

REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 12:30 – 1:30 PM

Location: Microsoft Team Virtual Meeting

Subject: Project Advisory Committee Meeting #15

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS		
Barry Abrams	Juniper Ridge Tax District	abramsb@hotmail.com
Waleed Albakry	City of Danbury	w.albakry@danbury-ct.gov
Tom Altermatt	City of Danbury	t.altermatt@danbury-ct.gov
Dan Carter	Town of Bethel	carterd@bethel-ct.gov
Matt Cassavechia	Danbury Hospital	Matthew.cassavechia@nuvancehealth.org
Greg Dembowski	Town of Brookfield	gdembowski@brookfieldct.gov
Matt Donadio	Town of Brookfield Police	mdonadio@brookfieldct.gov
Guyauth Gabbidon	HARTransit	guyauthg@hartransit.com
John Gentile	Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities	jmg1550@aol.com
Veera Karukonda	City of Danbury	v.karukonda@danbury-ct.gov
David McCollum	Town of Bethel	mccollumd@bethel-ct.gov
Ali Mohseni	New York Metropolitan Transportation Council	Ali.Mohseni@dot.ny.gov
Katie Pearson	Danbury Library	kpearson@danburylibrary.org
Francis Pickering	Western Connecticut Council of Governments	fpickering@westcog.org
James Root	Sierra Club, Connecticut Chapter	manoether@yahoo.com
Mike Safranek	Danbury Airport	m.safranek@danbury-ct.gov

OTHER ATTENDEES		
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION		
Krishalyn Macrohon	Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)	krishalyn.macrohon@ct.gov
Kevin Burnham	CTDOT	kevin.burnham@ct.gov
Nilesh Patel	CTDOT	nilesh.patel@ct.gov
CONSULTANT TEAM		
Sharat Kalluri	CDM Smith	kallurisk@cdmsmith.com
Mike Joyce	CDM Smith	joycemj@cdmsmith.com
Rick Black	SLR Consulting	rblack@slrconsulting.com
Jeanine Armstrong Gouin	SLR Consulting	jgouin@slrconsulting.com
Joe Rubino	SLR Consulting	jrubino@slrconsulting.com
Marcy Miller	FHI Studio	mmiller@fhistudio.com

2. Welcome

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) hosted its 15th Project Advisory Committee meeting (PAC) for the I-84 Danbury Study on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, from 12:30

– 1:30 PM. The meeting was virtual via Microsoft Teams. Marcy Miller, of FHI Studio, welcomed attendees to the PAC meeting and provided an overview of the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting platform. M. Miller introduced the study team and reviewed the agenda for the meeting, which included:

1. Welcome
2. Review of Study Background
3. Screening Process and Results
4. Potential Breakout Projects
5. Next Steps
6. Discussion / Questions

M. Miller stated that the purpose of the meeting was to give the PAC an update as well as discuss the potential breakout projects. She added that the team would present next steps and leave ample time for discussion and questions from the PAC.

3. [Presentation](#)

Kevin Burnham, of CTDOT, started the presentation and stated that the project team has been working on several items since the previous PAC meeting in August 2023. He said that since that date, the project team has coordinated with various stakeholders and continued to work on the potential breakout projects. In addition, the analysis of all 26 concepts, and their combinations, is complete and posted on the project website. He stated that the team continues to update social media and finalize the Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Study report.

K. Burnham reviewed the needs and deficiencies as well as the purpose statement of the corridor. He presented the four segments of the corridor (e.g., Mainline, West, Center, East) and the concepts that were analyzed for each. He described how each concept was screened for a fatal flaw analysis, redundancy analysis, and screening matrix analysis. One Mainline, two West, three Center, and two East concepts advanced in Concept Segments Screening to be merged into concept combinations. Using a series of maps, he highlighted the design features of the Reasonable Range of Alternatives that advanced through the concept combination process. He closed by discussing the next steps of the PEL Study process which included finalizing the PEL Study report and hosting a public meeting in Spring 2025. Once those are complete the Reasonable Range of Alternatives will begin environmental review and phase the design and construction of the larger project.

[Potential Breakout Projects](#)

Sharat Kalluri, of CDM Smith, next presented the potential breakout projects. The potential breakout projects include intersection Improvements at Main Street, North Street, and Downs Street by Interchange 5, bicycle improvements, a sidewalk gap analysis, transit service options, Interchange 8 improvements at US Route 6 / Newtown Road, and Flex Lane. These breakout projects are deemed to have independent utility and could be implemented quickly.

S. Kalluri stated that the Main Street, North Street, and Downs Street Intersection has been discussed in previous PAC meetings. Existing conditions at this intersection include poor traffic operations during the peak period traffic, poor sight lines on Main Street from the north of this intersection, and significant crashes, mainly rear-end and angled collisions, caused by lane

changing or crossing of traffic and congestion. The project team is also assessing ways to improve the sightlines on Main Street, its overall traffic operations and adapting Complete Street policy.

S. Kalluri explained that the study team hosted a public workshop on Monday, August 12, 2024 to present information and gather feedback from the public on this area. He said the team conducted a short questionnaire, which about 160 people responded in-person and online. The questionnaire was posted online for 30 days after the meeting. S. Kalluri presented feedback from the questionnaire noting that 73 percent of the respondents cited traffic delays as one of the greatest concerns at the intersection. Over half of the respondents said that they can support or love the idea of converting Downs Street from a two-way to a one-way eastbound.

S. Kalluri next presented potential bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the western end of the corridor, particularly along Mill Plain Road. He stated that the study team is currently exploring the option to create bicycle and pedestrian facilities along this corridor. He also discussed potential transit improvements including new express bus routes that can provide regional connectivity and a new circulator route in the central Danbury area to enhance access to work and shopping.

S. Kalluri oriented the PAC around the Exit 8 interchange and Route 6. A notable area in this section is Newtown Road that is mainly commercial / retail stores. The current layout of the interchange causes a circuitous route. The new interchange layouts would eliminate the need to circulate Newtown Road by introducing a Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI) at east bound off ramp, west bound on ramp, Newtown Road and Route 6 intersection. The DDI can significantly reduce circuitous movements in this area.

K. Burnham discussed the concept of Flex Lane, previously referred to Dynamic Lane Use (DLU). This is a strategy which allows the left shoulder to be used as a travel lane based on traffic conditions of the highway. He stated that the I-84 project limit of Flex Lane would be east of Lake Ave to Route 7 at Interchange 7. The exact location has not been defined. He presented aerial photographs and cross sections to illustrate how the variable message signs would operate by opening one of the left shoulder to traffic during peak travel conditions.

K. Burnham presented the benefits of Flex Lane. He explained that they can reduce peak hour delays and improve capacity. He added that some states have seen safety benefits from their implementation. They would be constructed within the existing right-of-way with limited impacts and in a short timeframe.

Next Steps

K. Burnham discussed the breakout project's next steps. At Main Street, Downs Street, and North Street, the study team will continue to reach out to business owners, identify funding, and initiate the project design and right-of-way processes. The transit analysis will be coordinated by CTDOT Public Transportation with transit agencies to conduct a service analysis for the additional regional and local services presented. The team is also continuing to refine the Mill Plain Road bicycle and pedestrian improvement analysis. Continued work on the Flex Lane will include public and stakeholder outreach, environmental review, design, and potentially construction in late 2027 or early 2028.

4. Discussion

Barry Abrams, of Juniper Ridge Tax District, asked where the funding will come from for the improvements. Nilesh Patel, of CTDOT, answered that, as part of the PEL Study, the report does not have detailed cost estimates, but the alternatives ranged between \$3-4 billion. B. Abrams asked if the new administration would affect the costs or whether projects can move forward. N. Patel answered that they would likely not affect the overall schedule or cost estimates at this time.

Francis Pickering, of Western Connecticut Council of Governments, asked if the study team could provide the slides to the PAC. M. Miller answered that they would be posted on the study website immediately following the meeting. F. Pickering added that many are concerned with recent executive orders that could affect the U.S. Department of Transportation. N. Patel replied with no news from the CTDOT management regarding the executive order.

Waleed Albakry, of the City of Danbury, submitted a question to the chat asking whether the main project is different from the Flex Lane. When prompted he followed up that K. Burnham answered this question during the presentation. K. Burnham added that depending on the success of Flex Lane, the study team could consider this strategy as part of the long-term solution. W. Albakry followed up and asked that the study team to continue the coordination with the City on the design of bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Mill Plain Road. He added that there may not be enough right-of way to accomplish this in the corridor.

John Gentile, of Danbury Commission for Persons with disAbilities, voiced his concern that the project needs to fix the sharp curves and grades in the corridor to address the congestion on the mainline. N. Patel responded that the purpose of the Flex Lane is not to provide free flow travel speeds, it will mostly help with reducing the travel times during the peak travel times. S. Kalluri said that the long-term mainline alternatives would look at design improvements to help with the curvature.

Matt Cassavechia, of Danbury Hospital, submitted a question in the chat about the safety benefits realized by states using flex lanes and their metrics for safety benefit. S. Kalluri replied that other states saw reduction in travel time and delay with Flex Lane in operation during peak periods. Also, they saw that traffic is now moving, and not stop-and-go condition, that resulted to safety improvements with reduction of crashes, particularly rear-end crashes.

J. Gentile said that the benefits of Flex Lane may not be as significant than as presented. He also expressed traffic weaving concern at Interchange 7, where I-84 and Route 7 merge.

F. Pickering questioned drivers' ability to manage driving in the Flex Lane and that Flex Lane is introducing the two-lane weaves, from existing one-lane weave. He added that other states saw the benefits with the implementation of Flex Lane on a linear and flat highway, unlike the I-84 Danbury corridor. He cautioned the study team on Flex Lane's messaging to the public, particularly its safety benefits. N. Patel agreed that incident management is important in operating Flex Lane and assured that the team is working closely with the emergency responders and CTDOT Highway Operations in addressing this concern.

B. Abrams stated that traffic has gotten worse since 2018, particularly in the westbound direction as far as exit 14 during his afternoon commute. N. Patel agreed that traffic patterns have changed

since the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that the study team conducted new traffic counts last year and is updating its traffic analysis.

W. Albakry asked the study team to coordinate the process of Exit 5 east bound improvement and its neighboring area with the City. He acknowledged that this area needed attention.

M. Miller encouraged the PAC members to visit the project website to review the meeting video and look for the upcoming project newsletter.