



# THE I-84 HARTFORD PROJECT

Spring 2014 Newsletter  
Issue 3

## Hitting a Home Run on I-84



Be part of our **FIRST** public meeting!

Mark your calendars!!! Our first public meeting will be held June 17<sup>th</sup>. See page 4 for details.



Rich Armstrong, left, chats with members of the PAC at a recent meeting.

The best solutions for the I-84 Hartford Project will probably come from the public, says Rich Armstrong, Principal Engineer of the Consultant Design Unit at the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT). “We need to be really good listeners,” he says of himself and the project team. “I try to make myself available and responsive.”

Armstrong, who has more than 30 years in the transportation industry, has overall responsibility for the project, including managing the consulting team that is doing the work.

Early in his career, Armstrong was the design Project Engineer for the lowering of I-91 along the Connecticut River in Hartford, reconstruction of the Founders’

Bridge, and construction of Riverfront Plaza.

In addition to needing constant and costly maintenance, the design of I-84 through Hartford reflects the thinking of a different era. As constructed, the highway presents some traffic operational inefficiencies and creates some barriers in the urban landscape. Armstrong hopes that this project team, with input from the community, will make I-84 a more effective transportation facility while softening its impact on the city, by providing better connections, being more visually appealing, and creating opportunities for more vital urban places. “The challenge is to make I-84 both a better highway and a better neighbor,” he says.

Armstrong encourages everyone to view the project’s recently updated website to learn more about the project, read the project’s quarterly newsletters and submit comments or questions. He also invites the public to call him with questions and comments or to schedule a one-on-one meeting.

“It is our strong belief that giving everyone an opportunity to weigh in will create a better project and avoid surprises at the end,” he says.

Armstrong knows that people will have many different opinions about the I-84 Hartford Project, but it is his job, and the project team’s responsibility, to listen to the community first, evaluate the varying concerns as well as the technical issues, and create solutions that are consistent with the project’s vision.

Some may ultimately disagree with those solutions, but Armstrong is hopeful that an open and responsive project process will help people accept the

*“The challenge is to make I-84 both a better highway and a better neighbor,” Armstrong says.*

rationale behind the decisions. “I hope everyone can feel

very, very satisfied with the outcome,” Armstrong said. “In an ideal world, everyone applauds at the end. I want us to hit a home run on every aspect of this project.”

### Habla Usted español?

Una versión de este boletín está disponible en español. Visite <http://i84hartford.com>.

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This view of I-84 over Capitol Avenue illustrates the imposing nature of I-84 in the project area, as well as the dark and uninviting spaces beneath.

## Looking Back... and Looking Forward

**L**ike many other cities, Hartford was defined and shaped by transportation. A river port city, Hartford traded goods with farming villages up and down the Connecticut River Valley. By the mid-1800s, railroads replaced most river trade and extended Hartford's market area.

In the 1920s, as the automobile began to compete for street space, public officials prioritized transportation efficiency over social exchange and further enabled the segregation of land-uses through zoning to help protect real estate investments. These policy decisions signaled the dissolution of city streets as "complete streets"--places that permit a myriad of activities and generate social value. The "space that connected home and work" became relegated to the domain of fast-moving cars – a sign of "progress" for a city eagerly looking to modernize.

When it became clear that traffic was choking arterial roads radiating from Hartford, the CT Highway Department (precursor of CTDOT) tried to provide relief to the growing traffic demand between Hartford and its suburbs. A series of planning efforts spanning the 1940s and 50s proposed a number of expressway concepts leading west from the city. When the Federal Aid Highway Act was passed in 1956, an east-west

expressway was incorporated into the Interstate Highway System as I-84.

Almost as soon as the highway was completed, the CTDOT, FHWA and the City of Hartford recognized the enormity of their efforts to usher in the era of automobile dominance. A remarkable study published by CTDOT in 1970, *I-84 Environmental and Joint Use Study*, acknowledges the unintended consequences of the highway, noting that "...the expressway is a massive monolith, dominating the urban streetscape."

It concluded that "community leaders and highway officials are often painfully aware of missed options for better environmental planning and many of them would like to take a second look at the roads they administer to see

what might be done to reclaim some of those latent opportunities."

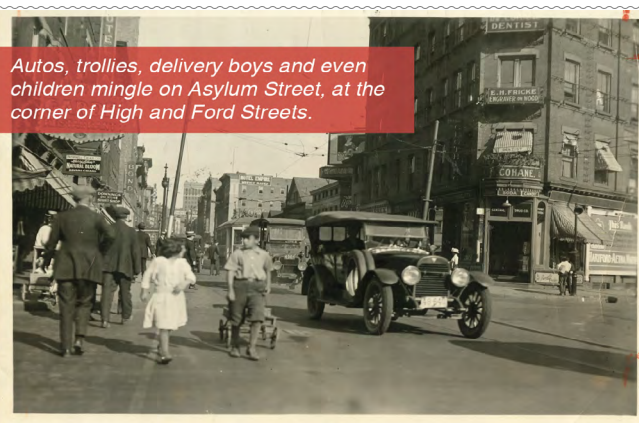
Some 40 years later, the I-84 Hartford Project hopes to be that "second look" to rethink how I-84 can both benefit travel and enhance Connecticut's capital city. Is there a way to lessen the visual and physical impact of this important highway? Can the streets connecting to the highway become more vibrant, public spaces, where all modes of travel co-exist rather than being dominated by the automobile only?

*"...the expressway is a massive monolith, dominating the urban streetscape."*

*- I-84 Environmental and Joint Use Study, 1970*

Certainly, the decisions made here in the last century were duplicated across America and reflect the thinking of the

times. It is clear that our future efforts will require a more complete understanding of the dynamics that shape communities and the profound influence that our decisions have on the world in which we live. Can we, together, create a better highway and a better neighbor? With your input, we will be doing our best to make this a reality.



Autos, trolleys, delivery boys and even children mingle on Asylum Street, at the corner of High and Ford Streets.

(Credit: The Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library).



## The Marriage of Two Modes

The future of Interstate 84 and the rail line in the corridor are woven together, just as the two facilities are physically intertwined throughout the corridor. While both are in need of reconstruction, reconfiguration of either facility will affect the other. Thus, the planning for these two vital transportation links must be carefully coordinated.

Over the decades, I-84 and the railroad have been a power couple in terms of transportation service. I-84 carries a volume of vehicles far beyond what was ever envisioned, and the railroad has provided a vital link for both passenger and freight travel. Following a period of some decline common to many railroads nationally, it is now on the cusp of resurgence. New Haven-Hartford-Springfield passenger service begins operation in 2016, with up to 25 round trip trains daily by 2030.

As the duo ages, both the highway and the railroad have multiple bridges that are near the end of their useful lives and require constant maintenance to remain operational. These maintenance costs are rapidly escalating.

Studies of both I-84 and the railroad are being carried out in close coordination to ensure that solutions benefit both modes as well as the communities they serve. The concurrent studies present a unique opportunity to create solutions that can improve circulation and connections, not only for rail and highway, but for pedestrians, buses and bicycles as well.

### A Sign of the Times?

The highway that is now I-84 was planned and designed in the 1940s and 1950s when transportation and urban planning differed considerably from our current thinking on mobility and urban spaces. One illustration of this is found in the following quote from a 1945 Connecticut Highway Department report entitled *Hartford Metropolitan Area Expressways*: "It has been clearly demonstrated....that [expressways] represent the only real solution of the problem of highway congestion." This is the opposite of what most transportation planners believe today.

This quote reflects the thinking of the times, and decisions based on this belief were duplicated throughout the United States. While we, also,



The railroad was originally constructed at-grade at Union Station, but the tracks were elevated in 1889 to avoid the heavy horse-drawn carriage traffic (and later, automobiles) on Asylum Street. The arch over the roadway is located where the rail viaduct now sits. (Photo courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, UCONN Library)



I-84 and the railroad are intertwined throughout the study area. The highway "was carefully engineered to preserve the railroad", according to the *I-84 Environmental and Joint Use Study* (1970).

can only reflect the thinking of our own times, we do have much more knowledge now of how transportation decisions profoundly affect urban spaces and of the factors which influence urban vitality. With the help of much stakeholder input, we will be working to bring this updated knowledge to the I-84 Hartford project.



Every planning project requires coordination with other on-going initiatives in the vicinity. For the I-84 Hartford Project, this means a massive amount of coordination, as the project area is a busy place!! The corridor is the setting for several other important CTDOT projects, such as study of the rail viaduct replacement, construction of CTfastrak and a pilot study on congestion relief in the corridor. In addition, the City of Hartford and the Greater Hartford Transit District have transportation projects underway in the study area. A full list of related projects can be seen on the I-84 Hartford Project website.

## Keeping Our Eye on the Ball



The structures that carry Interstate 84 through Hartford need extensive repair or replacement. Rather than just repairing or replacing I-84 “as is,” the Connecticut Department of Transportation and many stakeholders believe there may be opportunities to improve the highway’s design through Hartford to alleviate its impact on the community and improve connections to other transportation modes. To help us stay focused on the desired outcomes, a Vision Statement has been created to guide the development of alternatives and their evaluation. What does the vision include?? Check it out on our project website!

### Got Questions?

If you have a question about the I-84 Hartford Project, please visit our website and check out the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), which we update periodically as new questions arise. If your question isn’t answered there, please fill out the comment form, and we’ll respond quickly.



## Visit our New Website

We’ve updated the I-84 Hartford Project website! Visit <http://i84hartford.com> often for news and information.



## Please Attend!

A public information meeting on the I-84 Hartford Project will be held on June 17<sup>th</sup> at the Hartford Public Library. An open house will be held from 4 – 5pm, where the public can mingle with the project team at information stations. At 5pm and again at 7pm, the team will deliver a presentation on project background and status. At this meeting, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the project and provide us with your thoughts and concerns. We hope to see you there!

