



THE I-84 HARTFORD PROJECT

Winter 2014 Newsletter
Issue 2

Public Advisory Committee Makes an ImPACT!

Public engagement in transportation projects has come a long way since I-84 was planned in the 1940s and 50s. Then, planning for the new highway was carried out by state engineers, with some input from elected officials, city staff and corporate leaders.

Not so today! For the I-84 Hartford Project to be a success, the input of many is needed.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) is planning and undertaking a robust program of outreach using a variety of media and methods. As part of that program of outreach, about 30 representatives from municipalities, businesses, agencies, interest groups and neighborhood groups have been part of a Public Advisory Committee (PAC).

The PAC is helping CTDOT and the project team understand stakeholder issues. Besides providing input to the project team, PAC members will also serve as communication links between the project and their constituencies, helping to advance the best possible solution for the I-84 corridor through Hartford.

“CTDOT is planning a robust program of outreach...”

Several members of the PAC are also serving on a smaller working group to help the project team refine the project’s Purpose and Need statement (see sidebar). CTDOT anticipates forming other working groups around topics that need more extensive stakeholder discussion.

One thing is certain....there will be a lot more collaboration with a wider, more diverse group of citizens than when the highway was first built!



Top: In the late 1950s local officials were eager to have the highway built as it was seen as a road to progress. Hartford Mayor James Kinsella, third from left, pores over a map with local officials (Credit: Einar Chindmark Photographer, Hartford Times Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library).

Bottom: PAC members confer on current I-84 issues.

What is a Statement of Purpose and Need?

Development of a statement of Purpose and Need is one of the most important parts of any federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision-making process. It should be a full and honest explanation of why an agency is considering an action. It must clearly state the problem, along with evidence that supports that the problem exists. (Some common needs related to transportation projects may include transportation demand, safety, urban transportation plan consistency, modal interrelationships, system linkage and the condition of an existing facility). It must also include a clear statement of objectives that the proposed action is intended to achieve.

The Purpose and Need statement is an essential foundation for developing alternatives to solve the problem and, later, for evaluating and comparing those alternatives.

Common Concerns: Unique Interests

Construction impacts, cost and connectivity have been some of the major themes voiced in more than 30 stakeholder interviews conducted by the Project Team between April and October 2013.

The Project Team wants to hear the needs and concerns of municipalities, employers, advocacy groups, transportation providers, and neighborhood groups at the beginning of this long-term project to rebuild I-84 through Hartford. While there are several common themes, there have also been a wide range of comments on a variety of topics.

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A Spanish version of this newsletter is available on www.i84hartford.com



How Well Do You Know I-84 Bridges? *(Take this quiz and find out!)*

- About how much of I-84 between Park Street and High Street is elevated?
 - 100%
 - 80%
 - 65%
 - 50%
- Connecticut Department of Transportation contractors have worked on which of the following since 2005?
 - deck rehabilitation
 - repairs to the superstructure
 - joint replacement
 - all of the above
- How much money was spent repairing and maintaining I-84 bridges in Hartford from 2005 until 2012?
 - \$18 million
 - \$26 million
 - \$45 million
 - \$58 million

Answers

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Common Concerns: Unique Interests

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Here are a few samples:

Construction

Nearly everyone interviewed said they worry about how rebuilding I-84 might disrupt travelers, and some were concerned about impacts to local streets.

Connections

Many stakeholders raised the issue of “connectivity.” They asked,

- Will there be improved access and safety for vehicles, pedestrians and bikes?
- If the rail line is moved as part of the corridor solution, will connections between downtown, Union Station and Asylum Hill be affected?
- How will the project connect with other transportation modes and plans – CTfastrak, intercity rail, the East Coast Greenway and Hartford’s i-Quilt Plan?

Employers have also had specific concerns, such as the loss of parking

under the elevated highway and potential changes to ramps that might affect commuters.

Urban Design

Many have said they wonder how the project will change the area. Will it preserve the city’s historic features? Will it result in a more attractive route through the city? Will it incorporate “green” design and construction methods? Will it foster economic development, especially in neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor?

Many said they wonder how this major project will be funded. A few have asked if the state is considering highway tolls to fund the project.

While the stakeholder interviews reflect a range of views, they also express hope that the city and region will be well-served by the reconstruction of this old urban highway.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation will continue to seek stakeholder input as the project moves forward.



Top: Interviewees hope the I-84 project will support many modes for people to get to and move through the city – by car, bus, bikes and CTfastrak. A bus driver attaches a bike to a rack on a CT Transit bus.

Middle: I-84 ramps, rail and the busway converge near the state capitol. The busway is shown under construction in fall 2013.

Bottom: Late afternoon rush hour traffic on I-84 is a daily event.

Where Are We Now?

What is the **best** way to reconstruct I-84 through Hartford? Needless to say, opinions will differ. Over the course of the coming months and years, we hope everyone will weigh in with their ideas on this topic. But first, a great deal of hard data is needed. Collecting and analyzing that data has been the focus of the beginning phase of the project.

Over the past year, the I-84 Hartford project team has been gathering and analyzing data to assess the “needs and deficiencies” of I-84 in the study area. The needs and deficiencies analysis will help identify current and future travel issues as background for beginning to develop workable alternatives for I-84 in the corridor. The most viable alternatives will be further defined and developed during the environmental phase, which will also document the impacts and benefits of each option, as

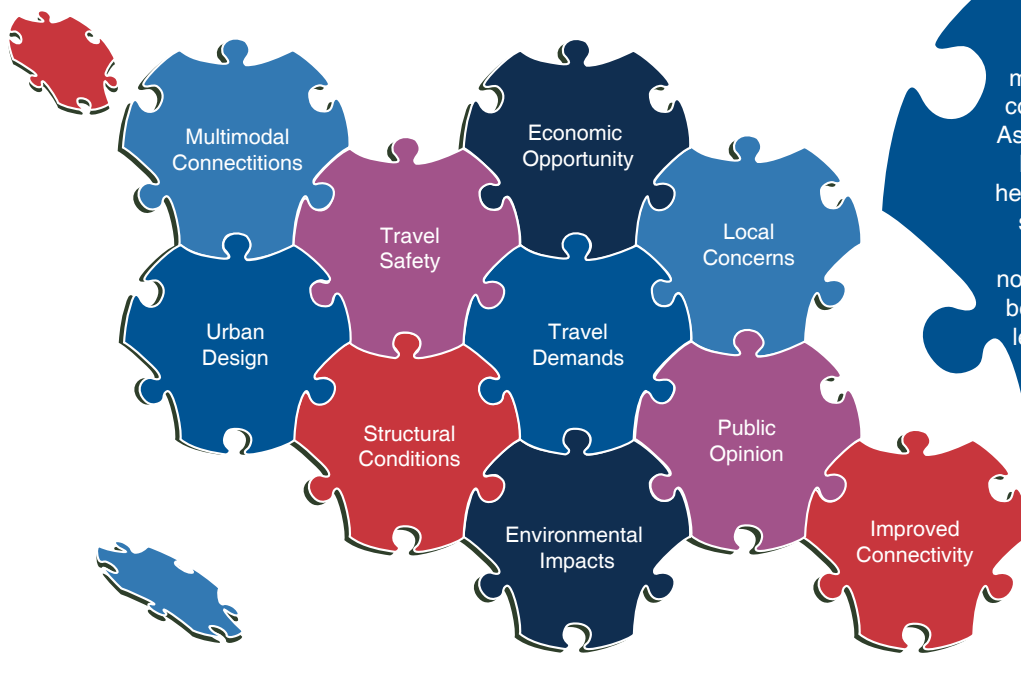


well as the effectiveness of meeting the Purpose and Need.

The project team is just now beginning the first phases of developing alternatives—all of which will be available for public review and comment. Careful evaluation of alternatives, along with the engagement of many stakeholders, will

ensure that decision makers fully understand the ramifications of each option for all travelers, residents, employers, and businesses. The best solution will optimize the benefits to all stakeholders.

Balancing Needs for Better Solutions



For the reconstruction of I-84 through Hartford to have the most successful outcome, many considerations must be weighed. As the project progresses, the I-84 Hartford project team wants to hear from all stakeholders. Please stay tuned and stay involved!!! Project updates, along with notifications of public meetings will be communicated through newsletters, e-bulletins, social media and the project website: www.i84hartford.com

Data, Data, Data

I-84 through Hartford is one of the most traveled highways in the state. With that much demand for the movement of people and goods, I-84 plays a key role in the economy of Hartford, the Capitol Region, Connecticut and New England.

To add to data already available, such as traffic signal and accident data, the project team used a variety of innovative methods to obtain traffic information, including:

- Portable video cameras to count traffic, pedestrians, and bicycles at an additional 173 locations in the project corridor, including city streets and other highways
- Several helicopters to video record traffic flows on I-84 and its interchanges
- Cell phone applications data for travel speed and traffic congestion levels

Not only do we need to understand how I-84 is used today, we must also try to predict how the highway will be used in the future and how travel is affected by growth trends, land use patterns, the interconnection of travel modes, and



Helicopters helped capture traffic flows on I-84. (Credit: Rodrigo Montalvo)

changes in work and commuting trends.

How will the project team use all of this information? Travel data for **all** modes, not just automobiles, will help the project team propose and evaluate alternatives for the corridor that can better respond to evolving travel needs and meet project goals. Those goals

include safer highway operations, better connections with local streets, better integration with local land use, greater opportunities for travel by foot, bicycle, bus, and train, and a more efficient and multi-modal transportation system.

A tall order, yes, but vital to project success.

A portion of Hartford's I-84 viaduct from above.

