



HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROGRAM, INC.

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**MARSHALL MILLSAP PRESIDENT
WES HAYNES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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12 January 2013

Mr. Robert Brown
DOT
2800 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, CT 06111

Re: Atlantic Street Railroad Bridge, Stamford, CT
Replacement Project No. 135-301

Dear Mr. Brown,

We concur with the SHPO's determination that the Atlantic Street Railroad Bridge is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and that its proposed replacement is an adverse impact on the resource. In addition, we believe that the loss of this historic bridge is also an adverse impact on the South End National Register historic district as a boundary portal and its close associations with the historical and architectural themes stated in the nomination. The bridge is the most visually distinctive among the city's four surviving contemporary underpasses, constructed of massive beams carried by abutments of giant ashlar and wrought iron lattice piers.

We recognize the existing site complexities and deficiencies of this resource. Located at an I-95 interchange it bottlenecks existing rush hour traffic, is an unpleasant pedestrian experience in its present condition, and is unsafe for rush hour bicycle traffic. We also agree with what appears to be a majority opinion within our community that the bridge and/or I-95 interchange need to be upgraded to remedy these existing problems.

The scope of the proposed replacement project, however, greatly exceeds the scope of needed upgrades to solve existing problems. We recognize that the proposed work is attempting to accommodate many diverse proposals which in some way are contingent upon increasing the capacity of this bridge. These include the proposed TOD development adjacent to the station, other potential private development in the South End, increasing the capacity of the rail line, and restoring street rail service between the South End and Bull's Head. The public has yet to have an opportunity to weigh in on the merit of these proposals. Stamford's history and quality of life is intrinsically linked with the railroad, and we along with what we believe to be the majority of daily commuters strongly support increasing rail capacity along the line. We also support restoration of street rail service (which the existing railroad bridges accommodated into the 1930s) on condition that it does not degrade pedestrian safety. Along with most Stamfordites, we are dismayed that local community participation was not considered in planning the TOD; from our perspective, it accomplishes State and regional goals at great cost to our quality and is being forced on our community without sufficient justification.

So while we support necessary aspects of this project's goals we strongly oppose the loss of the bridge and its replacement in the absence of clarity about its impact beyond the project area. We cannot

support expanding rail capacity one bridge at a time without understanding how this is to be accomplished with our other historic railroad bridges. Feeding two additional lanes of vehicular traffic into a historic largely residential district will place increased demand on existing streets; how will this be accomplished? HNPP and the residents of the South End do not want to see the higher pedestrian casualty rates present in the urban renewal zone introduced here. There are still several large-scale bulk-handling businesses in the neighborhood; how will the new bridge impact truck circulation through residential streets? What will be done to protect on-street parking for residents? We have been asking these questions for over a year now and have been told by DOT that this is the City's jurisdiction, and by the City that there are no plans because there is no funding. The time is overdue for the City and DOT to sit down with the public and come to terms with an acceptable comprehensive plan.

Our fears are grounded in the experience of the Urban Transitway which had major adverse impacts beyond the contributing resources it demolished at the district's north end. Like this project, it was presented in isolation from the neighborhood's existing traffic patterns. SHPO environmental review was limited to the impacted project area only. The Urban Transitway improved external vehicular traffic flow to the train station from the east but introduced a new internal pedestrian and vehicular barrier isolating Manhattan Street, then a contributing resource, from the greater district and dis-incented investment in basic upkeep and rehabilitation. It has also created a very hazardous pedestrian zone at Atlantic Street. Likewise, the impacts of this bridge replacement and adjacent TOD within the historic district are not yet known to the public. Stakeholders need to understand how they will impact pedestrian safety, intersection reconfigurations, street widenings, and on-street parking to prevent similar disinvestment from uncertainty. How these impacts will be addressed, along with a feasibility assessment of re-establishing street rail service should be presented for public discussion in a comprehensive plan.

With regard to the preliminary details of the project as currently presented:

- We concur with the DSSD's comments that the proposed underpass provides inadequate sidewalks in relation to vehicular lanes.
- We acknowledge the complexity of the proposed construction and concur that if the bridge is rehabilitated or replaced it should be done as expeditiously as possible to minimize traffic disruption.
- If complete replacement is warranted we suggest that salvaged historic features be incorporated within the finish landscaping in a creative, meaningful and visible way to commemorate the railroad's impact on the development of Stamford and mark the transition into the historic district.
- The bridge's existing materials have proven relatively maintenance free in their first century of use. We question the proposed use of imitation form-stone as an appropriate substitute in terms of comparable maintenance as well as its compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards*.

HNPP's experience working with the South End NRZ, DOT, SHPO and the City on the realignment of the intersection of Henry and Atlantic Streets was positive and we would welcome the opportunity to engage on these important issues raised by this project. Please contact me at 203-325-4278 or execdirect@hnppinc.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Wes Haynes
Executive Director

cc. Hon. David Martin, Mayor
Terry Adams, SENRZ
Sheila Barney, SENRZ
Daniel Forrest, SHPO
Todd Levine, SHPO
Manni Poola, City of Stamford