefit of public official briefings is to improve intergovernmental lines of communication and work more collaboratively on the identification and assessment of alternatives and the development of the preferred plan – a plan that considers needs, goals and priorities, that is composed of practicable recommendations, and is supported by policy-makers and their constituents.

3. OTHER ENGAGEMENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

The primary purpose of the following tools and techniques is to distribute information to the public in print and electronic or digital formats in a timely and efficient manner. These techniques will also serve to prompt interested citizens and groups to sign-up for e-mail alerts by providing their email address so that they can receive meeting notices and updates about the project.

Public notices will advertise the availability of free language assistance and the availability of reasonable accommodations. The notices will include the contact information and procedures for requesting the services, including the deadline for requesting the services. Additionally, public notices will provide instruction for those who are hearing impaired to call the 711 Telecommunications Relay Service to request accommodations.

A variety of tools will be employed for these purposes to better enable CTDOT to reach out to a diverse cross-section of the public including stakeholders traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems. Many communications will be issued in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Electronic media will be employed as a cost-effective means of casting a broad net and conducting engagement with a large, diverse audience. The anticipated benefit of the electronic media engagement component is meaningful participation of stakeholders representing diverse ages, ethnic and racial backgrounds, income levels, and other characteristics.

3.1 Project Website - i84danbury.com

A website dedicated to the project will be created to provide information about the project and to host project documents. The site will remain the primary portal for the public and will include PowerPoint presentations, fact sheets, concept plans, maps and other information developed over the course of the project. The website will also be a repository for all information presented at PAC and public meetings as well as summaries of those meetings.

The website content will present a balanced view of the project so that it is informative, objective and viewed as a source of accurate information. It will be regularly updated with news or postings of project progress, reports, meeting announcements, etc. In addition, the



website will largely be ADA-compliant, and text will allow users to contact a person with other language and/or ADA requests.

3.2 Social Media

In addition to the project website, online public engagement will also employ the use of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, to better notify the public of opportunities to attend live meetings and other public events, to steer online traffic to new postings on the project website and to provide interesting platforms to disseminate alternative project content (e.g., videos, photos, and webinars). Social media engagement will be conducted to varying degrees throughout the project. As the project proceeds, updates and information will be distributed through various social media channels to increase attendance at project public engagement events.

Social media can also function as an online forum for general feedback and for the exchange of ideas. They can provide an unstructured, accessible method for people to express concerns about the project or to brainstorm possible solutions. They can also provide value in alerting CTDOT to any project misconceptions or festering issues that should be addressed. Original social media content will be posted in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

The management and oversight of all social media outlets will comply with the State of Connecticut's Social Media Policy as outlined by the Office of Policy and Management. www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=3006&q=561700.

3.3 Newsletters and Fact Sheets

The project team will occasionally generate newsletters and fact sheets with project-related content. These documents will be brief and concise and will include text and infographics to convey information on key transportation-related topics such as freight, transit, land use sustainability, economy, and technology.

Printed versions of these brochures, newsletters or fact sheets will be distributed at public meetings, at local libraries and other community facilities; digital versions will also be posted to the project website and linked to social media. Newsletters and fact sheets will be translated to and available in Spanish and Portuguese. In addition, newsletters and fact sheets will be ADA-compliant.

3.4 Press Advisories / Media Relations

Engagement with the press and media outlets will occur at strategic points throughout the project. Press advisories or releases will be prepared at these points to update the public on project progress and notify the public and stakeholders about the availability of information or plans. Press advisories or public notices will also be prepared and distributed to media outlets in advance of key public information meetings or public hearings about the project to notify the public about the date, time, place of the meetings and the subject to be discussed.

There are several radio, TV, print, and online media outlets in the Danbury area that can assist in reaching environmental justice communities and LEP populations. The outlets will be utilized at key milestones in the project to reach targeted populations.



3.5 E-bulletins

In addition to regularly issued newsletters or fact sheets, the project team will prepare and electronically distribute e-bulletins over the course of the project to the individuals and groups on the project's stakeholder email list. The communications will include project updates, notifications of public meetings and events, links to project news articles, notification of project website updates, and announcements about new editions of project newsletters.

4. CONTACTS, COMMENTS, AND RESPONSES

4.1 Contact Database

The project team will work to identify stakeholders that should be directly engaged by the public outreach process. Examples of stakeholders include federal, state, regional and local officials, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), CTDOT partners or sister agencies, business, commerce or economic development organizations, transit operators, freight companies, transportation, transit or commuter advocates, bicycle advocacy groups, environmental organizations, public interest groups, institutions of higher learning, and community-based groups or social service agencies that advocate for limited English proficient populations, the disability community, and minorities, immigrant and ethnic groups.

Throughout the project duration, the project team will create and maintain a list of these organizations and individuals that includes their email addresses. These stakeholders will receive project updates and notifications of meetings electronically through email and via the project's website. Ongoing maintenance of the list will include the addition of individuals and organizations that request to be added, as well as making any requested changes to contact information.

4.2 Comment Database

Comments submitted by the public and stakeholders at meetings, via the website and social media pages, as well as via mail and fax, will be reported to the project team. The project team will create a database to collect, manage, and report on comments. The project team will report to the public (via the project website) what, generally, the team is hearing from the public and how CTDOT is addressing those questions and comments.

4.3 Response to Comments

Every person who sends a question or comment to the project website will receive an automatically generated "thank you for your comment" response indicating that the comment has been received and its content will be reviewed by the project team. Questions and comments will be aggregated by topic or theme and responded to on that basis. If appropriate, the topic will be added to the website list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Comments received via the project's Facebook page or other social media accounts will also be monitored, aggregated by topic or theme and responded to on that basis. Oral comments received at public meetings will be captured by project note-takers and put into a meeting summary. Written comment cards will also be collected at public meetings. These comment



cards will be reviewed, aggregated, reported, and archived similarly to those received via the website.

The project team will consider public comments, both written and verbal, expressed during a public hearing, informational meeting, or other form of public engagement activity in the decision-making processes of the I-84 Danbury Project. Following a public engagement event, a report of meeting or meeting minutes will be available to the public and posted on the project website and CTDOT's Internet website. The project team and CTDOT will make, keep, and maintain a record of the proceedings of the meeting.

Questions and comments received, and responses provided by CTDOT throughout the course of the project will be archived for the public record.

5. EVALUATION OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

The project team will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the project's public involvement and engagement efforts. The project team will track, where possible, and assess levels of overall public participation, the engagement of traditionally underrepresented groups, and public engagement metrics such as the number of comments received, and the degree of misinformation or public confusion about project objectives or process. The project team will adjust engagement efforts throughout the study to optimize feedback from diverse populations.