

Report of Meeting

Date and Time: Tuesday, April 29, 2014, 8:30 AM

Location: 227 Lawrence Street, Hartford

Subject: Public Advisory Committee Meeting #4

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1. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Michael Morehouse welcomed everyone and provided an overview of the agenda. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the Needs and Deficiencies study, provide a history of I-84, present background information on urban design, and summarize the Purpose and Need Working Group process. In addition, Mr. Morehouse discussed the project schedule and where we are in the process.

2. Needs and Deficiencies

Update on Project Costs (Risk Analysis)

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation, provided an overview of the project cost estimation process. Although the project is not yet in the design phase, we will need an estimated range of costs for planning purposes. He explained that there will be a range of possible costs for the project, which will become more specific as the project becomes better defined. Analyzing risks of the project will also allow the project team to define cost range. The initial cost estimates are based on the conceptual design alternatives developed during the earlier HUB of Hartford study.

Jackie McKinney, of the ArtSpace Residents Association, asked how the project team could accurately estimate costs on the I-84 project when the timeframe of construction is so many years in the future. Mr. Armstrong said that the team uses the historical rate of inflation, which is three to four percent annually, to estimate the cost of the project in future years.

Topics for Future Meetings

Mr. Morehouse noted that topics for future PAC meetings will likely include updates on safety, geometrics, traffic, bicycle/pedestrian conditions, and environmental conditions.

3. Urban Design

The PAC had previously indicated that they were interested in learning more on the topic of urban design. The project team discussed the history of how I-84 was developed, missed opportunities, and urban design and related issues.

History and Missed Opportunities in I-84's Past

Mr. Armstrong presented information from a report called *Hartford Metropolitan Area Expressways*, published in 1945, which was one of several precursor reports leading to I-84. The East-West Expressway was intended to accommodate traffic to Hartford from West Hartford and New Britain. In addition, it was expected to decrease traffic congestion on local roads. Mr. Armstrong noted that all the earlier reports reflect the mindset of their times.

Mr. Morehouse discussed *The Arterial Plan for Hartford*, a May 1949 report by Andrews and Clark and Robert Moses. Mr. Moses was a Connecticut native and polarizing character in urban design. Mr. Moses strongly favored highway construction. The proposed arterial plan prevented a highway from going through Bushnell Park, improved Pulaski Circle, widened Park Street, and bisected Hartford's Central Business District in the downtown area.

Mr. Morehouse also discussed *Comparison of Alternate Locations for the East-West Expressway*, completed by the CT Highway Department in March 1954. This report discussed the potential community impact of I-84, but that impact was not well addressed or quantified. The report stated that after I-84 was built, local roads would see a major decrease in traffic volume. History since the construction of I-84 has shown that vehicle miles traveled has increased as people started making more frequent and longer trips.

Mr. Armstrong talked about the *I-84 Environmental and Joint-Use Study* published in 1970. This report was written after I-84 construction was completed in 1969. It noted that the highway dominated the city landscape and that it was out of harmony with its physical environment. The study suggested proposals for reducing the highway's impact and utilizing the highway's valuable urban land for development, including building high-rises and parking garages. The study noted that most of the opportunities to improve the aesthetic qualities of the interstate were superficial and cosmetic in nature.

Robert Benzinger, of The Hartford, asked if we are any better off now than we were in the 1970s in terms of whether the changes we propose may be just superficial and cosmetic in nature. Mr. Morehouse responded that the project team is committed to seeking solutions that are more than cosmetic, including reconstruction of the highway in a different design. He also noted that we have better understanding now of the consequences of urban transportation decisions.

Jennifer Cassidy, of the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association, questioned why the original Hartford Public High School did not survive even though it seemed that planners wanted to build the highway

around the school. Mr. Armstrong said based on his research he believed that a cost-benefit analysis was done of needed repairs at the school, and it was deemed more cost effective to remove the old high school.

Toni Gold, of the West End Civic Association, said the historic information presented at the PAC meeting was fascinating, and she hoped it would guide the team on how it moves forward with the I-84 Hartford Project.

Ron Van Winkle, of West Hartford, asked why the highway was built as a raised structure over some parts of the city. Mr. Armstrong noted that the highway was carefully designed to avoid impacting the railroad, which created the need for grade separation. Mr. Morehouse added that the division of the community, which already existed because of the railroad, was exacerbated as a result.

Principles of Urban Design

David Spillane provided a history of urban design in the United States. Mr. Spillane noted that the physical design of a city drives how people move to cities, how much they get involved in activities, and how long they stay in that city. Mr. Spillane gave some background on the City Beautiful and City Scientific movements.

Urban Design Challenges in the Corridor

Mr. Spillane discussed the urban design challenges in the I-84 Hartford corridor and how the highway divides the city and how neighborhoods are separated from downtown which limits social and economic synergies. In addition, he discussed the separation of Aetna and The Hartford, two large employers, from the downtown area.

Urban Design Opportunities in the Corridor

Mr. Spillane discussed solutions for these challenges including Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), which involves opportunities around transit stations.

Mr. Van Winkle asked if there was a good example of an eight-lane highway that passes through a city with good urban design. Mr. Spillane said there are examples, including the Embarcadero in San Francisco, but said it is hard to compare any project with the I-84 Hartford Project because of its complexities and because every situation is different and needs its own solutions. For example, the Embarcadero only transports 25,000 automobiles per day. I-84, however, transports 175,000 vehicles per day.

Complete Streets

Mr. Morehouse discussed the concept of Complete Streets, which promotes local streets as safe, comfortable, and convenient places for all people using all modes of transportation (e.g. cars, bicycles, pedestrians). He discussed traditional street networks and modern street networks, which are largely built to accommodate only cars and have become congested with traffic. In addition, he discussed transportation trends, noting that Millennials are driving less than their predecessors and older adults are seeking Complete Streets designs where they live.

Context Sensitive Solutions

Mr. Morehouse discussed Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) and the importance of getting the perspective of not only planners and engineers in this project, but also people who live and work in the community. According to the Federal Highway Administration, “CSS is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to provide a transportation facility that fits its setting. It is an approach that leads to preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, community, and environmental resources, while improving or maintaining safety, mobility, and infrastructure conditions.”

4. Update on Purpose and Need Working Group

Mr. Morehouse asked Dr. Robert Painter, former HUB of Hartford chairperson and Purpose and Need Working Group member, to discuss the recent meetings of the Purpose and Need Working Group.

Dr. Painter stated that the I-84 Hartford Project has the potential to be a very exciting project. The Purpose and Need Working Group, a sub-group of the PAC, has been reviewing the Purpose and Need Statement. Dr. Painter noted that the Purpose and Need Statement is a necessary part of the Federal Highway Administration process. Dr. Painter further noted that the project team needs to target people who are skeptical of the I-84 Hartford project to provide them with information and engage them in the project.

Ms. Gold, a member of the Purpose and Need Working Group, added that she thought the group has been very successful. The discussions during the group’s meetings have been lively and people in the community feel that they are being listened to. The revised version of the Purpose and Need Statement reflects what the group members have been saying during the meetings.