Department of Transportation

Project No. 44-151

Interstate 95 – Resurfacing and Safety Improvements

East Lyme, Waterford and New London

Public Information Meeting

January 27, 2009, 7:00 PM

East Lyme Town Hall

Minutes

Present:
Connecticut Department of Transportation:
Richard B. Armstrong
Brian T. Cunningham
George A. Upton
CME Associates:
Jacob Argiro
Luchs Consulting Engineers:
Doron Dagan
Town of East Lyme:
First Selectman Paul M. Formica
Town of Waterford:
First Selectman Dan Steward
State Legislators:
State Senator Andrea L. Stillman
State Representative Ed Jutila
State Representative Elizabeth B. Ritter
Approximately 50 to 70 members of the public

Presentation:
Brian T. Cunningham, ConnDOT Project Manager:
Project Background:

- The project is the outcome of the 2004 "I-95 Corridor – Branford to Rhode Island Feasibility Study". The Study identifies two categories of improvements:
  - Near Term Improvements: Primarily safety and pavement surface improvements with no property and minor permitting impact.
  - Long Term Improvements: Widening with significant geometric and drainage improvements.
- This project falls into the Near Term Improvement category.
- The cost estimate for Long Term work at this time is over $1.6 billion.

- The first phase of the Long Term Improvements is the widening I-95 from CT River to Rocky Neck Connector at an estimate cost of $230 Million with projected construction start in 2014.

Project goals:

- Improve safety by replacing guide-rail with barrier curb along the median and upgrading guiderail along the shoulder where needed.
- Enhance Roadway riding surface by pavement milling and overlay.
- Provide minor bridge repair.
- Minimize disruption to traffic during construction.

Jacob Argiro of CME reviewed the project in more detail:

- Project limits along I-95 are from Exit 72 to a point 0.3 miles east to the Waterford/New London Town line for a total length of nine miles.
- Great emphasis will be put on safety and maintenance of traffic during construction.
- Median work will be conducted at night, Monday thru Thursday from 8:00 pm to 6:00 am.
- Both northbound lanes would remain open.
- There will be no impact to private property or utilities.
- There will only be minor environmental permitting required.
- The estimated project cost is $29 million.
- Construction will begin in the Fall of 2009 and end in the Fall of 2011.

Comments from Elected Officials:

State Representative Ed Jutila had a few questions:

He emphasized the importance of a number of transportation needs in the region including Rt. 11, Shoreline East, improving I-95 Exit 75 and others.

He asked to know more about the funding of the project and if it would qualify to be funded thru the upcoming Economic Stimulus Package.
Brian responded that the Department is investigating how the Stimulus Package would be implemented. Since this project is State funded and not Federally funded, it may qualify for funding in the Stimulus package, however it will not likely be “shovel ready” in time based on the draft legislation. It was further stated that the Project funding has been approved by the State Bonding Commission.

The Representative wanted to know how the 2007 tanker truck accident affected the project.
Brian responded that as a result of the accident, the ConnDOT decided to change the median safety measure from a cable guide rail system to concrete barrier curb.

The Representative inquired why this project does not include improvements to Interchange 75.
Brian stated that other ConnDOT units are studying different improvements to the interchange and their effect on Local Roads. Those improvements are not part of this project and at this time there is no schedule for the studies completion.

The Representative asked that he be given information about ConnDOT's efforts to improve Exit 75.

The Representative also emphasized that ConnDOT should not lose sight of the bigger picture and the great need for the third lane construction.

State Representative Elizabeth B. Ritter had the following concerns:
If ConnDOT would close the northbound On-Ramp at Interchange 75 as a solution to the safety issues there, traffic would shift to Route 1 and adversely affect the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Representative also noted that noise studies are needed to ensure that residential neighborhoods are not adversely impacted by the proposed additional lanes.
Brian responded that a Noise analysis would be part of the Environmental Study which will begin this year.

State Senator Andrea L. Stillman asked to know what bridge repair is proposed as part of this project.
Jake Argiro detailed the deck and guiderail repair needed on the two bridges within this project.

The Senator emphasized how important it is to minimize impact to traffic flow considering the importance of tourism and summer travel demands. She hopes that weekend traffic during high demand will not be affected.

The Senator further wanted to know how the funds would be spent and who would be responsible for the inspection of this project. She asked to be provided with the estimated cost breakdowns.
ConnDOT would provide the Senator this information once available and stated that the inspection would be conducted by ConnDOT.

Tony Sheridan – President of Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce
Asked for the time line for the Project.
Brian informed him that construction is slated to start in the Fall of 2009.
He was concerned over the traffic flow during construction and its possible adverse effect on tourism in the region.
He was informed that the southbound lane closure would be limited to nights Monday thru Thursday and that the travel lane would be restored every morning after the night work is complete.

In response to his question, it was further stated that the grass would be maintained in the median along the southbound lanes. The narrow 4' strip between the barrier and the northbound lanes would be paved.

The following comments were made by the public:

A number residents showed concern that the project's scope is too limited. They voiced the concern that there is serious congestion along I-95 particularly during the summer months. Four lanes (two in each direction) can not handle the traffic and only a six lane (three in each direction) solution would remedy the situation. They added that the proposed safety project does not go far enough to fix the problem.
Brian explained that the safety project being discussed is not proposed as a substitute for the future widening project. This project will improve safety by replacing the existing median guiderail with concrete barrier curb. The first step in the future widening project, an Environmental Impact Statement, will begin in a few months and the design of the first section of widening from the CT River to Rocky Neck Connector will follow.

Other members of the public noted that the biggest safety and operational concern is the layout of Interchange 75 namely, the close proximity of the I-95 Interchange 75 northbound On-Ramp to the I-395 left lane Off Ramp.
Brian responded that the ConnDOT is aware of this problem and at this time, a number of units are studying possible solutions. Unfortunately, the scope of the project discussed tonight does not include improvements to Interchange 75.

A few members of the public were opposed to the closing of Interchange 75 northbound On-Ramp as a remedy to this situation. They felt that such closure would adversely affect local roads and residential neighborhoods. Another resident suggested temporarily closing the On-Ramp and monitoring the impact.

The deficiencies of Interchange 74 and 75 southbound On-Ramps were raised. The Acceleration Lane is not long enough and trucks come barreling along the I-95 not enabling traffic join the traffic stream safely. The situation was noted to be worse at Interchange 75 where there is a curve on I-95 just north of the On-Ramp.
Brian stated that due to environmental permitting issues, which would have significantly delayed the project, the improvements to Interchange 74 On-Ramp were deferred to a subsequent project. Interchange 75 solutions are being studied by ConnDOT at this time.

Some members of the public showed frustration at the long time it takes for improvements to be carried out.
Brian explained that at this time there is only funding for the safety improvements. The construction of the first phase of the widening will be started around 2014, only after the Environmental Impact Statement process has been concluded.

A member of the public noted that a proposed development adjacent to Interchange 74

will include major improvements to the On-Ramp and public funds should not be wasted on project that may be part of a private development. He also asked that modern toll facilities be considered.
Brian noted that the private development will be coordinated with future I-95 improvements.

A resident asked that Express Lanes be considered.

A number of residents noted that increased presence of State police to monitor drivers speed would greatly improve safety.

Other residents noted that the signing along I-95 is insufficient and may cause driver confusion.
Brian stated that the ConnDOT will review signage.

A couple of residents expressed concern that the proposed concrete barrier proposed only 4 ft. away from the travel lane would not improve safety.

A resident recommended that the pavement work not be limited to only one lane-width at a time. He asked if the expressway could be temporarily closed so that the entire width could be paved at once.

A member of the public urged the use of cameras to enforce safe driving along I-95 during construction.
Brian acknowledged the comment.

A member of the public voiced his opinion that the money would be better spent by buying more M8 rail cars and improving rail transportation.

A member of the public was concerned about the safety of the drinking water aquifer which is located along this section of the I-95. He wanted to know what measures would be taken to protect it.
Brian responded that as part of this project, new catch basins with deeper sumps of 4 feet, which can trap some of the pollutants, will be used. A more comprehensive measure of installing fine particles separators would require a much greater design, permitting and construction effort, which would be part of a future widening project.

A member of the public expressed support for the safety improvements including the barrier installations. He asked that gaps be provided in the median for emergency vehicle access.

Adjournment:
The Public Information Meeting was adjourned at 9:40pm. A number of residents remained in the hall and some additional discussion ensued.