



Estudios Abiertos – Opening Up the OPS



To reach Hartford's Spanish-speaking stakeholders, the I-84 Hartford team held its first Spanish-language Open Planning Studio in June. The three reinas, or queens, of the Connecticut Institute for Community Development's Puerto Rican Day Parade dropped in for a project update.

Despite our nation's incredible diversity, holding public meetings for transportation planning projects in any language other than English is still a rarity.

Diversity abounds in Hartford. Over 40 percent of Hartford residents are Hispanic or Latino, and an estimated 16% of city residents do not speak English well. Much of this population is concentrated in the neighborhoods around the I-84 highway.

The I-84 Hartford Project team recognizes the vitality and unique character that these communities contribute to Hartford. It's important to provide everyone an equal opportunity to help plan the future of the highway and city. With this in mind, all outreach materials are provided in Spanish, and Spanish-speaking staff are available at all public meetings and pop-up events.

In June, we broadened our bilingual outreach, hosting our first Spanish-language Open Planning Studio!

This event, held on Wednesday, June 15th, followed Tuesday's English-language Open Planning Studio at the Samuel V. Arroyo Center in Pope Park. Several Spanish-speaking engineers from the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) helped welcome members of the public and presented project information throughout the day.

Special guests dropped by, including the three *reinas*, or queens, of Hartford's Puerto Rican Day Parade.

The young queens, ranging in age 5 to 17, enjoyed a personal presentation of project materials, and an early release viewing of the new I-84 corridor fly-through video.

"I like that everything was clearly explained – the cost, the impacts of the various plans – everything that is going to affect the people."

The narrated video takes viewers on a guided tour of the proposed lowered highway. Using 3-D modeling and artistic renderings, the video quickly and clearly explains the many opportunities that the lowered highway presents. Watch it in either Spanish or English on i84hartford.com, or via social media. (continued on [page 3](#))

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¿Habla usted español? Una versión de este boletín está disponible en español a i84hartford.com.

Faces & Places of the Corridor

Welcome to Faces & Places of the Corridor, profiles of people who live, work, run businesses or lead groups, as well as notable places, within the I-84 study area. Know someone or some place that should be featured? Share your ideas!

El Mercado: Good Eats, Good People

A long-standing Hispanic market on Park Street provides local flavor



El Mercado is a staple for Latino foods. Above, the restaurant vendors bustle with lunch crowds.

For more than 25 years, La Plaza del Mercado has been a staple for many Hartford residents.

“We call it El Mercado in the ‘hood,” said Dee Killiebrew, a regular customer and city resident. Although he is not Latino, Killiebrew enjoys the shopping experience and products the marketplace has to offer. “The food is good; the hospitality is good,” he said.

El Mercado is an indoor shopping center on the corner of Park Street and Affleck Street, across from Hartford Public Library’s Park Branch. Inside, upbeat Spanish music resounds. Flags from Latin American countries gently sway overhead while customers shop for their staple foods.

People travel from all over Hartford, including the city’s North End, to purchase groceries. The vendors sell coveted produce and brands hard to find outside of Latin America, said manager Alejandro Polanco.

The shopping center includes restaurants, featuring cuisines from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Peru, and Colombia, as well as a cell phone store, a music store, and a clothing boutique.

El Mercado employs about 50 Hartford residents, Polanco said.

Killiebrew said the employees make his shopping and dining experiences enjoyable. “They’re really friendly here,” he said.

Many employees and customers travel to El Mercado by car. Finding a parking space can be challenging at times, said George Carrero, another Hartford resident who has been traveling to El Mercado for 20 years.

“Parking is too crowded,” he said.

Yet, groups of teenagers, old friends, and families with strollers walk to El Mercado. Its prime location on the vibrant, pedestrian-oriented Park Street lends to El Mercado’s long-standing success.

Improving the roads surrounding I-84 will provide better sidewalks, bikeways, and transit connections so that more people can discover, and easily reach, this local gem.

Renovations are in store for El Mercado, too. Over the next year, Polanco says management plans to invest in key improvement projects.



Estudios Abiertos – Opening Up the OPS, continued

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Discussion after the evening presentation focused on the air quality and potential noise impacts of a lowered highway. One mother, who arrived with her children after registering for a summer baseball league in Pope Park, questioned how the project would account for environmental impacts. Noise and air quality are concerns in the neighborhoods surrounding the elevated highway.

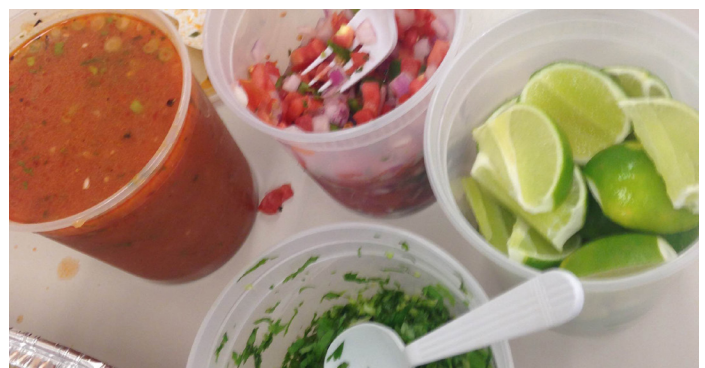
CTDOT engineer Rosmery Rodriguez explained how lowering the highway would eliminate noisy bridge joints. In addition, she noted that visual and sound barriers could be integrated into the design of the elevated East Coast Greenway, a concept that is under consideration. Although the environmental impact report is not yet complete, the project team is committed to reducing the harmful impacts of the highway throughout the city.

Chris Hansen, of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), praised the effort, saying, “It’s very important that everybody has the opportunity to see this. This is how we like outreach to be done.”

Echoing his statements, Andrea Merejo, also of FHWA, addressed the project team in Spanish, saying “I like that everything was clearly explained – the cost, the impacts of the various plans – everything that is going to affect the people.”

Whether it’s the Kitchen at Billings Forge or Max Bibo Deli, the I-84 Hartford Project team enjoys celebrating and supporting local flavors and businesses. Catering for the Open Planning Studio was provided by Rosita’s Restaurant, a Salvadoran staple on Park Street in the lively Frog Hollow neighborhood, also known as *La Park*.

Please look for similar events as the project continues. In the meantime, check out the meeting materials on the project website, and follow English or Spanish social media! Find us on Facebook at facebook.com/proyectol84, or on Twitter at [@proyectol84](https://twitter.com/proyectol84).



Save the date for
Open Planning Studio #10!
 SEP 13
 Fellowship Hall
 Immanuel Congregational Church
 10 Woodland St, Hartford
 12 – 8pm • Schedule to follow

Spanish-speaking CTDOT engineers helped facilitate the event, including youth art activities (top). The Planning Studio took place in Pope Park, in the Frog Hollow neighborhood. Lunch was provided by Rosita’s, a local Salvadoran restaurant (bottom).

Leading the Pack: Advancing the Best Alternative



With over 100 alternatives developed, how will the design team select just one to build?

In order for an alternative to advance, it must meet the three key needs of the project (see sidebar), as well as many of the goals and objectives. A solution that hits the “sweet spot” will be publicly supported as well.

Our Fall 2015, Issue 9 newsletter discussed the evaluation process known as *screening*, which helps CTDOT select the most reasonable design solution.

Through in-depth screening, we’ve analyzed whether and how well each alternative can fix the bridges, improve traffic operations, and increase mobility throughout the corridor. Through engagement with the community, stakeholders, and our Public Advisory Committee, we’ve gathered substantial feedback on what people like, and what they don’t.

Of the four primary alternatives, the Lowered Highway and the Tunnel are most favorable among the public, while the Elevated Highway is unfavorable. Per National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, the No-Build must remain on the table until the end of the planning study.

Which alternative advances to final design and construction? Let’s take a look at the two solutions with the broadest support, from a technical perspective.

Across the board, the lowered highway receives high marks. Engineering models predict that it moves traffic well, both on I-84 and on local streets. It also balances the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit systems within the corridor. Compared to the other alternatives, it accommodates all users best.

At \$4.3 – 5.3 billion, the cost ranks lowest among the build alternatives.

On the other hand, while the tunnel can meet the need to fix the bridges, building a tunnel through Hartford would require significant property impacts, including relocation of the underground Park River Conduit.

At an estimated \$9.7 – 12.1 billion, the cost is also prohibitive.

To satisfy public support, the team has conducted extensive modeling and analysis to establish a viable tunnel design. The team has yet to identify an engineering solution that satisfies the project needs without an incredible number of impacts.

No matter which alternative is selected, all have benefits and impacts that will be carefully considered.

The design team will continue increasingly rigorous screening and soon recommend a reasonable range of alternatives. Please stay tuned for this exciting next step of the project!

The Three Project Needs



- **Address the bridge structures.** An alternative must solve the structural deficiencies of the bridges by removing or rebuilding them.
- **Improve traffic operations and safety.** Does the alternative add shoulders, eliminate poor weave sections, and prevent ramp backups? Does it meet modern design standards?
- **Increase mobility for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders.** Is there enhanced network connectivity? Are there opportunities for improving streetscapes?