

# Is the DOT proposing a tunnel on Danbury's west side to straighten I-84? Yes and no.

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A proposed tunnel to straighten Interstate 84 between exits 2 and 4 on Danbury's west side, among the options being considered by the state DOT.



DANBURY - Yes, the Connecticut Department of Transportation is looking at an option to build a half-mile tunnel on the west side to straighten Interstate 84 between Exits 2 and 4.

But no, leaders involved in planning the billion-dollar reconstruction of I-84 through Danbury do not consider the west side tunnel a viable option.

“We are wrapping up the concept development phase in the fall and the tunnel is one of the concepts, but we have over 20 concepts that we have looked at, and ones that don’t make sense don’t go very far,” said Andy Fesenmeyer, the project manager for the I-84 Danbury Project. “But we do want to make sure that we have looked at every single option.”

By the DOT’s own assessment, the prospects of cutting a tunnel under University Boulevard would not “reduce congestion or improve mobility on the highway,” and therefore “It is recommended that this concept be dismissed from further consideration.”

That’s good news to state Rep. Bob Godfrey, the dean of Danbury’s Hartford delegation.

“This tunnel proposal destroys two neighborhoods, a business community and cuts under Western Connecticut State University,” said Godfrey, who has represented Danbury for 32 years. “This ain’t gonna fly.”

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Then why did the DOT call attention to the tunnel option in a tweet last week, along with two other project concepts?

The DOT wants to be transparent about investigating every option, Fesenmeyer responded.

“We look at everything - so we say, ‘What would it look like if we straighten the highway?’” Fesenmeyer said. “We don’t want someone to come back to us later and say, ‘You didn’t investigate the tunnel option.’”

The tunnel option is one of three plans currently on the I-84 Danbury Project website to improve the stretch between New York and Exit 8.

The project, which is yet to be funded by the state Legislature, is at least a generation away from completion, although smaller upgrades related to the over project could begin late in the decade.

The next public outreach meeting, which has not been scheduled, will likely follow two project meetings this fall - the first on Oct. 14 between the project team and Danbury

officials, and the second with the project advisory committee - a large group of municipal and private sector leaders from greater Danbury.

The goal is to finish the concept plan by the end of 2022, after which a specific proposal would be developed to be funded, engineered and vetted.

“This is not a simple operation with easy answers - we’re talking about billions of dollars and a huge undertaking,” Fesenmeyer said, estimating the project might not begin until the mid-2040s. “But there could be some early action in the mid-to-late 2020s.”

Godfrey said re-engineering was overdue, especially in the area of the Danbury Fair mall.

“The highway came through Danbury in 1963, and professionals have learned a lot in the last 60 years about what’s wrong with left-handed exit ramps and the highway being more curvy than straight,” Godfrey said. “It was a good design for its time, but that time has passed.”

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