

Report of Meeting

Date and Time: Tuesday, October 14, 2014, 8:30 AM

Location: 227 Lawrence Street, Hartford

Subject: Public Advisory Committee Meeting #5

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1. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Michael Morehouse welcomed everyone and provided an overview of the meeting agenda and purpose. He noted that the purpose of today's meeting is to introduce the concept of scoping, get PAC feedback on the early development of alternatives, and provide an update on the Working Groups. In addition, Mr. Morehouse discussed the project schedule and where we are in the process.

2. Overview of Public Scoping Meeting

Scoping Package

Mr. Morehouse noted that scoping is the first official step in the environmental process. He noted that Christine Tiernan would provide an overview of the Public Scoping Meeting presentation. He urged PAC members to take notes and provide feedback to the project team on the scoping presentation so that the Project Team can update the presentation prior to the actual Public Scoping Meeting.

Mr. Morehouse provided a brief overview of the development of I-84 in Hartford, as well as background on the project.

Presentation

Ms. Tiernan provided an overview of the presentation that is planned for the Public Scoping Meeting, scheduled for January 2015. She provided an overview of National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and Connecticut Environmental Protection (CEPA) processes. She described the three different types of documents that are completed for the environmental process, depending on the level of impact anticipated, as well as the Public Scoping Meeting format. Ms. Tiernan continued on to walk the PAC through the Public Scoping Meeting slides.

Mr. Morehouse asked if there were questions on the Public Scoping Meeting presentation. Questions included:

Jackie McKinney: Shouldn't we start out with the reality that the viaduct will fall down if we don't do something—make this point more clearly? Mr. Morehouse agreed with this message.

Dr. Bob Painter: This project is in an urban environment where there are few environmental resources such as wetlands. The "other environmental resources" which are important to our city landscape should be described more clearly. He suggested putting the environmental resources slide right up front in the presentation. Ms. Tiernan responded that would be a good thing to do in addition to being displayed on boards at the public meeting.

Mike Marshall: We've heard that there are guidelines that interstate interchanges should be no less than one mile apart. Yet there are interchanges in Boston's Big Dig project that are less than that. Is there some background on the design guidelines that can be provided, for example, the ideal distance between ramps? Do we know that spacing them will help? Tim Ryan and Dave Stahnke: We know that one mile spacing does help the flow of mainline traffic as well as reduces congestion and accidents, but we will need to assess where the ramps could go and the impact to the local streets. Mr. Marshall asked, is the impact of moving interchanges, with possible additional traffic on local streets, part of the environmental analysis? Mr. Ryan: Yes, it is.

David Morin: Are the rates of accidents in Hartford higher than other areas? Mr. Ryan: Yes. Accidents between Asylum Avenue and Sigourney Street are four times higher than the state average. There is more friction in this area and no shoulders. While creating new interchanges may make the distance driven longer, the travel time may be less. Mr. Morin: Is the impact of vehicles driving through residential neighborhoods part of an environmental assessment? Ms. Tiernan: Yes, it is. We will look at each alternative and the impact on local roads.

3. Preliminary Alternatives

Mr. Morehouse introduced the alternatives development discussion, and noted that there are generally four preliminary alternatives. They are the No Build, Elevated Highway, Lowered Highway, and Tunnel options. Mr. Stahnke noted that these four preliminary alternatives are actually ranges of alternatives and each will likely have many sub options.

Preliminary Alternative 1 - No-Build

The No Build is often referred to by FHWA as No Action. Mr. Stahnke discussed the key features, noting the width and horizontal alignment will be maintained as-is, but many bridges will need to be replaced or fully rehabilitated.

Preliminary Alternative 2 - Elevated Highway

Mr. Stahnke described the key features of this option noting that I-84 would be rebuilt as an elevated highway with bridges built to current standards and wider shoulders. The railroad will remain on the existing alignment, which limits the ability to lower the interstate. Also, interchanges would be changed to reduce their number and reduce the highway footprint.

Preliminary Alternative 3 - Lowered Highway

This alternative might be at grade or below grade in a cut. The realigned rail is what makes this alternative possible. The railroad would be relocated to the north of the highway, with a new platform/station area. Interchanges would be reduced, shoulders widened and curves will be reduced where possible.

Preliminary Alternative 4 – Tunneler Highway

Mr. Stahnke next discussed the key features of the tunnel option, noting that this alternative would put the highway in a tunnel from Laurel Street to Myrtle Street. There would need to be fewer interchanges with this alternative, as well. He stated that this alternative would likely have the most impacts to properties during construction. He also noted, again, that there could be many permutations of this (or any) of the preliminary alternatives, such as tunneling a smaller section of this option.

Coordination with Rail Alternatives

Mr. Stahnke noted that Brett Wallace from the Rail Alternatives Analysis Study is present at the meeting today. He stated that the two teams have been in close collaboration and planned to have a detailed coordination meeting later today. Mr. Stahnke went on to discuss the next steps in the alternatives analyses. He said the study will get more specific, conduct further research, test each option for traffic, etc.

Bypass Alternative

Mr. Stahnke discussed the bypass alternative. He noted that questions continue to come in on this and explained why it isn't being considered as an alternative. Mr. Stahnke said that 60% of the highway traffic begins and/or ends in the city. This traffic would still have to be accommodated making the need to address the deficient bridges a necessity. Also, the environmental impacts identified decades ago when the I-291 bypass was initially proposed were so significant they prevented the road from being constructed. He noted that the "by-passable" traffic within the I-84 corridor isn't significant enough to warrant a bypass option.

Cost Risk Assessment

Mr. Stahnke presented the preliminary cost ranges for four preliminary alternatives. He stated that that tunnel option was roughly two to three times as much as the other options.

Questions and Comments on Alternatives:

Dr. Painter: Is there any information on the Rail Alternatives Analysis schedule? Mr. Stahnke: Yes, they have a schedule to finish by the end of the year and our engineers are definitely working together. There are challenges with property impacts, especially towards the Asylum Hill side.

Toni Gold: Can you further expand the details of the wider alignment on the tunnel alternative? Mr. Stahnke: It has to do with the constructability. Ms. Gold: What about the Park River? Can you build a tunnel with the conduit? Mr. Stahnke: Yes, but it affects the alignment, especially around Aetna and the DAS (state office) buildings.

M. Riley: Does this study constrain us to work within the existing footprint? Can we improve horizontal alignment? Mr. Stahnke: Yes, we are working to change the alignment where we can while balancing the property impacts. Mr. Riley: So you are not excluded from going outside the current footprint? Mr. Stahnke: No. Mr. Riley: Will this study include congestion pricing? Mr. Stahnke: Congestion pricing is an on-going study to be completed next year, and we are coordinating with that study team. Mr. Riley: How will rail work be financed? Rich Armstrong: If it becomes integral to our project, it will be financed by our project. It all depends on how integrated the two projects are. The rail improvements would be funded independently if the I-84 project and the rail project were considered to be independent of each other.

Mr. Marshall: I thought I remembered in the HUB Study that the tunneling option be east of Broad Street because there was less potential value to be captured from the land between Aetna and DAS? Mr. Stahnke and Mr. Ryan: Yes, you are correct. This alternative could also have the ability to have a tunnel in just this section east of Broad, perhaps a platform to cover the highway. The HUB study identified the area between Asylum Hill and Downtown as being valuable.

Dr. Painter: What does it mean that this is not a highway project but a corridor project? Mr. Stahnke: Any alternative that changes the existing interchange layout will affect more than just the highway. This includes the local road network, parking, **CTfastrak** and transit. There is also rail to consider.

Ms. Gold: Will the City gain significant land to add to its tax base, especially by Broad Street, in Alternatives 3 and 4? I think the HUB study identified something like 10 acres. Mr. Stahnke: Some alternatives will provide more land. We have not calculated the amount of land that may be freed up because we have yet to include specific interchange configurations, but we will evaluate this as we go forward. Mr. Morehouse noted that Mitch Glass from the team is here today; he is looking at urban design opportunities.

Mr. Morin: When you say the highway will have shoulders, does this mean that the highway will be wider? Mr. Ryan: Some of the alternatives will actually be narrower because there is currently space between the eastbound and westbound lanes that will be reduced or eliminated. Mr. Morin: How many

interchanges do we have now? Mr. Ryan: Now we have eight partial or full interchanges in a 2.5 mile span. There are a lot more than needed. Some are spaced less than ¼ mile apart.

Mr. Morehouse asked the PAC, is today's presentation the right level of detail to show the public at the Public Scoping Meeting?

- Ms. Gold: Yes, probably right now. She suggested a list of things to be determined on each map, so that people understand that analysis is in beginning stages. She said it would be really helpful to detail for each alternative what is given up and what is gained.
- Jennifer Cassidy: It would be really helpful to have a map of the area of sufficient size so I can use as a point of reference to understand alternatives. She would like to have the base aerial 11X 17 size to be able to mark up during the presentation.
- Dr. Painter: It would be helpful to show examples of how street connections can be made to help people visualize alternatives. Show new land made available with any given alternative.

4. Next Steps

Working Groups

Mr. Morehouse noted that two new Working Groups were formed this month. The Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Transit Working Group met for the first time on 10/1/14 and the Traffic and Parking Working Group met for the first time on 10/3/14. He provided a recap on what the team heard at each meeting. He also stated that an Urban Design Working Group will begin this fall. Mr. Morehouse said the expected frequency of working group meetings was every 4-6 weeks.

Joe Hewes asked how he could provide comments on alternatives. He would prefer to write letter. It was noted that comments can be submitted to the project website or a letter could be addressed directly to Rich Armstrong.

Can the PAC have more information on land reclamation? Mr. Morehouse this is something the Urban Design Working Group can help figure out as we move forward and the alternatives become more defined.