I-84 Danbury Project

REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Wednesday, May 25, 2022, from 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM
Location: Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting Platform
Subject: Project Advisory Committee Meeting #8

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS / PHONE
PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS		
Barry Abrams	Juniper Ridge Tax District	abramsb@hotmail.com
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Sharon Calitro	City of Danbury	s.calitro@danbury-ct.gov
Matthew Cassavechia	Danbury Hospital	Matthew.Cassavechia@wchn.org
Peter Frengs	Town of Brookfield	
Guyauth Gabbidon	HARTransit	guyauthg@hartransit.com
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Rudy Marconi	Town of Ridgefield	
David McCollum	Town of Bethel	mccollumd@bethel-ct.gov
Robert Mortell	New York Metropolitan Transportation Council	robert.mortell@dot.ny.gov
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Paul Steinmetz	Western CT State University	steinmetzp@wcsu.edu
Chris Roscia	CTWeather	chrisr@ctweather.com
James Root	Sierra Club, Connecticut Chapter	manoether@yahoo.com
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Ralph Tedesco	Town of Brookfield – Director of Public Works	rtedesco@brookfieldCT.gov
Unidentified caller		
Unidentified caller		

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION		
NAME	**ORGANIZATION**	**EMAIL ADDRESS**
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CONSULTANT TEAM		
Timothy Gaffey	CDM Smith	gaffeyt@cdmsmith.com
Sharat Kalluri	CDM Smith	kallurisk@cdmsmith.com
Jeanine Armstrong Gouin	SLR Consulting	jgouin@slrconsulting.com

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Kevin Rivera	FHI Studio	krivera@fhistudio.com
Marcy Miller	FHI Studio	mmiller@fhistudio.com

2. Welcome

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) hosted its eighth Project Advisory Committee Meeting (PAC) for the I-84 Danbury Project on Wednesday, May 25, 2022, 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. She noted that Krishalyn Macrohon, of CTDOT, has taken over Yolanda Antoniak's role on the project. Y. Antoniak has retired from CTDOT. She also introduced Rick Black, of SLR Consulting, as one of the members of the project team and a presenter of the meeting. M. Miller added that Andy Fesenmeyer, of CTDOT, will review the next project steps and there will be time for PAC discussion throughout the call.

K. Macrohon reviewed the agenda and relayed that the purpose of the meeting was to continue exploring three additional concepts with the PAC. These are Concept 24 (Starr Avenue – Interchange 5), Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO), and Concept 14 (Collector-Distributor (CD) Road Eastbound-East). She also noted that the concept screening process would be presented, as well as next steps.

3. Presentation

K. Macrohon provided the PAC with a list of activities the project team worked on following the previous PAC Meeting in November 2021. She stated that the team planned and attended a meeting with several New York elected officials, published the Spring 2022 newsletter, added additional concepts to the website, attended pop up events, and posted to social media. She provided a list of the current PAC members.

Jeanine Armstrong Gouin, of SLR Consulting, 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.

J. Gouin provided an overview of how each of the concepts was further evaluated. The concepts are explored with these five main categories:

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

She introduced Concept 24 (Starr Avenue – Interchange 5), which occurs in the area between Interchanges 5 and 6. This concept would provide a new interchange at Starr Avenue in the westbound direction, a CD road in the eastbound direction, full access to / from I-84 at North Street, access to businesses on North Street and downtown points, and opportunities to enhance pedestrian and bicycle use. She discussed an overhead view graphic of the concept included in the presentation.

She provided a summary of the traffic analysis for Concept 24. She noted that congestion would increase on I-84 outside of the limits of this concept and at select intersections. The CD road would also experience congestion during the PM peak hours. She added that there would be several impacts to community cohesion, including the dead-ending of eight streets, altered traffic circulation, and bicyclist and pedestrian travel flow disruptions. Six of the eight dead-ended streets would be located in Environmental Justice (EJ) neighborhoods. She also highlighted some of the neighborhoods such as the Starr Avenue area, that would have substantial right-of-way impacts, or property takings. As a result, this concept would heavily and irreparably impact this neighborhood.

M. Miller stated that the term EJ generally includes populations that are often underrepresented in the process. They are often low-income, minority, Limited English Proficiency, but can also include seniors, students, and others. J. Gouin reiterated that the project cannot disproportionately impact EJ populations.

J. Gouin discussed the pros of this concept, noting that it would improve the connection to Danbury Hospital and downtown, provide full access to/from I-84 at North Street, use typical construction methods, and provide opportunities to enhance pedestrian and bicycle travel. In addition to the impacts to community cohesion and the human environment, the cons include that the concept does not reduce congestion; the CD road will experience congestion and delay; and there would be a steep grade at Main Street and Starr Avenue as well as wide intersections. The estimated cost is less than $0.5 billion. This concept would need to be combined with one or more other concepts to fully achieve the project Purpose in the entire corridor. To move forward, it would need to demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the impacts.

Sharat Kalluri, of CDM Smith, next provided information on two concepts. The first concept he presented is referred to as Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies. He stated that TSMO is a set of multimodal strategies which can help maximize the use of the existing and planned transportation infrastructure. He discussed 3 TSMO strategies considered in I-84 corridor: dynamic lane use, temporary hard shoulder running, and freeway ramp metering. Temporary hard shoulders would likely not work well in this corridor due to proximity of the ramps. Freeway ramp metering would cause backing up of traffic on local roads.

He provided a brief overview of other TSMO strategies such as traffic incident management, arterial management, travel demand management, public transportation management, corridor management, and connected and automated vehicle deployment (driverless cars).

S. Kalluri discussed dynamic lane use in more detail. Dynamic lane use is a strategy which opens or closes a travel lane at different times per day. He presented a series of cross sections and aerial graphics to show how this lane structure could work in the left shoulder during the peak and non-peak hours. It would be implemented between Interchanges 3 and 8. He said the team is still

evaluating this concept and he added that this strategy has been successfully implemented in states of Michigan and Wisconsin.

S. Kalluri discussed the pros and the cons of the TSMO options. The positive aspects of TSMO are that these strategies can typically be completed in a short timeframe (5-10 years) using typical construction methods, require limited funds to construct, can use technology, and all the work would be done within the existing right-of-way. They also would reduce peak hour delay. The cons include that it will be unfamiliar to most Connecticut drivers, the left shoulder could no longer be used as a breakdown area during the peak hours of traffic, left ramps are not eliminated, it does not provide lane continuity on I-84 mainline, and it requires special signage to enforce this strategy. The estimated cost is less than $0.5 billion. It has merit to reduce congestion and improve mobility and should be evaluated further.

S. Kalluri next began the discussion on Concept 14 (Collector-Distributor Road Eastbound-East). This concept would be in the eastern section of the I-84 corridor near Interchanges 7 and 8. Its purpose is to address the weaving movement by adding a CD road in the eastbound direction. Newtown Road and U.S. Route 6 would be reconfigured. He presented the reconfigured roadways and discussed the travel movements on a series of aerial slides in the presentation. He discussed the concept of the diverging diamond, or "turtleback", and presented how drivers would get around the Interchange 8 area in this concept. He said that this movement is becoming more popular nationally. CTDOT is considering this design in Norwalk, Connecticut. He discussed the proposed ramp relocations at Interchange 8 would improve the traffic circulatory on Newtown Road and eliminate the weaving condition between the I-84 westbound off-ramp and Newtown Road (U.S. Route 6) traffic.

S. Kalluri discussed the pros of the Concept 14 (Collector-Distributor Road Eastbound-East). The positive aspects of this concept are that it eliminates left hand ramps at Interchange 7, reduces peak hour delay, eliminates weaving of Route 7 eastbound traffic, occurs mostly within the right-of-way, and requires typical construction methods. The estimated cost is less than $0.5 billion. It should be evaluated further and potentially combined with a concept that addresses mobility adjacent to the highway.

Rick Black, of SLR Consulting, next presented information on the screening process. He presented six general screening phases that the team will use in the coming months:

1. Develop screening criteria
2. Apply screening criteria,
3. Screen concept segments
4. Combine concept segments
5. Segment combination screening
6. Reasonable range of alternatives

R. Black stated that due to the expanse of the I-84 corridor study limits, the corridor is evaluated into four segments: west, center, east, and mainline. The goal is to try to find one or more concepts that works for each segment and combine them to create full project concepts that will meet the project purpose.

The project team will soon measure the concepts against the screening criteria. The initial concept analysis, as presented in the concept white papers, has evaluated the concepts for fatal flaws. A fatal flaw can occur if a concept lacks potential to meet the project Purpose, if there are constructability issues related to technical feasibility and cost, or if there are unjustifiable environmental impacts. Concepts that pass this fatal flaw screening will move on to the concept screening analysis. Following the concept screening, the remaining concepts will be combined into study concepts that will be further assessed, with the anticipated outcome being development of a reasonable range of alternatives and will continue through a detailed environmental study.

M. Miller stated that the numbers on screening process graphics in the slide deck are example numbers. They do not represent with any of the concepts that are on the website and have been presented at PAC meetings.

A. Fesenmeyer 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 noted that the team will likely complete the development of over 23 concepts in Spring 2022. If someone is interested in hearing about one that it is not covered in a PAC meeting, they can let A. Fesenmeyer or S. Kalluri know, and they will present it at a future meeting. M. Miller encouraged the PAC members to visit the concepts webpage because four new concepts have been recently posted.

A. Fesenmeyer 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 next meeting will be on June 22, 2022, and will focus on screening.

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 24 (Starr Avenue – Interchange 5)

B. Abrams, of the Juniper Ridge Neighborhood, asked if the team has reached out to any of the potentially impacted properties yet. J. Gouin stated that the team is still very early in the screening process and has not reached out yet. They would want to know that the concept may move forward past the fatal flaw analysis before reaching out to individual property owners. B. Abrams later wrote in the meeting chat that he doesn't support taking properties near Interchange 5.

Chris Roscia, of CTWeather, asked if the project team is coordinating with the regularly planned road paving work. A. Fesenmeyer stated that CTDOT has a paving program, and the project team works closely and coordinates with the Maintenance department.

Tom Altermatt, of the City of Danbury, stated that the City had a recent technical meeting with the project team. He acknowledged that a lot of work is needed for Concept 24 to work. M. Miller responded that the plan is to screen some of the concepts down to smaller number.

Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Concept

Matt Cassavechia, of Danbury Hospital, questioned if there has been any feedback from emergency services in the areas that uses this strategy. S. Kalluri answered that cameras could be placed on the gantry and can close the lane to traffic during an emergency.

Concept #14 (Collector-Distributor (CD) Road Eastbound-East)

B. Abrams wrote in that exit ramp locations seem logical.

General Comment

B. Abrams wrote in that he supports a connector between Interchanges 3 and 8, as it can support local traffic. He noted from the presentation that locals are significant percentage of traffic on I-84.

General Comment

James Root, of the Sierra Club, asked about the content of the newsletters, particularly of the last newsletter. He cited internet connection issues and could not expand more on his question. M. Miller said that she would contact him offline to discuss his questions.

5. Adjourn

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