

# **Open Planning Studio**



April 27 – May 2, 2015 Draft Summary Report



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## INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

The goal of the I-84 Hartford Project is to examine a variety of options for reconstructing I-84 through Hartford, from the Flatbush Avenue to I-91 interchanges (the busiest section of highway in Connecticut), and modify its design to create a long-term solution that the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) and stakeholders will embrace. At the same time, the I-84 Hartford Project will strive to reduce the highway's footprint on the city; lessen the highway's visual and physical impact on adjoining neighborhoods; better integrate the highway into the urban environment; create linkages to existing and proposed future modes of transportation; and support Hartford's economic development goals.

As part of the study process, the I-84 Hartford Project Team (the Project Team) has been conducting a comprehensive and ongoing program of public outreach since the project's initiation to engage a full a range of stakeholders and the general public in the planning process. A unique and dynamic Open Planning Studio was conducted over six days in Hartford in April and May 2015 as a key element of the overall public outreach program. This event was one where project planners and designers invited the public to come to a working studio space and learn about the project. They were encouraged to comment and share their ideas about I-84, and observe as the team continued to develop designs in response to the input received.

The purpose of the I-84 Open Planning Studio was to engage as many stakeholders as possible in the exploration of alternatives for improving or replacing the I-84 Viaduct in Hartford. A number of alternatives had been identified during the previous months. This Open Planning Studio would serve has a first tier screening of alternatives. The team was interested in learning if any of the alternatives should be eliminated from further consideration due to unavoidable and unacceptable engineering, community, or environmental constraints.

The objectives of the Open Planning Studio were to:

- Build community consensus for a range of reasonable and feasible alternatives for improvement or replacement of the I-84 Viaduct,
- Make the evaluation of all alternatives transparent and inclusive,
- Build support as the study process progresses for the identification of a preferred alternative in the end,
- Fully identify and respond to concerns from a broad range of stakeholders regarding the project and reflect that in the final design.



#### **Guiding Principles**

The conduct of the Open Planning Studio was guided by the following community outreach principles:

- The public shall have adequate access to information: The Open Planning Studio and supporting documentation will be posted on the project website and notice of the Studio and materials will be distributed to stakeholders in advance through a diversity of means. An Open Planning Studio report will be prepared at its conclusion and posted on the project website.
- The public shall have clarity in the information presented to them: Technical information will be
  presented in terms that are understandable to the public. Open Planning Studio materials and
  notifications will be made available in more than one language to accommodate those who do
  not speak English well.
- The public shall be able to engage and comment on the evaluation of alternatives as it progresses with a responsive and timely Project Team: The public will receive sufficient notice of the event with multiple opportunities to participate, to be held at a time and place that is convenient and comfortable. Ample time to review project-related materials will also be provided. All public questions and inquiries will be answered in a timely manner.
- The public shall be able to participate in a process that is well coordinated: Good coordination, communication, and collaboration among all concerned members of the Design team will be critical to providing the public with the most current and correct information and the overall success of the Open Planning Studio.

#### **Environmental Justice Outreach**

Additionally, the Open Planning Studio was conducted in a manner that would encourage the inclusion of Environmental Justice (EJ) populations, which includes minority groups, low-income groups, and those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). These populations have tended historically to be disenfranchised in the planning processes for large transportation infrastructure projects. Not only does the Project Team have a desire to reach out to EJ populations, the Project Team is mandated by the federal government and Federal Highway Administration policy to ensure that these populations are informed about the project.

The majority of Hartford residents directly affected by the I-84 Hartford project are minority, low-income, and/or have LEP. The 2011 CRCOG report titled, "Limited English Proficiency: Four Factor Analysis and Language Assistance Plan, Greater Hartford Integrated Mass Transit Planning Study, Hartford CT" indicates that 16 percent of the Hartford population does not speak English well, and their primary language is Spanish. Consequently, the Open Planning Studio was planned, publicized, and conducted in a manner that welcomed and encouraged participation by EJ populations, and accommodated those with LEP in particular, as described in more detail in the following segments of this report.

## REPORT ORGANIZATION

This report documents the I-84 Hartford Open Planning Studio and the positive response it generated. It is organized to offer insights into this vigorous, interactive studio experience. As such, this report follows the Open Planning Studio in a chronological fashion. That is, it documents the Open Planning Studio as it was planned, organized, publicized, and then conducted. The report concludes with an abridged version of the presentation that was given the final day of the event and which summarized its findings. The appendices to this report include the detailed catalog of the publicity conducted, minutes of meetings conducted during the event, the presentations given during the event, and feedback received from all sources such as the project website, twitter, and hand written notes.

## **OPEN PLANNING STUDIO**

#### Open Planning Studio Planning

Planning began in February, 2015 with a written event plan. This is included in **Appendix A**. The plan established the Project Team approach to the event and the goals for what the Open Planning Studio should accomplish. Weekly meetings were held from February through to April 2015 to track preparations for the Open Planning Studio and adjust the list of tasks necessary to publicizing and running it. In addition, the Project Team met with a group of knowledgeable advisors familiar with Hartford and its neighborhoods to get their help in selecting the strongest methods for communicating with the community about the Open Planning Studio. A number of these advisors continued to provide invaluable help with publicity and logistics for the event, such as arranging for free parking in a Hartford public garage for those attending.

#### Publicity and Outreach

Publicity and outreach were critical first tasks for the Open Planning Studio to promote attendance and assure that as many people as possible were informed and welcomed to attend. The materials used for this effort are included as **Appendix B** to this report. The approach to community engagement for the Open Planning Studio was two-fold including a direct-contact/canvass method and a media outreach effort.

Direct Outreach: Direct outreach was made to both existing stakeholders on the project contact list and to households in close proximity to the study area in Hartford. There were three email blasts in the weeks leading up to the Open Planning Studio to inform the more than 1,500 stakeholders who had already provided their contact information in order to be updated about the project on an ongoing basis. Then, an email was sent every day of the event to the same group to update them about the schedule for the next day and opportunities to participate. The list of stakeholders on this contact database was updated every week to add new individuals and organizations identified through the ongoing outreach efforts for the project.



To supplement this, a letter was mailed to approximately 1,000 residential property owners with property within ¼ mile of I-84 in Hartford. In addition, an Open Planning Studio flyer was distributed in both English and Spanish. The Project Team spent four days canvassing the neighborhoods within ¼ mile of I-84 in Hartford and left approximately 6,000 flyers with the residents in that area. Another tool that was used to publicize the event was a sidewalk stencil applied to the sidewalk network around the Open Planning Studio event venue with spray chalk to inform passersby about the studio. One studio attendee noted, in particular, that the stencil was "brilliant" and enticed him to stop in.

Finally, the Project Team took advantage of opportunities to promote attendance at the Open Planning Studio with information booths at such events at the MetroHartford Alliance Rising Star Breakfast, which occurred one week before the event. For this outreach, the attendees were encouraged to visit the project website to learn more about the Open Planning Studio and to keep up to date on the growing schedule of events as they were confirmed. The website, <a href="isa4hartford.com">isa4hartford.com</a>, was continuously updated in the weeks leading up to the Open Planning Studio so that all site visitors would have the most current Open Planning Studio information.

**Media Outreach**: A media plan was also developed for the Open Planning Studio that included preparation of a press release and identification of potential media outlets that could be contacted about announcing the Open Planning Studio. Of those, a targeted list of about 40 media outlets including newspapers, neighborhood newsletters, radio stations, television stations, and Facebook Pages were contacted and asked to post an announcement at least once before the event. Of those 40, approximately 15 did so at least once. Additionally, a public relations expert was consulted who was able to connect the Project Team with several television and radio programs. Through this effort, the Open Planning Studio Project Team and CTDOT Project Manager were interviewed live for several television news and radio programs both before and during the event. A complete log of the media contacts made is included in **Appendix B**.

Coordination with EJ Outreach Efforts: From its initiation, the I-84 Hartford Project overall community engagement plan has included targeted efforts to communicate project information to EJ populations and solicit their input. As part of the planning and outreach specifically for the Open Planning Studio, several coordinated efforts were made to continue that targeted outreach and incorporate efforts to encourage the EJ communities to participate in the Open Planning Studio. The City of Hartford along with Hartford organizations that work in, advocate for, and represent the EJ neighborhoods were consulted for advice on the best means to reach out to those neighborhoods and assure residents and business owners were informed. During the Open Planning Studio three evenings were set aside for a focus on the study area neighborhoods as a special effort to engage in conversation about them. A number of those neighborhoods have a concentration of EJ populations residing in them. Pizza was served during those evenings to make them as welcoming and friendly as possible.

#### Materials, Tools, and Displays

The Open Planning Studio event called for a wide array of materials tools and displays to communicate with attendees. The Project Team understands that not only do different people take in information in different ways, but the complexity of the information about the range of possible alternatives made effective communication about them critical. The Project Team wanted the event to not only be informative but to be as engaging, stimulating, and interactive as possible. Therefore, it was important to have a number of different ways for those attending to feel a part of what was happening during the week

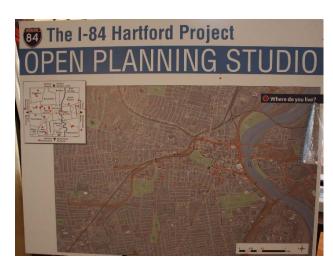


and that their comments, questions, and ideas were truly welcomed. Those who visited the studio on multiple days should find something new and interesting to participate in each day. The following materials, tools, and displays were utilized during the Open Planning Studio. In addition, the boards that were displayed throughout the room are included in Appendix C. The Project Team was always available during the Open Planning Studio to discuss the information and use the interactive materials with those attending.

#### **Interactive Information:**

- 13 Large display boards of the seven (7) fundamental options for redesigning I-84 with conceptual renderings.
- Small display boards showing about 40 options for the redesign of I-84.
- A display board asking those attending where they live, to get a sense of where attendees were coming from for the event that they and the Project Team could see geographically (see picture on right).
- A 70" LCD SMART Board, which is an electronic tool which could display a variety of project maps and graphics. Attendees could draw on the board and make notes to demonstrate their ideas and concerns. Their notes and sketches were captured as images that could then inform the redesign on an ongoing basis. These images are included in **Appendix D.**
- An interactive three-dimensional model of the various alternatives in I-84 corridor.
- An interactive GIS-based set of graphics was available on a large monitor. It allowed attendees to take flyovers of the study area, focus in on specific areas of interest, and see the environmental and community resources.
- A hands-on tool that allowed attendees to take 3dimensional streetscape element shapes and add
  - them to different streets in the study area; in this manner they could design their own streetscape and show the Project Team what they might like those streets to look like in the future.
- A Textizen survey; bookmarks in English and Spanish were handed out. They contained a phone number that users could text to, in order to answer some simple questions about I-84 and gain their feedback on the Open Planning Studio materials and information.
- A display board at the Open Planning Studio exit area with blank post-notes to encourage attendees to write and post any closing thoughts.





Display board asking where people live



SMART Board image captured after a discussion



- An introductory presentation (See PAC presentation in **Appendix E** as an example) was given explaining the range of I-84 alternatives under consideration.
- Handout materials included the project newsletter, a copy of the event schedule, I-84 business cards (website information), and a copy of the event flyer.
- A table of project background information including past newsletters, the draft project documents, and graphics produced for the screening of environmental resources in the study area.
- A Spanish language guide to the introductory presentation was available.
- Spanish language interpreters were present throughout the event.
- All handout materials were available in English and Spanish.
- A Census postcard survey was used asking basic demographic information to get a sense of who was attending the event. Results of the survey are included in **Appendix F**.
- Paper comment cards and a comment box to deposit them in. Results deposited in the comment box are included in **Appendix D**.
- Note paper and pens were stationed in numerous locations in the studio to encourage attendees to make notes for themselves and to leave comments for the Project Team.
- A buffet of snacks, tea, coffee, and water was available at all times.
- A children's corner was set up with toys and crafts to play with.
- Sign-in sheets to track attendance for each part of each day.
- Hanging name tags identified each event team member.
- The Project Team had a set of work stations set up to enable them to work on varied aspects of the project during the Open Planning Studio.
- Fence banners and outdoor sandwich boards signs announced the event.
- Indoor welcome banners were placed in the lobby printed in English and Spanish.
- Welcome /Thanks for coming boards were placed in the lobby printed in English and Spanish.
- Social media updates, on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, were posted throughout the event.

#### Schedule

The schedule for the Open Planning Studio included an open house format throughout the week and numerous scheduled meetings, all of which were open to the public. The general purpose of the scheduled meetings was to have a focused conversation on specific neighborhoods or topics or resources of particular concern relative to the project's design. The schedule was made available in two formats, as shown in Exhibit 1 and 2.



#### **Exhibit 1: Studio Schedule**



## I-84 HARTFORD OPEN PLANNING STUDIO DAILY SCHEDULE

(Open All Week - Drop in Any Time)

#### April 27th - Monday

- Noon Studio Opens!
- Noon Project Advisory Committee Meeting
- 1-4 PM Open House Design Team Working on Alternatives
- 2-4 PM Interactive Student Session
- 6-8:30 PM Open House Behind the Rocks and Frog Hollow Neighborhoods focused discussion

#### April 28th - Tuesday

- 9 AM-Noon Open House
- 9 AM Traffic and Parking Working Group Meeting
- 1-4 PM Open House Design Team Working on Alternatives
- 1:30 PM Downtown Business Improvement District Meeting
- 6-8:30 PM Public Meeting

#### April 29th - Wednesday

- 9 AM Noon Open House
- 9 AM Urban Design Working Group Meeting
- 1-4 PM Open House Design Team Working on Alternatives
- 1 PM Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Transit Working Group Meeting
- 6-8:30 PM Open House –Downtown and Clay Arsenal Neighborhoods focused discussion

#### April 30th - Thursday

- 7:30 AM Leadership Greater Hartford Meeting
- 9 AM-Noon Open House Design Team Working on Alternatives
- 1 PM Historic and Cultural Resources Special Topic Meeting
- 6-8:30 PM Open House Parkville, West End, and Asylum Hill Neighborhoods focused discussion
- 6:30 PM Bike Tour of Study Area

#### May 1st - Friday

- 9 AM-Noon Open House
- 9 AM Air Quality, Noise, and Vibration Special Topic Meeting
- 1-4 PM Open House Design Team Working on Alternatives
- 3 PM Student Interactive Session

#### May 2<sup>nd</sup> - Saturday

- 9 AM-2 PM Open House
- 11 AM Public Meeting Presentation of Studio Findings!



Exhibit 2: Studio Schedule with Descriptions from Website

Monday Apr 27	
Noon - Project Advisory Committee     Meeting	A 38-member group that meets with and provides feedback to the project's study team quarterly. The PAC is comprised of representatives from agencies, employers, and civic groups invested in I-84.
2 PM – Interactive Student Session	A rebuilt I-84 will have an impact the school-age generation. Students of all ages are invited to learn more about the project and to engage with the team. Will this project inspire a career in planning? In engineering? At the very least, we hope to involve young people in the decision-making process.
6 PM - Behind the Rocks & Frog Hollow - Neighborhood Focused Discussion	How will the interchange be integrated to the Capitol Avenue and Broad Street area? Will ramps be added to or removed from my neighborhood? Where will the parking underneath I-84 be relocated? Come talk about your neighborhood. Share your wishes and worries.
Tuesday Apr 28	
9 AM - Traffic & Parking Discussion	Will there be new local street connections? Where will they be? How will the rebuilt highway alleviate congestion on local streets? Will there be more parking? Less parking? Learn about how each alternative addresses getting around and parking in Hartford.
1:30 PM - Downtown Business     Improvement District Discussion	How does I-84 support economic vitality and the quality of life in downtown Hartford today? Join Business Improvement District property owners for a discussion on how a rebuilt highway can contribute to a more vibrant, healthier city in the future.
6 PM - Public Meeting, with Air Quality and Noise Experts Attending	What do you know about the design options? Do you think the highway should be raised, lowered, or put in a tunnel? We'll keep the presentation brief and get you involved in fun activities to experiment with street design and alternative configurations. Includes time to talk about air quality, noise and vibration effects.
Wednesday Apr 29	
9 AM – Urban Design Discussion	What will the new I-84 look like from ground level? What elements can improve the function, sustainability, and aesthetics of Hartford? Learn about how the design can promote a safer, happier, and healthier community.
1 PM - Bicycle, Pedestrian & Transit Discussion	Will there be an improved bike network? Can I suggest where bike lanes and amenities should be? Which alternatives will be most beneficial to Transit Oriented Development? How will the project promote public transit? How will the project impact the railroad and CT <i>fastrak</i> ?



6 PM - Downtown, Clay Arsenal &  Assulum Hill Neighborhood Fosused	How will construction affect my business? Will there be fewer I-84 entrances or entrances downtown? Will the street
Asylum Hill Neighborhood Focused Discussion	network change? How will planned development projects,
Discussion	such as the NoDo stadium, be integrated? What will happen to
	the Park River Conduit? Come talk about your neighborhood.
	Share your wishes and worries. Pizza from Aladdin.
Thursday Apr 30	
• 7:30 AM - Leadership Greater	LGH, an organization that has been connecting and inspiring
Hartford (LGH) Discussion	diverse leaders to build strong and vibrant communities in the
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	Hartford region for four decades, describes the rebuilding of I-
	84 as a "leadership moment." Members will learn more about
	the project and how they can get involved.
1 PM - Historic & Cultural Resources	How can redesign of I-84 through Hartford enhance the city's
Discussion	cultural and historic resources? Share your ideas about how to
	preserve Hartford's past while creating new beginnings.
6 PM - Parkville, West End & Asylum	Will the Sigourney Street entrance and exit change? What
Hill Neighborhood Focused Discussion	about Sisson Avenue ramps – what will happen to them? Will
	changes to the highway provide development opportunities?
	Where will they be? Pizza from City Pizza. Come talk about
	your neighborhood. Share your wishes and worries.
• 6:30 PM – Bike Tour	Whatever your ability, join us for a fun guided tour of the I-84
	area from the perspective of a bicyclist. We'll discuss
	opportunities for bicyclists and bike advocates as we rethink I-
	84. Don't forget your helmet!
Friday May 1	
9 AM - Air Quality, Noise & Vibration	Which alternatives are most beneficial to air quality? How will
Discussion	noise and vehicle emissions factor into the rebuilding of the
	highway? Come join a discussion about these topics.
3 PM - Interactive Student Session	A rebuilt I-84 will have an impact the school-age generation.
	Students of all ages are invited to learn more about the project
	and to engage with the team. Will this project inspire a career
	in planning? In engineering? At the very least, we hope to
	involve young people in the decision-making process.
Sat May 2	
• 11 AM – Closing Discussion	What was learned from the week-long session? How did our
	conversations inform the design options? What are the most
	promising ideas that emerged this week? Come hear about the
	ideas and opinions shared with the I-84 Design Team during
	the Open Planning Studio.



## SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

Overall, those who attended the Open Planning Studio and the Project Team and sponsors found it to be a strong success and to have achieved its aims. The Studio, and the outreach and publicity that went with it, informed many about the project. The event generated goodwill and positive feelings about the planning process with the public. In addition, the comments and suggestions of the attendees did a great deal to inform the next steps in the design for I-84.

Still, as with any event of this scale and ambition, the Project Team can look back and assess what went particularly well or should perhaps be approached differently the next time. Summary observations are included in the following discussion.

When asked how they heard about the Open Planning Studio, attendees most often said they received an email, saw or heard an interview in the news about the event, or had already been to one of the previous public meetings and had been following the project regularly. Some attendees dropped in to the Studio because they saw the signs outside the studio space or saw the chalk-stencil on the sidewalk. The number of attendees who visited the studio as a result of the canvassing was less than hoped for, despite the aggressive publicity effort.

While some tactics were more effective than others at getting people in the door to the Studio, the novelty of the week-long event and related press coverage did draw people into the event and expose them to the project. This is perhaps the greatest value of holding the Studio. For example, the canvassing that occurred in the weeks prior to the Studio was extremely successful at driving people to the project website. During the three days that members of the Project Team were canvassing neighborhoods in the corridor, there were 226 sessions on the project website, 131 of these sessions were new users. During the week of the Studio, there were 1,191 sessions on the project website, and 770 of these sessions were new users. Whether or not they were walking in the Studio doors, people were undoubtedly going to the website to learn about and provide comments on the project and draft alternatives.

Members of the public were also actively providing dialogue on the project's social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The *Storify* piece in **Appendix B** provides detailed insights to the number and variety of responses received on social media. In addition, the live-media coverage of the studio was extensive and grabbed the attention of members of the public. Comments by those attending the studio about hearing or seeing the Project Team on live radio or TV (e.g. NPR, Face the State) indicated how strongly this helped to draw people into the Studio.

EJ stakeholders are generally the most difficult to reach, inform, and engage in large infrastructure project planning. This was true for the Open Planning Studio, and these populations had a limited attendance at the Studio. The fact that the project is still in the early planning stages could have made attending at this juncture a lower priority for many. It will be important to continue the process of conducting small-scale, outreach meetings to effectively reach EJ populations in Hartford and assure their concerns are heard.



At the Studio, the sessions which targeted a specific topic generated the most attendance. Similarly, the scheduled times for special events such as student sessions or the bicycle ride generated a lot of interest. Sessions such as the discussion of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit issues also led to some great in-depth conversations about those topics and truly focused in on how the design of I-84 might affect those stakeholders. Specifically, the bicycle, pedestrian, and transit and the urban design discussions were particularly valuable in terms of public input. The April 28<sup>th</sup> evening Public Meeting was not well attended beyond the large contingent of federal and state agency staff and Project Team members. Because attendees understood they could drop in at any time to the studio, attendance on that particular evening may have seemed less important. It could have been better or differently publicized.

**Appendix G** includes the summaries of discussions during key meetings.

Of the numerous interactive activities at the event, the demonstration of the 3D visualization model showing a number of the I-84 design alternatives was highly effective at communicating the project complexities in an understandable way. The 3D model station was almost always occupied by members of the public and Project Team. Continued development and demonstration of this tool should be prioritized for future events.

Having project planners and engineers on hand to listen to ideas generated by the public, and convert those ideas into illustrations was another success of the Studio. During the final day of the Studio, new ideas were presented to public who attended the final public meeting, and the concept originators were invited to explain their ideas to the audience. This reinforced the fact that the Project Team was truly interested in hearing people's ideas and incorporating them into the planning for the project.

The opportunities for public involvement were extensive during the week-long event. Future events may or may not benefit from being conducted over a full week, however. The goals of each future event should be weighed in the decision-making about its duration. An event that is one, two, or three days may still effectively capture the interest of the public as well as build on the energy of the Project Team in a vibrant way.

The Project Team concluded that a similar event(s) should be conducted again as the project progresses. The Project Team could build on that in working towards consensus on what will ultimately be the final design. Another Open Planning Studio conducted when the redesign options have been refined further to a more limited range of concepts could be equally valuable to moving the final design choice forward.



#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Open Planning Studio Plan

Appendix B: Outreach/Media Planning

Appendix C: Display Boards

Appendix D: Public Comment Catalog

Appendix D: Meeting Presentations

- 1. Public Advisory Committee (4/27/2015)
- 2. Historic / Cultural Resources Special Topic Meeting (4/30/2015)
- 3. Air Quality, Noise, and Vibration Special Topic Meeting (5/1/2015)
- 4. Final Public Meeting (5/2/2015)

Appendix E: Postcard Survey Results

Appendix G: Report of Meetings

- 1. Public Advisory Committee (4/27/2015)
- 2. Traffic and Parking Working Group (4/28/2015)
- 3. Public Meeting Air Quality and Noise Discussion (4/28/2015)
- 4. Urban Design Working Group (4/29/2015)
- 5. Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Transit Working Group (4/29/2015)
- 6. Historic / Cultural Resources Special Topic Meeting (4/30/2015)
- 7. Air Quality, Noise, and Vibration Special Topic Meeting (5/1/2015)
- 8. Final Public Meeting (5/2/2015)