

REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Wednesday, December 14, 2022, from 5:30 – 8:00 PM

Location: Western CT State University Student Center, Room 202

Subject: Public Information Meeting

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS / PHONE
Richard Corzo	self	robinhood399-list@yahoo.com
Mike Rocco	self	mroccoconollamps@gmail.com
Mike Elliot	self	deadmanlaz@gmail.com
Seth Dalk	self	slyinc@charter.net
Thomas Tampone	self	Thomas.tampone@gmail.com
Eric Siege	Mill Plain Volunteer Fire Department	esvege@yahoo.com
Eli Khouss	Self	
Tim Curtis	self	
Sulttipol Radernot	Self	suttipolr@gmail.com

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION		
NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
Nilesh Patel	Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)	Nilesh.patel@ct.gov
Krishalyn Macrohon	CTDOT	krishalyn.macrohon@ct.gov
CONSULTANT TEAM		
Sharat Kalluri	CDM Smith	kallurisk@cdmsmith.com
Jeanine Armstrong Gouin	SLR Consulting	jgouin@slrconsulting.com
Joe Seamands	SLR Consulting	jseamands@slrconsulting.com
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Fernanda Mastroluca	SLR Consulting	fmastroluca@slrconsulting.com
Marcy Miller	FHI Studio	mmiller@fhistudio.com
Laura Parete	FHI Studio	lparete@fhistudio.com
Zainab Kazmi	FHI Studio	zkazmi@fhistudio.com

2. Open House

Prior to the formal presentation, the study team conducted an open house session to answer specific question about the Interstate 84 Corridor study in Danbury. This included a short 11-slide loop video that used the voice and face recording platform. This was shown on a large video monitor immediately after the sign in table. This loop video is available at www.i84danbury.com/course_cat/past-events/.

In addition, there were a total of 13 boards situated around the room that provided background information on the project and the Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) study process. Several boards showed potential concepts under consideration for the mainline, west, center, and east segments. And one board is dedicated to highlight concepts that are eliminated from further consideration.

Krishalyn Macrohon, of CTDOT, welcomed everyone and stated that the meeting will be recorded. She asked how those in attendance were informed of the meeting. About 90 percent of those in attendance raised their hands to acknowledge that they heard of the meeting through social media postings, either in Facebook or Instagram. One person stated that he also saw the article in Tribuna newspaper. She introduced the project team. She next discussed the Title VI of Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in English and Spanish versions. She encouraged everyone to complete the survey after the meeting at this link <https://portal.ct.gov/ctdotsurvey>. The goal of the survey is to improve future community engagements by Connecticut Department of Transportation.

K. Macrohon reviewed the agenda. It included discussion on study limits, PEL study process, and study segments for the mainline, west, center, and east segments of the corridor. The meeting would discuss non-highway options and close the presentation with the next steps for the project team. She passed the presentation to Rick Black of SLR Consulting.

R. Black discussed the key findings from 2018 Needs and Deficiencies Study, which evaluated the existing conditions of the I-84 Danbury study corridor. He first discussed congestion. He stated that the original design capacity of the highway was 15,000 vehicles per day. The 2016 volume significantly increased to 110,000 vehicles per day, and the forecasted 2040 volume is 130,000 vehicles per day. He stated that poor mobility, including the lack of facilities for transit, bicycle, and walking, adds to many of the deficiencies for travel in the study corridor.

He discussed what a PEL study is and what the study seeks to accomplish. He noted that the PEL study process can potentially shorten the environmental or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. He stated that the team has set up a Project Advisory Committee (PAC), which has met 12 times since the study started. He described the PAC members' role and the group they represented. He discussed the community engagement process and how early outreach can potentially lead to early identification of community concerns. Overall, the PEL Study process could lead to short-term, early action, or quick win projects.

R. Black discussed that the study is currently evaluating the solution-based concepts and is looking to initiate a program to implement solutions as the next step. He presented the study limits which begin from the New York – Connecticut state line to Interchange 8 of I-84. He stated that the corridor is over an 8-mile stretch and presents complex issues such as incomplete interchanges, left hand ramps, etc.

R. Black explained that the study limits are divided into four (4) segments: mainline, west, center and east. He first discussed the mainline segment and its key deficiencies. Mainline segment looks at the entire I-84 corridor of the study limit and is currently experiencing the peak hour congestion, left hand entrances and exits, and poor site distances. He invited Sharat Kalluri of CDM Smith to explain the three mainline concepts that are moving forward for consideration. S. Kalluri stated that Concept 1 would add a lane for the entire stretch of the corridor. This concept would also eliminate the left ramps to and from Route 7 at Interchanges 3 and 7 and proposes to replace them with right-hand ramps. Concept 9 would separate Route 7 and I-84 traffic by introducing express lane for Route 7 in the median. Route 7 drivers would not be able to exit locally. In contrary, Concept 22 would provide I-84 as express lane in the median while Route 7 would be in the outside lanes with local access. Concept 9 and Concept 22 would have wider footprints than Concept 1.

R. Black discussed the west segment. Key deficiencies in the west segment include left hand ramps at Exit 3, weaves between Exits 3 and 4, sharp curves, and short merging distances. S. Kalluri discussed Concept 6 which introduces new Segar Street ramp at the vicinity of Interchange 3 in the eastbound direction. Concept 12 would create a collector distributor (CD) road between Interchanges 3 and 4 in the eastbound direction and provides access to Lake Avenue. A CD road typically runs parallel the highway and collects local traffic.

R. Black discussed the center segment and its key deficiencies. He explained that this section of the corridor has seen increased congestion as most local residents use the highway for local trips within the Greater Danbury. In addition, the current local network contributes to the poor mobility of the corridor. S. Kalluri discussed the four concepts in this segment. Concept 3 would provide full interchange at Tamarack Avenue, which improves the access to the hospital and other areas of Danbury. The existing ramps at North Street will be removed under this concept. Concept 13 (Great Plain Road) would provide partial ramps at Great Plain Road to complement the missing ramps at North Street.

S. Kalluri discussed Concept 13 at Great Plain Road. Concept 16 would eliminate the existing North Street interchange (Interchange 6) and provide connection to North Street and Tamarack Avenue via Collector-Distributor (CD) Roads on both the north and south sides of I-84. Concept 26 would provide Interchange 6 (North Street) a full interchange and create a CD road between Exits 5 and 6 in the eastbound direction. Under this concept, the Main and North Street interchanges would be too close to each other.

R. Black continued onto the discussion of east segment. Similar to the west segment, deficiencies in the east segment include the weaving between Exits 7 and 8 and the left-hand ramps at Interchange 7. S. Kalluri described two east concepts, Concepts 14 and 15. Concept 14 would include a CD road in the eastbound direction between Interchanges 7 and 8. Meanwhile, Concept 15 would include CD road for both directions between Interchanges 7 and 8. Both concepts would propose a diverging diamond interchange at Interchange 8. This would eliminate the need for the Newtown Road northbound traffic to circulate around the interchange to enter the I-84 westbound on-ramp.

S. Kalluri next discussed a strategy that could be a potential break-out project: Dynamic Lane Use (DLU). He asked the attendees to picture the Tappan Zee bridge, officially named the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge, in New York and how it worked. During the construction of the new Tappan Zee bridge, he explained that a fourth lane was introduced as a reversible lane and was implemented using movable barriers. Unlike the Tappan Zee, he clarified that the proposed strategy would not use movable barriers and would use gantry and signage to indicate the opening and closing of the dynamic lane. In addition, DLU would be provided in the inside shoulder in each direction and would be open during the peak hour in the peak direction. During non-peak hours, the DLU would function as a left shoulder. He also added that DLU is not recommended to operate 24 hours / 7 days per week because of its inadequate shoulder width during operational and would need to clear the lane for emergency use.

S. Kalluri next discussed the non-highway concepts that considered the regional transit services, including express bus routes, especially to commuter rail stations. He added that a circulator service could enhance access to work and shopping destinations in the city by providing transfers between HART hubs and the new express services. He also mentioned a study on the Maybrook Line Rail Service by Putnam County, which explores the feasibility of adding a service between Danbury and Brewster. Finally, he discussed potential bicycle and pedestrian trail improvements, some of which are being look at by the City of Danbury.

Nilesh Patel, of CTDOT, discussed additional lists of potential early action projects. He discussed next steps of the project, which include the completion of the draft PEL Study Report in early 2023. The draft report will include recommendations for early action / break out projects and long-term projects. He also announced that the next public meeting will be expected in Spring / Summer 2023. He then presented the timeline of the detailed NEPA, design, and construction as presented using a flow chart. He added that the extensive length of the corridor may require phasing the construction. He closed the presentation describing how the public can stay involved.

3. Question and Answer Period

Question/ Comment: Where does the runoff go? There was additional discussion on the requirement to put drains and filter in the Elks Lodge parking lot on Sugar Hollow Road and an insinuation that the CTDOT does not have to do this on highways. It was voiced that the State often dumps asphalt in the middle of road, and this is an environmental concern. It seems like the state gets away with more than the locals.

Answer: N. Patel replied that the state does have strict standards, especially with newer U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations that will continue to become more stringent. Jeanine Armstrong-Gouin added that when I-84 was built with no regulations. There are now EPA storm water criteria and regulations, which provide opportunity to improve the water quality with any improvement. She added that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be involved with any permitting projects that require federal funding.

Question/ Comment: Are you still taking comments and how can they be submitted?

Answer: The best way to submit comments moving forward is via email at info@danbury.com.

Question/ Comment: This work seems like it's going in the right direction.

Question/ Comment: Can the median concepts [Concepts 9 and 22] be done within the existing footprint.

Answer: No, these concepts require more impacts.

Question/ Comment: I like the dynamic lane use.

Answer: Several other states are implementing this strategy, and their data has shown positive results for reducing congestion.

Question/ Comment: Did any of these concepts address the eastbound Exit 5 going over to Clapboard Ridge Road? There is heavy congestion of eastbound traffic getting off Exit 5.

Answer: Not directly, Concept 26 is the closest. Additionally, there is no planned flyover concept that directly connects the I-84 eastbound traffic to Clapboard Ridge Road. Motorists will still need to make a left-hand turn at a signal at Main Street off-ramp.

Question/ Comment: Will the dynamic lane use exacerbate the traffic weaving that is existing now? Some drivers would have to cross three lanes instead of 2 lanes under this strategy.

Answer: The signage would have to be very clear for this to work well.

Question/ Comment: Has the team collected data with respect to where cars are going?

Answer: The study team has collected traffic volumes as part of the Needs and Deficiencies Study, including origin and destinations data. The study team gathered from the travel pattern that 30% of traffic on the highway is local.

Question/ Comment: Will CD roads require property takings?

Answer: Possibly. In many of the cases, there would need some property takings. Some areas would require retaining walls to lessen the impacts.

Question/ Comment: Disappointed that Concept 10 is not part of the presentation.

Question/ Comment: Can the old Exit 2 that used to provide access to Kenosia Avenue be restored? Bringing this back could alleviate traffic to the mall and on Mill Plain Road. Also, another lane is needed at Mill Plain Road.

Answer: The study team will look into this further, but the current Exit 2 is too close to the old ramp at Kenosia Avenue.

Question/ Comment: Most of the eastbound traffic lightens up after Exit 5. The corridor between Exits 3-5 is the most congested.

Answer: The congestion before Exit 5 in the eastbound direction is because of Route 7 traffic weaving. The proposed right-hand ramp at Interchange 3 could alleviate this.

4. Open Discussion

- A resident liked Concept 13 with the split interchange at North Street / Great Plain Road. He indicated that it was the least impactful. In his opinion, the study should not focus just on the Hospital but look at other options. He did not like Concept 3 because it does not connect directly to North Street. He also asked if anything else is being proposed on I-84 in the west side (Interchanges 1 and 2) besides the lane add on the mainline. The project team noted his comments on the Concepts 3 and 13 and added that at Interchanges 1 and 2, no work is being proposed.
- A resident stated that he did not like Concepts 9 and 22 because of the wide cross section. The project team noted his comment.
- One of the attendees works at District 4 as a snowplow operator and had maintenance concerns with the dynamic lane use specifically associated with how the snowplow operations occurs during a storm. The project team noted his comment.
- Another resident asked how the dynamic lane use will work with Route 7 traffic being on the median side while ramps are not being switched. The project team indicated that there will be adequate signage and pavement markings provided to guide traffic and this is being currently studied.