



# I-84 Danbury Project



Summer 2019 Newsletter

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I-84 Danbury Project



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## Documenting the Needs of a Critical Commuter and Freight Corridor

As part of the planning phase of the I-84 Danbury Project, the project team released a *Needs and Deficiencies Report* in October 2018 and presented its findings to the Project Advisory

Committee shortly thereafter in May 2019. The purpose of the report is to document the problems in the I-84 Danbury Project study area.

The study area encompasses I-84 between Exits 3 and 8 and is approximately 6.5 miles in length. In addition, it also extends on Route 7 between Exits 7 and 9 and from I-84 to Exit 11, about 1.5 miles in length.

The report identifies several deficiencies in the corridor including considerable traffic congestion. One source of this travel delay is local

motorists using I-84 during peak periods. The morning peak congestion occurs in the westbound direction near the Route 7 merge with

I-84. Traffic often backs up between Exits 6 to 8 on I-84 and on Route 7 southbound approaching the merge. In the evening, traffic is typically congested

in the eastbound direction starting at the New York state line all the way to Exit 7. In addition, as the western gateway into Connecticut, the corridor has a high percentage of trucks and commercial vehicles

The ramps contribute to many of the congestion and safety problems in the corridor. They are closely spaced and

**The ramps contribute to many of the congestion and safety problems in the corridor.**



Drivers entering the highway cross paths with drivers exiting the highway.

some use the same lane for entering and exiting traffic, which causes weaving (see graphic). In addition, the incomplete interchange at Exit 6 does not allow sufficient access to Danbury Hospital, a major regional employer.

The left-hand ramps also cause

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## Seeing the Project Area from A Different Perspective

On Wednesday, April 3rd, Sharat Kalluri, a traffic engineer and the I-84 Danbury Project Manager at CDM Smith, saw the project area from a new perspective. That cool, sunny spring day, Kalluri boarded a helicopter with a pilot and cameraman to view and videotape the project area from above during the times of day that it is most congested.

It's no surprise to read or hear about traffic congestion going toward New York in the morning and from New York in the evening. The Connecticut Department of Transportation, however, suspected that an aerial videotape of traffic could help identify the exact pinch points and better understand their causes.

Kalluri took two separate rides over the heavy commuting corridor: one early in the day to view the morning commute, and one later in the afternoon to view the evening commute. "We wanted to get video of the corridor so we can document the traffic and congestion problem and confirm the information obtained from our prior data collection," Kalluri said. On each flight, Kalluri and crew flew over westbound and eastbound I-84, as well as Route 7 in both directions within the project study area, for a total of four round trips. Each round trip was about 10–15 minutes long.

It was important that the team collect congestion information on a typical day, not a day when traffic is unusually heavy due to a crash or weekend / holiday trips. The team planned to abandon the video recording if a crash occurred



Kalluri posing with the helicopter before heading up and out.

and try again on a different day. During the evening flight, when a tractor-trailer slowed to a stop, it looked as though they would have to call off the flight. Luckily, the truck pulled entirely off the roadway. "It didn't stay in the travel lane, which was good," Kalluri said.

From the flights, Kalluri and the team learned where traffic congestion is the biggest issue. They were surprised to see that, "There is only one pinch point area in the morning, but the whole corridor gets bad in the evening," Kalluri said. "It was eye-catching." The evening commute was broadly and consistently difficult from the New York State line to Exit 7. That's over seven miles of congestion!



The flight videos were presented to the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) at their May 2019 meeting and are available on the project website at [www.i84danbury.com](http://www.i84danbury.com), on the "Project Videos" page under "About."

The traffic conditions and driver behavior observed from these aerial flights will provide another piece of information as solutions and concepts are developed.



# Local Spotlight

Welcome to the Local Spotlight, profiles of noteworthy people, organizations, or places within the study area

## Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities

The City of Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities has an important function: advise the Mayor and the Common Council of the needs of persons with disabilities in the community in relation to housing, economics, employment, transportation, health, recreation, and other matters. They are a team of volunteers whose main task is to ensure that the City complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"We work to be the capital A in disabilities," said John Gentile, Chair of the City of

Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities. "The point is to focus on the abilities.

In addition to helping the City, the Commission often hears from people on issues of access to buildings, transportation, and parking. Comments on parking range from not enough handicap parking, people using handicap spaces who don't need them, and plows pushing snow into handicap spots. As for the snow complaints, Gentile said, "We try to be a little bit preemptive and send an email to the Mayor and the Department of Public Works to remind them." They also hear from people

with other issues such as landlord complaints and wheelchair needs. "We do a lot of referrals," Gentile said.

Annie Dance, the Commission Secretary, got involved with the organization in 2013, after moving to Danbury two years prior. "I was looking

to get involved in the community, and saw the Commission's web page," she said.

Dance is mostly deaf in one ear and uses an owner-trained service dog. Her dog assists her by making physical contact with her and leading her to the location of a common sound

she might not hear (e.g. doorbell, keys dropping, and people speaking her name). "He's a good extra set of ears," Dance said.

As someone with an "invisible disability," Dance also uses her experiences to advocate for people who may not outwardly appear to be disabled. Some people with invisible disabilities, especially those who use a service dog, sometimes receive pushback from strangers when they're out with their dogs.

As far as how they hope to influence or guide the I-84 Danbury Project, the Commission wants to ensure that

**"We work to be the capital A in disabilities. The point is to focus on the abilities."**



Annie Dance and her service dog Harley.

changes to transportation and transit routes, whether permanent or temporary due to construction, don't have adverse impacts on the city's disabled population.

Commission meetings are held in City Hall on the second Tuesday of the month.

More information can be found at <https://www.danbury-ct.gov/government/boards-commissions/commission-for-persons-with-disabilities/>





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problems. For example, motorists traveling on Route 7 northbound from Ridgefield and points south must first merge onto the right hand lane of I-84 eastbound before crossing over into the left lane to exit onto Route 7 northbound causing drivers to switch/cross multiple lanes.

I-84 itself has substandard geometry. In many areas, the curvature of the roadway does not provide drivers adequate sight lines, especially for slowing and stopping. The steep grades prohibit large trucks from reaching their desired speeds in many areas. In

addition, inadequate shoulder widths do not allow motorists to pull their vehicles out of traffic when needed.

Because of the peak period congestion, the ramp locations, and the curves in the road, the Danbury section of I-84 sees many crashes. This is pronounced between Exits 3 to 6 in the eastbound direction and at the Route 7 merge (Exit 7) in the westbound direction. The predominant type of crash is rear-end, which is typical in areas of congestion.

The 2018 report identifies several broader needs in the overall corridor.

These include deficiencies in the existing transit and rail service in the study area, lack of travel demand management (TDM) programs (i.e. commuter parking, carpool, vanpool and other employer-driven opportunities within the region), lack of pedestrian and bicycle travel linkages, and inefficient freight travel and connectivity within the corridor.

The goal of the I-84 Danbury Project is to find a set of solutions to address these needs and deficiencies. Take a moment to view the full report on the project website at [www.i84danbury.com](http://www.i84danbury.com) under Project Documents.

## Get Involved!

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