

**Department of Transportation
Project No. 102-317
Rehabilitation of Br. No. 00717 and 00718
Merritt Parkway (Route 15) over Silvermine Avenue and Silvermine River
City of Norwalk**

**Tuesday June 30, 2009, 7:00 P.M.
Norwalk City Hall, Room 300A**

Minutes

Present:

Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT or Department)

Julie Georges, Transportation Principal Engineer
Mary E. Baker, Transportation Engineer
Joseph Sorcinelli, Transportation Engineer

Close, Jensen and Miller, P.C. (CJM)

E. Allen Randall, Liaison Director
William R. Stark, Project Engineer

Presentation:

Project goals, existing conditions, environmental considerations, utility and right of way impacts as well as project cost and schedule were addressed by Ms. Mary Baker of ConnDOT.

The proposed scope of work for the project and the means and methods anticipated to implement the work were discussed by Mr. William Stark of the firm of Close Jensen and Miller, P.C the Department's Liaison Engineer for this project.

Significant talking points of the presentation are listed below:

- Bridge No. 00718 over the Silvermine River is structurally deficient due to the condition of the existing deck.
- Bridge No. 00718 as well as Bridge No. 00717 are functionally obsolete due to the curb to curb width of the travel way on the bridges being insufficient to safely accommodate the average daily traffic volume of 73,000 cars per day traveling across them.
- Bridge No. 00718 over the Silvermine River was replaced in 1958 following the failure of the original bridge during the 1955 flood. As such, the replacement structure is not considered to contribute to the historic significance of the Merritt Parkway.

- Bridge No. 00717 is the original bridge built in 1938 to carry the Merritt Parkway over Silvermine Avenue and therefore contributes to the historic significance of the Parkway.
- Due to the close proximity [50'±] between Bridge Nos. 00717 and 00718, the deck on Bridge No. 00718 cannot be replaced in a safe manner without involving work on Bridge No. 00717.
- Due to the heavy volume of traffic at this location along the Parkway, two lanes of traffic must be maintained during most hours of the day, 7 days a week.
- Traffic shifts to allow for work areas on Bridge No. 00718 cannot be safely accommodated due to the restricted width of travel way on Bridge No. 00717.
- Bridge No. 00717 is proposed to be widened approximately 4 to 5 feet on either side to provide for more usable area for traffic to safely travel through the work site.
- In order to accomplish the widening the architecturally significant parapets and pylons on each side of the bridge will have to be removed and replicated following the widening.
- Original 1936 bridge plans for Bridge No. 00717 are to be made a part of the contract documents to assure that the parapets and pylons are recreated to the exact dimensions of the original construction.
- To accomplish the widening of Bridge No. 00717 work will take place on Silvermine Avenue that will require traffic on Silvermine Avenue to be reduced to one (1) lane of alternating traffic controlled by temporary signals.
- The already substandard vertical clearance of 13'-2" posted for Bridge No. 00717 will further be reduced by the work necessary for the widening to a minimum of approximately 11'-0" requiring all trucks to use alternate routes around the bridge site during construction. Upon completion of the widening the vertical clearance would return to the 13'-2" posting limit.
- During certain activities associated with the widening it will be necessary to detour all traffic around the bridge site. It is intended to utilize existing Comstock Hill Road as opposed to Perry Avenue as the designated detour route. It was emphasized that the detour would be in effect for only certain allowed activities, only intermittently, and would be required during day light hours, i.e. 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. to avoid the need for night work at the site.
- Work on the Merritt Parkway would require five (5) major stages of construction to accomplish the deck replacement of Bridge No. 00718 while maintaining two (2) lanes of traffic in each direction except for allowable off -

peak hours, when the Contractor would be allowed to take one (1) lane to facilitate his activities.

- Due to the proposed work being classified as minor reconstruction involving the maintenance of existing structures with no added capacity to the roadway, the action is anticipated to be deemed as having “No Adverse Effect” by the State Historic Preservation Officer. An official designation is pending.
- All work on Bridge No. 00718 is anticipated to be done from above with no intrusion in the Silvermine River; thus mitigating the need for permits from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.
- A Flood Management General Certification will be required for the project; however, this will be issued by the Department of Transportation due to the work being limited to deck replacement which is considered a maintenance activity.
- Public utilities along Silvermine Avenue will be affected by the widening of Bridge No. 00717 and coordination with the appropriate utility companies will take place during the final design phase of the project.
- Due to the extensive existing Right of Way of the Merritt Parkway, no private property involvement is anticipated.
- The project cost is anticipated to be approximately \$10,000,000.
- The projected start of construction is in the Spring of 2011, assuming funding is available, with completion in the Summer of 2014 for a duration of approximately 30 months with no work being performed in the winter months of December through March.

Public Comments and Questions:

- Mr. Brian Sweeney of the City of Norwalk’s Public Works Department offered that the City took no issue with the proposed project with the exception of the routing of trucks over the Comstock Hill Road detour as the road was narrow at its northern point. He suggested that further coordination with the City would be advisable before a final detour route was implemented. In addition he requested that the contract have language mandating that sufficient notice to the City be given prior to implementation of the detour at any given time during the construction period.
- Norwalk Common Council Members, Douglas Hempstead and Anna Duleep thanked the Department for initiating a Public forum while the project was still in a relatively early stage and suggested that additional meetings with area “Stakeholders” should take place before any final decisions were made.

- Mr. Lee Levey, President of the Norwalk Association of Silvermine Homeowners (NASH) made a lengthy statement criticizing the Department for the timing of the meeting in the summer vacation period. In addition he expressed dismay that the Department did not come prepared to offer alternatives which would avoid the need to involve Bridge No. 00717, which he characterized as the “gateway” to the Historic Silvermine Avenue District. Further, Mr. Levey expressed concern for the loss of trees along Silvermine Avenue in the area of the bridge widening and suggested that an extensive landscaping plan be developed as part of the project. In regard to the use of Comstock Hill Road as the designated detour route he reiterated that the road was narrow and crossed into the Town of New Canaan making it an undesirable alternative for traffic. He also noted that Silvermine Avenue was a major access route for emergency vehicles and that the reduced vertical clearance at the site would be problematic to responders. Mr. Levey requested the Department reconsider the project and eliminate any work on Bridge No. 00717.

- Mr. Peter Viterette representing the Silvermine Community Association expressed the opinion that historic Bridge No. 00717 was structurally sound and could be rehabilitated within its existing footprints and that widening was not consistent with his definition of historic preservation.

- Ms. Jill Smyth representing the Merritt Parkway Conservancy asked if rapid construction methods were considered for replacement of the deck on Bridge No. 00718, so as to mitigate the need to involve Bridge No. 00717. In addition she expressed that perhaps additional studies were in order before the Department rendered a final decision.

- Mr. Ted Bryant representing the Norwalk Historical Society questioned if the Department was operating in accordance with the Federal Highway Administration guidelines, regarding Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 4(f) of the U.S. DOT Act in the development of the project due to the use of anticipated federal funding.

- Various other persons in attendance expressed views as to the impact on the neighborhood, quality of life of the residents, effects the project may have on property values during the construction period as well as the general theme that the Department should exercise further constraints on the Parkway users in order to mitigate the need to involve Bridge No. 00717.

In response to the statements and question cited above, the Department representatives offered the following:

- The project is only in the preliminary design phase and additional coordination with City officials would take place during the development of the final design to assure that the best possible detour route would be designated for use during the construction.

- Rapid construction techniques such as the use of precast panels to replace the existing deck of Bridge No. 00718 were investigated but deemed not viable due to the limited time periods available to reduce the number of lanes on the Merritt Parkway. The Department also investigated the possible construction of temporary bypass structures within the existing Parkway right-of-way for the purpose of handling traffic during the proposed rehabilitation of Bridge No. 00718. This alternative was determined to be infeasible due to a prohibitive estimated cost and the significant physical impact such construction would have upon the parkway landscape. This option was further complicated by the proximity of the adjacent Route 7 ramps and question of how to connect the temporary roadways to the Parkway mainline without compromising safety at the Route 7 interchange.

- In regard to the condition of Bridge No. 00717 it was acknowledged that the bridge was not currently deemed as being structurally deficient but that it is in need of some rehabilitation that was identified in the 1998 Conservation and Restoration Plan for the Merritt Parkway Bridges.

- In regard to the Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Department reiterated that it is awaiting a final determination of effect from the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and would be guided accordingly. It is expected that a Programmatic Section 4(f) document will be prepared for this project. Based upon the proposed scope of the bridge rehabilitation work the Department has recommended that this project qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Categorical Exclusion document will be prepared subsequent to the SHPO determination and approval of the 4(f) document and submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for concurrence. FHWA acceptance of the Categorical Exclusion precludes the need for an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.

- The Department reiterated that the designated work to replace the failing deck on Bridge No. 00718 could not be safely performed without the widening of Bridge 00717 to allow for vehicles to travel through the construction site safely.

- The Department agreed that a “Stakeholders Meeting” will be scheduled prior to a final decision being rendered on how to move forward with the project.

Adjournment:

- The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 P.M.