

REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Tuesday November 16, 2021, from 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM

Location: Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting Platform

Subject: Project Advisory Committee Meeting #7

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS / PHONE
PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS		
Barry Abrams	Juniper Ridge Tax District	abramsb@hotmail.com
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Greg Dembowski	Town of Brookfield	gdembowski@brookfieldct.gov
Peter Frengs	Town of Brookfield	
John Gentile	Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities	jmgsr1550@aol.com
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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION		
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Marcy Miller	FHI Studio	mmiller@fhistudio.com

2. [Welcome](#)

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) hosted its seventh Project Advisory Committee Meeting (PAC) for the I-84 Danbury Project on Tuesday, November 16, 2021, from 12:30 – 2:00 PM via the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting platform. Marcy Miller, of FHI Studio, welcomed attendees to the PAC Meeting and provided an overview of the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting platform and team members. Yolanda Antoniak, of CTDOT, reviewed the agenda and relayed that the purpose of the meeting was to continue exploring three additional concepts with the PAC. These are Concepts #3 and #13 (Hospital Access) and Concept #4 (Non-Highway Concept). She added that Andy Fesenmeyer, of CTDOT, will review the next project steps and there will be time for PAC discussion throughout the call.

3. [Presentation](#)

Y. Antoniak commenced the presentation portion of the meeting by providing the PAC with a list of activities the project team has worked on since the previous PAC Meeting in May 2021. She stated that the team has met with the Danbury Mayor, published a summer newsletter, added additional concepts and FAQs to the website, attended pop up events, and posted to social media. She reviewed the Draft Purpose Statement which is to “reduce congestion and improve mobility of people and goods in the I-84 corridor in greater Danbury.” She added that each concept will be evaluated against this statement. A concept needs to fulfill the purpose to move forward through the evaluation process.

She introduced two concepts that could improve access to Danbury Hospital. The first is Concept 3 via Tamarack Avenue, and the second is Concept 13 via Great Plains Road. She reminded the PAC that the concepts are not in sequential order and do not imply prioritization. She added that

the team will also cover Concept 4, which is a non-highway option. She recognized that many use modes, other than automobile travel, to get around. She added that improvements or expansion of some of these modes could offer some relief to the congestion in the corridor.

S. Kalluri, of CDM Smith, next provided an overview of how each of the concepts was evaluated. The five main categories against which concepts are evaluated are:

1. Traffic operations,
2. Effects to mainline I-84,
3. Key constructability elements,
4. Environmental resource analysis, and
5. Construction cost estimate.

S. Kalluri began the discussion on Concept 3 - Hospital Access via Tamarack Avenue and Concept 13 - Hospital Access via Great Plains Road. He provided several reasons of why access to the hospital is important, notably that it is the region's only trauma center. He reviewed the current travel time required from the Exit 5 ramp to the Hospital (about 9 minutes). He displayed a route graphic that illustrated how access could be improved via Tamarack Avenue or Great Plains Road/Germantown Road. He provided an overview of the Tamarack Avenue option (Concept 3). There would be a full interchange at I-84 and Tamarack Avenue. The North Street interchange would be eliminated. He added that there are opportunities to enhance pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Jeanine Armstrong Gouin, of SLR Consulting, next discussed the constraints of this concept. She said that Tamarack Avenue is constrained on both sides, by Immanuel Lutheran Cemetery, residential homes, and floodplains/floodways. She stated that the cemetery is eligible for historic status. The homes of the Ford Avenue neighborhood, which is an Environmental Justice community, are located very close to the roadway. The neighborhood cannot be disproportionately impacted by the project. J. Gouin displayed a graphic of the proposed alignment and stated that the team has looked closely at ways to reduce the impacts to the burial plots and homes.

S. Kalluri displayed a concept of the new interchange at Tamarack Avenue. He added that this new connection and alignment would reduce the travel time from I-84 to the hospital from almost nine minutes to about two minutes.

S. Kalluri next provided an overview of the Great Plains Road / Germantown Road option (Concept 13). There would be a partial interchange at I-84 and Great Plains Road. Thus, the North Street interchange would remain. A full interchange cannot be provided (with ramps on the east) because of the proximity to the Route 7 ramps. He added that there are opportunities to enhance pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

S. Kalluri discussed the pros and the cons of the two concepts. The positive aspect of Concept 3 is that there would be one highway ramp at one location, which generally meets driver expectation. The positive aspects of Concept 13 are that there are fewer property impacts and the unchanged North Street ramps would continue to support local businesses. The cost estimate for both concepts is less than \$500 million. The recommendation is to study these concepts further and potentially combine one or both with others that address congestion and mobility on the highway.

S. Kalluri began the discussion on Concept 4 – Non-Highway Options. These could reduce vehicular congestion on the highway and local roads and improve mobility along the corridor and the region. These non-highway options also complement existing transit services. The team conducted a high-level transit analysis to identify potential transit improvements after studying the regional demand. Transit modes considered include express buses, shuttle buses, local buses, and commuter rail shuttles. The purpose is to understand where and how much ridership can be improved and what the cost to do that would be. S. Kalluri listed the data sources used in the analysis. He described the existing service in the state of Connecticut, noting that east-west services between regions is limited. He stated that within the Danbury region, HART provides local bus service and Metro North Rail services the Danbury Branch and Harlem Rail lines.

S. Kalluri presented trends on how people generally travel in the Danbury area. Most travel within an 8-town region and use I-84 and Route 7. He added that Danbury has the most zero- or one-car households in the study area. Improving transit service will improve mobility options for all users. He stated that express bus routes could fill a void by providing better access to commuter rail stations. New circulator routes could enhance access to work and shopping destinations. He discussed the analysis the team conducted on the Maybrook Line rail service between the Danbury and Southeast stations. The team considered a new station in Danbury near the New York / Connecticut line. The result is that about 6 percent of auto trips during peak hours could shift to transit. This illustrates that bus and rail options alone will not significantly reduce congestion on I-84. While they do provide mobility options, they alone do not meet the project purpose. They can complement any highway option to meet the project purpose.

Because there was ample time before the end of the meeting, S. Kalluri next discussed another concept not referenced in the agenda. This was Concept 10 – Interchange 7 Route 7 Ramp - Westbound. This will look at the Route 7 southbound merge onto I-84 westbound. The lane drop on the ramp currently causes considerable congestion on the ramp. He stated that the team is proposing to keep two thru lanes all the way down to I-84 and eliminate that left lane on Route 7 as an exit-only lane. Travelers can still exit here but it would not be an exit-only lane. It would improve congestion on Route 7 southbound by eliminating the queuing. Its estimated cost, is less than \$0.5 billion, and is recommended for further analysis.

Andy Fesenmeyer, of CTDOT, concluded the presentation portion of the meeting. He provided an explanation of the project process and timeline, noting that the project team is currently in the concept study phase, where a range of concepts and recommendations are being developed and evaluated. He announced that the study team plans to complete the concept study phase by the end of 2022. He noted that the team will likely have reviewed over 23 concepts by the end of the 2021. If someone is interested in hearing about one that it is not covered in a PAC meeting, please let A. Fesenmeyer or S. Kalluri know, and they will present it at a future meeting.

He stated that the next steps will be to start combining various concepts to create complete alternatives that meet the purpose. All alternatives will be screened, and the PAC will be involved in this process. The team will cover Concept 14, to improve the Interchange 8 area, as well as Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO), at the next PAC meeting. The next meeting will likely be early next year.

A. Fesenmeyer concluded the presentation by thanking the PAC for attending and opened the meeting up to questions.

4. Question and Answer Period

During the meeting, the project team provided opportunities for PAC members to comment and ask questions. Below is a summary of the questions, comments, and responses.

Concept 3 and 13 - Hospital Access

John Gentile, of Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities, stated that both concepts have some merit but are problematic. For example, he cited potential conflicts with drivers getting onto I-84 at Great Plains with drivers who are trying to get off at North Street. He added that he thinks that while ramps at Tamarack Avenue probably make the most sense, the property impacts are considerable. S. Kalluri answered that there is enough space between potential Great Plains ramps and the North Street ramps. Weaving should not be a concern. Ramps at Tamarack Avenue would attract more traffic and potentially congestion as well.

Barry Abrams stated that the team had previously presented an option to widen I-84 on the outsides and create a local access road in the middle to handle local traffic between Exits 2/3 and Exit 8. Would it make sense to put an ambulance lane in this center area of the highway? S. Kalluri confirmed that B. Abrams is referring Concept 2, a collector-distributor (CD) road. While this concept does pull traffic off the highway, it puts it onto the CD road, creating congestion there. He said that the project team would continue to look at this concept.

Matt Cassavechia, of Danbury Hospital, stated that it seems like Concept 13 offers more benefits. He thinks Concept 3 would add too much congestion to the local road network. S. Kalluri asked whether ambulances might prefer Great Plains Road over Tamarack Avenue. M. Cassavechia answered that ambulance traffic would likely prefer the less congested, slightly flatter Great Plains Road over Tamarack Avenue.

J. Gentile stated that there is a big hill on the highway between Great Plain Road and North Street. He asked the project team to consider whether Concept 13 and the topography would ultimately factor together to contribute to additional congestion on the highway.

Abdul Mohamed, of the City of Danbury, stated that travelers in towns north of Danbury use Route 37 to access the I-84 ramps at North Street and Golden Hill Road. If North Street is closed, it may negatively affect travelers coming from the north.

Tom Altermatt, of the City of Danbury, questioned how wide Tamarack Avenue would be from I-84 to the hospital in Concept 3. S. Kalluri said that the bridge would be reconstructed to be 60 feet wide. Tamarack Avenue would need two northbound lanes approaching the signal at the ramps for 800 feet.

Concept 4 - Non-highway Options

James Root, of the Sierra Club, asked for clarification on the number of trips that could be reduced from enhanced bus and rail service. What new services and how many buses are assumed? S.

Kalluri answered that it was a very high-level analysis that includes adding the new services. J. Root said he would like to see the numbers potentially grow by running even more buses.

B. Abrams asked if the team assumed that people would have to switch trains at Southeast or would there be continuous service to New York City. S. Kalluri discussed some of the assumptions of the commuter choice model which was used. He stated that the assumptions were generally favorable to the traveler (e.g., ample parking, etc.) but that there would be two separate lines, requiring a transfer.

Greg Dembowski, of the Town of Brookfield, asked for an update on the low-hanging fruit (projects that could be done more quickly at a lower cost) discussed at the prior meeting. A. Fesenmeyer stated that the team will discuss several of these options at the next PAC meeting. The analysis is still underway.

Concept 10

J. Gentile stated that this would negatively impact the Great Plain Road concept. S. Kalluri said that the two concepts would be looked at together during the next phase of the project.

General Comment

B. Abrams asked whether the access road concept from Madison Road has been eliminated. S. Kalluri said that it has not been eliminated yet. The team recognizes his comment and will consider it as the concepts are combined in the future.

5. Adjourn

M. Miller concluded the seventh PAC Meeting by stating that the project website will be updated with the meeting materials soon.