

Hartford West MIS Newsline

Interstate 84 Corridor Planning Study

Hotline: 1-800-786-2191



Welcome!

May, 1997



The people of Connecticut face many challenges over the next two decades. One of the most pressing is the need to provide safe and efficient transportation for our people and goods. The Hartford West transportation corridor is one of the corridors in our state where this need will be most urgent and the challenge most difficult.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT), the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency (CCRPA) have identified peak hour traffic congestion and safety deficiencies as major concerns for Interstate 84 (I-84) and other arterial roadways between Downtown Hartford and the Fienemann Road Interchange in Farmington. To address these concerns and to evaluate the effectiveness of different transportation system improvement alternatives, these agencies are jointly undertaking a Major Investment Study (MIS) for this corridor. The MIS will guide transportation-related investment decisions for the next two decades.

ConnDOT and our planning partners (CRCOG and CCRPA) welcome and encourage your participation in this study.

*James F. Sullivan, Acting Commissioner
Connecticut Department of Transportation*

INSIDE:

<i>Issues For I-84 and The Corridor Towns Today</i>	<i>page 2</i>
<i>What Will The Study Accomplish?</i>	<i>page 4</i>
<i>Sorting Out The Options</i>	<i>page 5</i>
<i>Anticipating Traffic: Using a Computer Model</i>	<i>page 5</i>
<i>How You Can Get Involved</i>	<i>page 6</i>

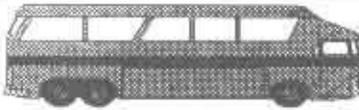
"The Hartford West transportation corridor is one of the corridors in our state where the need (for safe and efficient travel) will be most urgent and the challenge most difficult."

What Is An MIS ?

A Major Investment Study or MIS is a first step in the transportation system planning process established by the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration for transportation projects to be funded with federal monies. The MIS process is intended to bridge the gap between conceptual planning and the detailed environmental analysis of designs of new transportation facilities. In order to receive federal funding for new highway and transit projects, ConnDOT must follow procedures outlined by these federal agencies for an MIS.

Hartford West MIS Project: The Where? and The How?

The study area for the Hartford West MIS is defined as the area within two miles of I-84 between Asylum Street in Downtown Hartford and Fienemann Road in Farmington. The study area also includes areas of West Hartford, Newington and New Britain which are adjacent to the New Britain-Hartford railroad line. The corridor area as shown on the map on Page 3, was first identified by CRCOG as part of their listing of severely deficient transportation facilities in need of improvements. CRCOG recommended that a MIS be undertaken for this corridor.



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The first step in this MIS was to establish a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of representatives of the towns and cities in the study area as well as representatives from other agencies such as the Greater Hartford Transit District.

The next step was to prepare a report documenting the existing needs and issues of the transportation system in the study area. This means more than just roads. The study considers a variety of transportation modes including local and express buses, rail, bicycles and pedestrians.

Following the existing condition assessment, a set of alternatives to improve the transportation system will be identified and analyzed for their feasibility. The alternatives will include a complete range of strategies from the "Do Nothing" (other than already committed projects) to the possible construction of a whole new transportation system link such as a light rail service or High Occupancy Vehicle lanes (HOV). Elements of the different alternatives can be combined into packages to meet the identified needs and deficiencies.

Following the initial alternatives screening process, the number of most feasible and practical alternative packages will be reduced to a select few. The performance of these select packages in terms of meeting the project's goals and objectives will be quantified. This evaluation concludes this portion of the MIS process. Ultimately, the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives packages will be studied in greater detail during a following stage of the transportation system planning process with the preparation of an environmental document.



THE PROJECT CONSULTANT TEAM:

- Headed by *Wilbur Smith Associates of New Haven, CT.*, the MIS project team includes:

- *Wilbur Smith Associates - Prime Consultant*
- *De Leuw Cather/Parsons Transportation Group Environmental Factors*
- *Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. - Socioeconomic Factors, Newsletter*
- *KKO Associates - Transit Analysis*
- *The Knox Group- Public Outreach*



Existing Issues For I-84 and The Corridor Towns

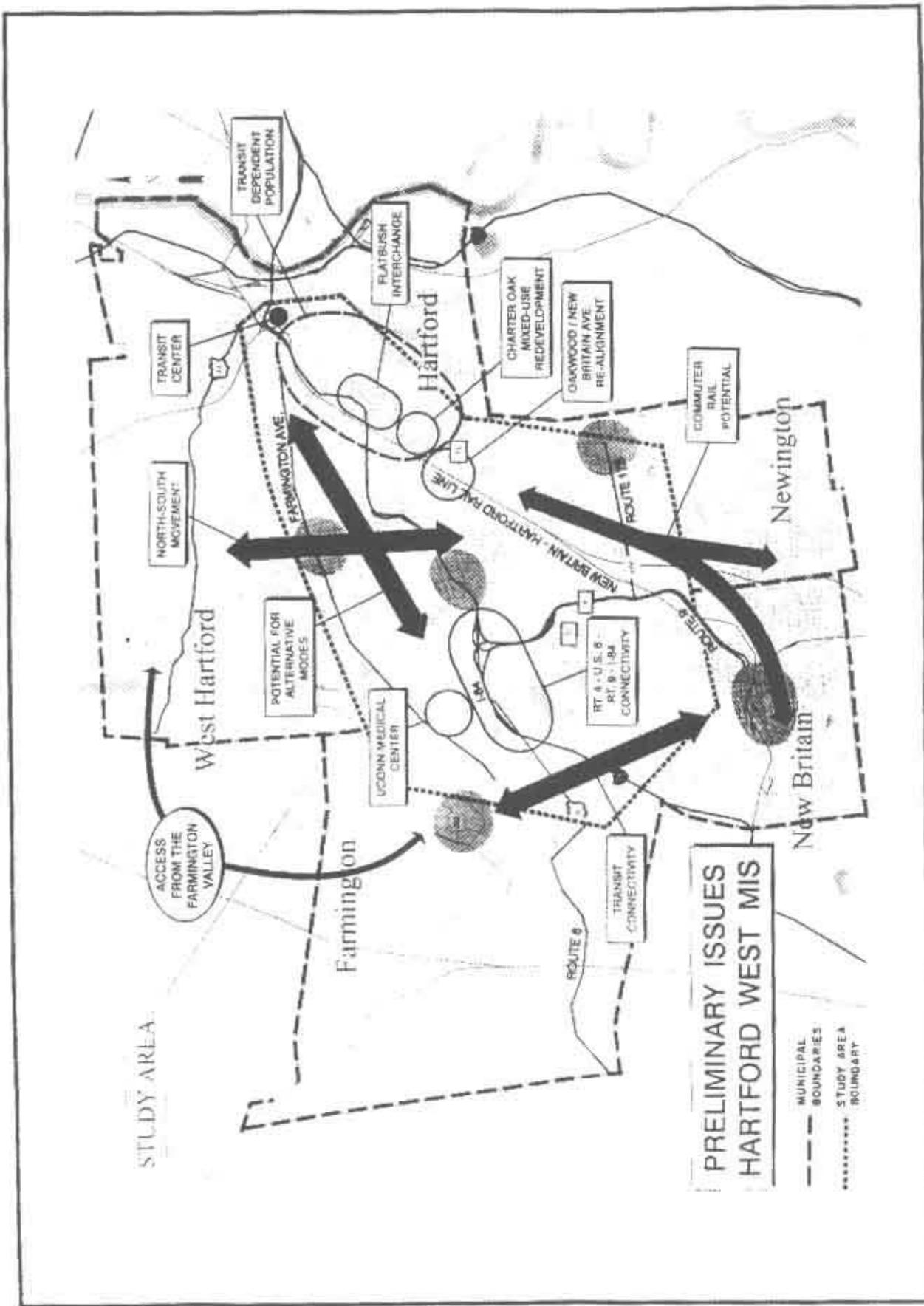
Almost everywhere in the United States, travel by private car constitutes the most common form of transportation. However, existing travel conditions within the Hartford West corridor are far from ideal. Drivers on I-84 experience traffic congestion during the morning and evening peak travel hours.

The I-84 expressway is now thirty five (35) years old. Several sections of the roadway, including the Flatbush Avenue ramps and the highway mainline between Asylum Avenue and the Kane Street Interchange, do not meet current design standards. The parallel arterials, such as Farmington Avenue, Park Road and New Park Avenue, are also congested, carrying a significant volume of commuter traffic, as well as local traffic oriented to adjacent commercial and residential areas.

One of the other ways to gain an understanding of the need for improvements to the transportation system is to evaluate community characteristics within the corridor. That kind of analysis can indicate the demands which will be placed on the transportation system in the future. The Wilbur Smith Associates project team conducted such an evaluation and produced a draft report outlining their findings. The report has been distributed to the Technical Advisory Committee for their review. For analysis purposes, the study area communities were grouped into three predominant patterns of population, land use and housing character: Urban Areas - Hartford and New Britain; Inner Suburban Areas - West Hartford and Newington; and Outer Suburban Areas - Farmington. The following is a brief summary of the findings of the community evaluation study.

(Continued on page 4)

Understanding The Map on Page 3: The map symbols and text focus on some of the issues identified by the TAC for the Hartford West Corridor. The bold arrows and text boxes indicate general areas where travel movement could be improved by an enhanced transportation system. The grey oval-like shapes highlight activity centers in the study area.





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Hartford West MIS Newsline

(Continued from page 2)



Hartford and New Britain

Many residents of these urban areas do not have a vehicle available for their use. As a result, they are "transit reliant." Transit service availability is, therefore, a significant issue in this corridor. Without a car, or adequate transit services, "transit reliant" urban residents access to suburban employment opportunities can be very difficult.

Another major concern for the study area's two cities is that the selected transportation system improvements support their urban development initiatives. Both cities have a number of revitalization efforts underway and their ultimate success is linked to whether development sites can be easily reached. For example, new commercial development resulting from the Charter Oak redevelopment project in Hartford would benefit from direct access to I-84 eastbound at Flatbush Avenue. Similarly, the revival of rail service could be very beneficial to downtown revitalization efforts in New Britain.

West Hartford and Newington

One of the most pressing issues for the inner suburban area towns is the increased through traffic on residential and arterial streets. While the highway network in the study area is considered complete according to current CROG plans, many connections between important arterial roads and the highway are either absent or obsolete. In several areas improved highway ramp connections would provide needed access to key areas of economic development. One example of a 'missing link' is the absence of a direct connection between Route 4 and Route 9.

Farmington

Employment growth in the Greater Hartford region is increasingly concentrated within the outlying suburban towns such as Farmington, while the traditional regional core, Downtown Hartford, has experienced loss of jobs (10 percent of its total employment) between 1993 and 1995. Farmington now has more workers traveling to employment centers within town than it has residents commuting out of town.

Population growth has also occurred throughout the Farmington Valley communities. This produces additional strain on the I-84 corridor, as well as arterial routes, such as Route 44, Route 4 and Route 6. The capacity of the existing roadway network has become inadequate to handle current and projected future traffic volumes. The widening of I-84 is severely limited by the surrounding land uses and environmentally sensitive areas. The steep topography of the Talcott Mountain ridge poses a further limitation on options for roadway redesign. As congestion grows on the limited number of arterial routes, traffic is forced to seek alternative less congested routes through residential or other neighborhood areas. This trend adversely affects the safety and livability of these communities.

One additional concern is the lack of transit access. The conventional service area covered by many public transit routes radiates from an urban transit center. This means that no transit routes exist to serve many trips for education, shopping, and personal business in outlying areas or between communities. For example, shopping areas in Farmington are inaccessible by public transit from New Britain. The same is true of many employment destinations.



What Are The Study's Goals?

It's all well and good to say we want to improve the transportation system in the Hartford West corridor. But just what does that mean? If the MIS is going to propose alternative plans for system improvements, how will we know if those plans can do what it takes to resolve problems and serve the future?

The TAC began to tackle these questions by agreeing on some general goals for how the transportation system in the area should perform. They then translated those goals into more specific objectives with ideas on ways to measure whether the objectives would be met by each of the MIS improvement plans. Five basic goals were defined through their discussions:

1. To increase choice of travel mode.
2. To reduce roadway congestion.
3. To improve public health and safety associated with transportation.
4. To support and improve economic development opportunities by improving mobility.
5. To enhance the livability and quality of life for corridor communities.



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The results of the TAC efforts also included five or more objectives for achieving each goal. An example of one such objective relative to each goal is:

1. To utilize the existing railroad and highway right-of-way for transportation improvements such as heavy or light rail, improved bus service, or other services.
2. To alleviate localized choke points and bottle-necks on road segments and at intersections.
3. To minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.
4. To provide transportation services that connect "job-rich" areas with areas in need of employment and opportunity.
5. To restrict the movement of through traffic and control traffic speed through neighborhoods.

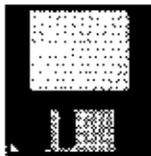
As the alternatives are more specifically defined, performance measures will be applied to see what package of various improvements best meet these goals and objectives. The performance measures include a broad range of items such as: traffic volumes, speeds, transit ridership, number of increased jobs and congestion levels.

Sorting Out The Options:

So what are the kinds of choices this MIS will be looking at for improving the transportation system in the I-84 Corridor? To address the issues outlined in the article on Page 2, a range of options must be considered. These could include:

- ◆ **Highway/Roadway Modifications:** These could include changes to ramp locations, construction of High Occupancy Vehicle lanes, and new connections to the I-84 from other highways or arterial roads.
- ◆ **Transit Alternatives:** These could include enhancing local bus service, creation of new transit centers in such locations as West Hartford Center, and new light rail or commuter rail service.
- ◆ **Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Alternatives:** Transportation Demand Management (TDM) is a generic term that encompasses a wide range of strategies that have been used across the U.S. to reduce peak hour vehicular travel and increase overall mobility. These measures include such approaches as encouraging employers to offer a flexible transportation allowance in place of employer-paid parking and supporting services for commuters who use carpools, vanpools and buses.

Enhancements to the above options could include system features such as extension of bicycle routes to meet transit stops and improvements to pedestrian facilities to make transit more accessible.



Anticipating Traffic: Using A Computer Model To Look Into The Future

Corridor and highway simulation models, such as CORFLO and FRESIM are being used to quantify the current and future traffic conditions within the I-84 study corridor. The traffic conditions reflect the performance of the roadway network. A base simulation model representing current conditions is prepared. Once the base model is in place, a variety of potential future land development and roadway design scenarios can be created to allow comparison of their respective impacts on traffic volume, traffic delay, traffic access to key areas, and their effect on the choice of transportation mode made by people in the area. Performance measures or criteria upon which to gauge how different scenarios compare for use in this project include in part:

- ◆ Existing and future year traffic volumes by direction and by segment;
- ◆ Existing and future year Level of Service, for each segment;
- ◆ Speed - Average vehicle travel speed by segment; and
- ◆ Delay - Total vehicle delay by segment, including ramps or other interchange configurations.

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What's Happening Next?

The overall schedule for the Hartford West MIS calls for the study to be completed in about eighteen months. We are already almost six months into the study and as you can read in this newsletter, a lot of information has been collected and synthesized.

A Public Meeting will be conducted on May 15 at the West Hartford Town Hall Auditorium from 6:30 PM to 9:00 PM.

The next step in the MIS process is the development of a comprehensive list of alternative improvements. The TAC meets on a monthly basis and will spend the next meeting discussing options and narrowing down the list to the most feasible set of packages which best meet the project goals, objectives and identified needs. Once the select group of options or Alternatives Packages has been agreed upon by the TAC, these will be presented at the public meeting for review and comment.

How You Can Get Involved

There are several ways you can stay informed and involved as this study progresses:

- * You can attend the **Public Informational Meeting** scheduled for **May 15th, (6:30 - 9:00 PM)** in the **West Hartford Town Hall Auditorium.**
- * You can contact your community representative on the **TAC** through your **Town/City Hall.**
- * You can read reports on the project at your local library.
- * You can read this and the four following newsletters.



You can also use the Hartford West Hotline to contact the project team.

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