

## REPORT OF MEETING

**Date and Time: Thursday, October 20, 2022, 12:30 – 2:00 PM**

**Location: White Hall, Western Connecticut State University**

**Subject: Project Advisory Committee Meeting #11**

### 1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS / PHONE
<b>PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>		
Tom Altermatt	City of Danbury	<a href="mailto:t.altermatt@danbury-ct.gov">t.altermatt@danbury-ct.gov</a>
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John Gentile	Commission for Persons w/disAbilities	<a href="mailto:jmgrs1550@aol.com">jmgrs1550@aol.com</a>
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Ralph Tedesco	Brookfield	<a href="mailto:rtedesco@brookfieldct.gov">rtedesco@brookfieldct.gov</a>
John Tully	Putnam County Planning	<a href="mailto:John.tully@putnamcounty.ny">John.tully@putnamcounty.ny</a>
Chris Roscia	CTWeather	<a href="mailto:chris@ctweather.com">chris@ctweather.com</a>
James Root	Sierra Club, Connecticut Chapter	<a href="mailto:manoether@yahoo.com">manoether@yahoo.com</a>

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION		
NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
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CONSULTANT TEAM		
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### 2. Welcome

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) hosted its 11<sup>th</sup> Project Advisory Committee Meeting (PAC) for the I-84 Danbury Project on Thursday, October 20, 2022, from 12:30 – 2:00 PM in White Hall at Western Connecticut State University. Marcy Miller, of FHI Studio, welcomed attendees to the first in-person PAC Meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic. She introduced the project team and handed the presentation to Krishalyn Macrohon, of CTDOT. K. Macrohon reviewed the agenda and relayed that the purpose of the meeting was to continue the discussion on concept screening. She added that the team would present next steps and leave ample time for discussion and questions from the PAC.

### 3. [Presentation](#)

K. Macrohon provided the PAC with a list of activities the project team worked on following the previous PAC Meeting on August 24, 2022. She stated that the team screened remaining concepts, combined concepts for the entire corridor, added concepts to the website, attended a pop-up event in Danbury, and continued to create content and post to social media. She then handed the presentation over to Rick Black of SLR Consulting. He reviewed next steps which include finalizing screening of all concepts.

R. Black defined a Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Study. He described the step-by-step process of screening and the resulting reasonable range of alternatives.

R. Black displayed an image of the study area and reminded the four study segments – Mainline, West, Center and East. He provided a summary of the mainline screening result as previously discussed in the last PAC meeting. R. Black stated that Concepts 5, 8, 9, and 22 did not make through the segment concept screening process. Only Concept 1 met all the screening analyses, while Concepts 4 (Non-highway) and 23 (TSMO) are being recommended for breakout projects.

R. Black went on with the screening of the remaining segments and started the evaluation on west segment. R. Black invited Sharat Kalluri, of CDM Smith, to discuss Concept 6. S. Kalluri described the Concept 6 details. He stated that one of the current issues for drivers is accessing Exit 4 to Lake Avenue in the eastbound direction due to the current weave between I-84 and Route 7 traffic. With this concept, I-84 traffic would provide a new ramp onto Segar Street to eliminate the current weave.

S. Kalluri next described the details of Concept 12. In this concept, the Lake Avenue off ramp to I-84 eastbound would be accessed through a short collector-distributor (CD) road between Exits 3 and 4. A new median barrier would be installed between I-84 eastbound and Route 7 northbound to prohibit I-84 eastbound traffic from using the Lake Avenue off-ramp. This concept would prevent the weaving of traffic and realign Route 7.

R. Black presented the matrix analysis of Concepts 6 and 12 of the west segment and stated that Concept 12 would require a full permit for both wetland and stream impacts. R. Black stated that Concept 6 would address the weaving, while Concept 12 would only partially address them because the weaving is influenced by Route 7.

R. Black said that Concepts 6 and 12 in the west segment move forward in the screening, but Concept 7, which included an option to tunnel I-84 is be eliminated.

R. Black next described the four concepts in the center segment: Concept 3, 13, 16, and 26. All these concepts would seek to provide better access to Danbury Hospital and Downtown.

Concept 3 would eliminate the existing Interchange 6 on North Street and provide a direct connection to Danbury Hospital via Tamarack Avenue. Concept 13 would provide a new partial interchange on I-84 at Great Plain Road. Concept 16 would eliminate the existing Interchange 6 and provide a connection to North Street and Tamarack Avenue via a collector-distributor (CD)

road. Concept 26 would provide a full interchange at North Street and add a collector-distributor (CD) road in the eastbound direction.

R. Black discussed how the concepts in the center section were screened in the matrix analysis. Only Concept 26 would improve morning congestion on Route 7. Concepts 16 and 26 would maintain full access to businesses on North Street. Concepts 3 and 26 would provide a full interchange. Concepts 3 and 13 would keep construction costs under \$100 Million and have a low construction complexity and staging schedule. Concepts 3, 16 and 26 would have impacts to the nearby cemetery. As a result, Concepts 3, 13, and 26 move forward for further screening, while Concepts 2, 11, 16, 24, and 25 failed the concept segment screening process.

R. Black next discussed the east segment concepts. This includes Concepts 14 and 15. Concept 14 would construct an eastbound CD road between Interchanges 7 and 8. Concept 15 would also provide CD roads in each direction between Interchanges 7 and 8. Concept 15 would provide a full reduction of travel time and address the weaving. In concept segment screening, both Concepts 14 and 15 passed the fatal flaw, redundancy, and matrix analyses. R. Black added that both concepts would address the left hand exits at Interchange 7.

R. Black explained that all 8 concepts (1 concept in Mainline, 2 in West, 3 in Center and 2 in East segment) that made through the concept segment screening process are combined to create a total of 12 concept combinations. These combinations are named alphabetically A through L and will be further assessed and compared against one another.

R. Black described how the concept combinations will be first screened for its feasibility and ability to address the study purpose and need, followed by a redundancy analysis and a matrix analysis. The remaining concept combinations would be considered as part of the reasonable range of alternatives. This would be the beginning of selection for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis.

R. Black introduced Nilesh Patel, of CTDOT, who discussed the next steps of the project. These include the identification of early action (breakout) projects. He stated that the project team will continue screening the concept combinations. Following the screening, a range of reasonable alternatives would be developed to move forward into the NEPA, or environmental, phase. The study will be documented in the PEL document. R. Black mentioned that the next Public Information Meeting is being planned for late 2022.

#### **4. Discussion**

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

James Root, of the Sierra Club, asked how the PEL process fits into the NEPA process. R. Black answered that the PEL process can greatly improve the NEPA process. It can shorten it and eliminate alternatives that have fatal flaws. It can also engage key stakeholders early in the process and identify early action projects that may move forward without going through the NEPA process.

John Gentile, of the Commission for Persons w/ disAbilities, commented on the comparison of Concepts 3 and 26 of the center segment. He shared that Concept 26 will be a state burden as it improves the interchange on North Street, which is a state road; While Concept 3 that introduces a partial interchange on Tamarack Ave is a city burden. R. Black noted that this consideration is further looked at NEPA process should these concepts go through the screening process.

Chris Roscia, of CT Weather, commented that the population in the eastern and western segments of the study area are inclined to grow. He asked if the concepts considered the possibility of massive growth. R. Black answered that the traffic model considered projections of growth for year 2040. It also accounted other future land use planning projects.

David McCollum asked for clarifications on turtle back concept. He inquired if the slip ramp to I-84 eastbound on Route 6 will be preserved and if the turtle back will only serve Newtown Road traffic. S. Kalluri confirmed that the ramp would not be affected, and the turtle back will only serve traffic on Newtown Road. He added that traffic on side streets such as Payne Road would need to loop around to access I-84 westbound.

On Concept 15, Alec Slatky, of AAA, asked how close the entrance ramps from the CD road would be with the I-84 westbound on-ramp at interchange 7 where Route 7 southbound traffic merges with I-84 westbound. S. Kalluri explained how traffic will operate under this concept and confirmed that the distance between two ramps is adequate.

C. Roscia asked if the study considered any animal crossings or migrations routes. R. Black responded that migration routes are not looked at in the study phase, but the rest of the environmental impacts would be looked at in more detail in the NEPA phase of the alternatives analysis.

Vinny Tamagna, of Putnam County, questioned whether the PEL requires input or feedback from the public. R. Black responded that continuous public engagement, aside from holding PAC meetings, is solicited, and as required by the PEL process. N. Patel added that there will be a public information meeting in late 2022 and a final public information meeting once PEL Study is completed.

V. Tamagna questioned whether the Danbury to Southeast Rail Study is considered in this project. He added that NY has recently completed a feasibility study on restoring the connection that included 4 options of rail alignment. R. Black responded that the rail study is considered as part of Concept 4, which looks at non-highway improvements. S. Kalluri added that the analysis done for the I-84 Danbury Project PEL study was high level and did not project a large reduction in traffic volumes. He also confirmed that the project team has seen the feasibility report and is reviewing the proposed alternatives. Another attendee commented that he would like to see direct trains from Danbury to Grand Central. This would increase ticket sales and ridership in the area.

Betsey Paynter, of Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG), questioned whether traffic impacts of COVID-19 have been incorporated into the study. S. Kalluri responded that the travel volumes are starting to return to pre-COVID levels, with some changes. For example, the AM travel has spread out over several hours in the morning commute. He also assured that the traffic model will be updated during the NEPA/environmental review phase.



A. Slatky asked the process on evaluating the magnitude of cost of the combined concepts. R. Black acknowledged that the construction cost is important in the screening process and will look at the differentiators to distinguish the differences.

J. Root asked if the PEL study will discuss issues such as impacts to mass transit and affordable housing. He also asked if the PEL study will be reviewed by WestCOG. R. Black responded that the PEL study focuses on improving roads as solutions, and other resources are considered to choose for proper solutions to advance. There is a sincere effort to consider underrepresented populations and how alternative modes of mobility can help meet their needs. He added that WestCOG is participating in the PAC and will have an opportunity to review the report.

J. Gentile questioned why fewer people were present at this PAC meeting than at previous meetings. Various study team members responded that this is the first in-person PAC meeting since COVID. Many may have become used to virtual meetings and may prefer that. There may be some hesitation to get back to in-person meetings. The study team committed to ask the PAC about their meeting preferences

## **5. Adjourn**

R. Black concluded the 11<sup>th</sup> PAC Meeting by thanking everyone for attending.