



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

**Date and Time: Thursday, October 29, 2015, 4 - 8 PM**

**Location: Hartford Public Library, Hartford**

**Subject: Public Meeting**

### **1. Meeting Schedule and Attendance**

The public meeting took place on Thursday, October 29, 2015 from 4 to 8 PM. The meeting consisted of an open house where members of the public could obtain information and talk with project staff about the I-84 corridor and study process. There were informational boards set up around the room and a computer station that allowed participants to see a 3D simulation of the corridor with select alternatives. The project team gave a formal presentation to the general public at 6 PM, which was followed by a panel question and answer discussion.

Sixty-eight (68) members of the public signed in at the public meeting.

### **2. Boards**

Several boards were placed around perimeter of the room. They included:

1. I-84 Study Area Map
2. I-84 Hartford Fast Facts (an infographic)
3. Program Overview (a flowchart of the overall project schedule)
4. Mainline Alternatives: Vertical Alignment
5. Mainline Alternatives: Horizontal Alignment
6. Mobility: Bicycle and Pedestrian Analysis
7. Potential Building Impacts
8. Construction Considerations
9. Options that Perform Well (7 options/boards)
10. Hartford Railroad Alternative Analysis
11. Broad Street rendering
12. Sisson Avenue rendering
13. Asylum Avenue rendering
14. Capitol Avenue rendering
15. Preliminary Traffic Analysis (4 alternatives / boards)

There were also booklets located on the center table in the rear of the room that displayed traffic operations of the surrounding roads for the interchange options.

### **3. Presentation**

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone and introduced himself.

Project Background

R. Armstrong gave an overview of the agenda for the presentation. He explained the purpose of the I-84 Hartford Project, which is to address the bridge's structural deficiencies, operational and safety deficiencies, and mobility deficiencies. He said that \$60 million dollars has been spent on maintaining the viaduct since 2004. Vehicles are competing to get on and off the highway, which causes them to weave from lane to lane. I-84 was expected to carry 55,000 automobiles per day, but currently services 175,000 per day.

R. Armstrong provided a history of the project, and noted the study limits. The project area extends from approximately Flatbush Avenue to the I-91 interchange. He also reviewed the project schedule and said the project is currently in the environmental phase, which includes developing alternatives and preparing documents for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

### Overview of Alternatives

Dave Stahnke, of TranSystems Corporation, next provided an overview of the mainline alternatives. He stated that there are generally four vertical alignments and a number of horizontal alignments. He continued on to describe the various interchange options on the eastern and western portions of the corridor. He described the range of costs for each of the four mainline alternatives.

### Alternative Screening Process

D. Stahnke next discussed the alternatives screening. He described the process of using the purpose and need to narrow the 150+ possible alternatives to a more manageable number. He reviewed the three major components of the purpose and need (bridge deficiencies, traffic and safety operations, and mobility). Regarding mobility, he described that the team analyzes mainline operations first then ramp and local road intersection operations second. He also described bicycle and pedestrian considerations. He reviewed the alternatives, spending time on the traffic analysis results for the existing conditions, and for one sample of each of the elevated alternatives, lowered alternatives, and tunnel alternatives.

### Traffic: What Have We Learned

D. Stahnke described that the team has learned a number of things related to the mainline analysis, including that there are too many ramps and the poor intersection operations affect the mainline. He stated that closing the Trumbull Street and High Street ramps would improve traffic conditions. The intersection analysis shows that the Sigourney Street ramps are needed and that the Broad Street and Asylum Street ramps should be relocated/reconfigured to improve traffic operations.

### Initial Alternatives Assessment

R. Armstrong next presented the preliminary screening results. He described that there are four color rankings (red, yellow, green, and black) in the table, plus areas that have yet to be filled in (white). He noted that each purpose and need criterion is scored for each option and assigned a color. Red denotes poor performance for that criterion, yellow denotes moderate performance for that criterion, and green denotes good performance for that criterion. A cell that is has the color black has a critical flaw for the criterion. A cell that has the color white has yet to be assessed for that criterion.

R. Armstrong discussed the elevated options in detail noting that many of them are colored black because they perform poorly for traffic. He next discussed the tunnel options in detail noting that many of them are colored black because they perform poorly for traffic and have

very high costs. Specifically, he stated that the team has developed a new tunnel alternative that can satisfy the traffic needs but there are significant property impacts and construction costs. Many of the lowered highway options perform well against the purpose and need criteria, though there are building impacts with many of the lowered alternatives. R. Armstrong provided additional details on potential building impacts on the west and east side.

After R. Armstrong finished presenting the initial screening summary results, he stressed the importance of getting comments and feedback from the public.

#### More on the Options that are Perform Well

R. Armstrong next provided a graphical overview of characteristics for two of the seven options that are performing well. He displayed the existing mainline and ramps, proposed mainline, ramp closures, proposed local roads, building impacts, potentially available land, and potential greenways and streetscapes for Option 3A/B W3-3 on the western portion of the corridor and Option 3B E2(S) on the eastern portion of the corridor. R. Armstrong asked the audience to take note of the building impacts of each of the potential options. He also referred the audience to the building impact boards on the side of the room.

#### Rail Alternatives Study

Brett Wallace, of Parsons Brinckerhoff, next provided an overview of the Hartford Railroad Alternatives Study. He stated that the Parsons Brinckerhoff team assessed a range of alignments to upgrade the rail line. They coordinated closely with the I-84 Hartford Project team. He presented the range of benefits and costs for the various alignments. He highlighted F1 and F1 noting that they have great benefits because they are straightening the alignment.

#### 3-Dimensional Model

Nick Mandler, of TranSystems Corporation, next walked the group through the 3-D model. He completed a flyover description of the existing conditions, and one elevated alternative, one lowered alternative, and one tunnel alternative.

#### Learn More / Provide Input

R. Armstrong closed the presentation by stating that public input is critical to the process. He encouraged members of the public to visit the interactive webpage, 3-dimensional model, and Open Planning Studios.

#### **4. Panel Question and Answer Discussion**

The question and answer discussion consisted of a panel of team members who alternated answering questions from the public. These team members included David Spillane of Goody Clancy, N. Mandler, Christine Tiernan of AECOM, D. Stahnke, Tim Ryan of TranSystems Corporation, Jackie McKinney of the Public Advisory Committee, and Tim Jost of Parsons Brinckerhoff.

An attendee asked what the numbers in the circles of the preliminary traffic analysis boards represent. N. Mandler answered that each number represents the sum of all lane approaches at that intersection.

There was a question on the feasibility of building a bypass, or ring road, instead of reconstructing I-84 in Hartford. R. Armstrong answered that a bypass would not solve the need for traffic to get into and outside of Hartford. He noted that during rush hour 60 percent of

traffic on I-84 is getting on or off in Hartford. Eighty percent gets on or off in West Hartford, Hartford, or East Hartford. There was a comment stating that much of this 80 percent includes single-occupant vehicles. Has the team thought about attractive transit options? R. Armstrong stated that the state is currently looking at this, in particular, to expand CT *fastrak*. N. Mandler added that while the team cannot include a mode or service in its assumptions that is not planned or funded yet, the team will try to keep options open.

Toni Gold questioned how the new station annex would be connected to the old station and Downtown. T. Jost stated that the station designs have not been developed yet, but the team would want to be sure that the new station annex is connected to Downtown, and Asylum Avenue would likely serve as this connection. Another attendee asked about the roles / services of each of the stations. For example, where would a passenger buy his ticket? T. Jost stated that these details have not been developed yet, but it would likely be expected that the bus transit would remain at the existing station.

One attendee commented that the presentation is informative and that the base maps on the website are not readable. This attendee also asked what the decision making process is. R. Armstrong described the NEPA/Connecticut Environmental Policy Act process that the project team is following, noting that while it is open and transparent to the public, the state and Federal Highway Administration ultimately make the decision on what improvements to implement. C. Tiernan added that the Public Advisory Committee comments and public comments inform the decision making process.

There was a question on whether any additional river crossings are included in the scope of the I-84 Hartford Project. T. Ryan discussed that this project is focused only on the bridges in the two-mile limit between Flatbush Avenue and the tunnel. He acknowledged that while there is a relationship between the two areas, this would have to be a separate study.

There was a comment that the lowered option seems like a good alternative. This attendee asked how the team will ensure that the neighborhood streets are correctly addressed. T. Ryan answered that the process is to start the analysis at the highest level first; to make sure the alternatives can fix the mainline issues. For those alternatives that meet the high level criteria, they continue to be assessed for the details. T. Ryan noted that the team is looking to start getting into the details on a selection of these alternatives early next year (2016).

There was a request to see the brownstone wall on future graphics. R. Armstrong answered that we are assessing the feasibility of maintaining the wall.

An attendee questioned how the highway can carry three times as much traffic as intended. N. Mandler answered that early designers expected I-84 to carry 55,000 vehicles, though it had capacity to carry more than that. He added that the future improvements to I-84 are not intended to be capacity improvements, but rather structural, operational, safety, and mobility improvements.

There was a question whether maintenance costs are included in the estimate and ranking criteria. R. Armstrong answered that they are not, and that the lowered alternatives would likely have the lowest maintenance costs.

An attendee commented that he had concerns with the concept of staged (or conventional) construction, in that it greatly affects cost. D. Stahnke noted that the team plans to look at the possibility of closing the highway, knowing that it has been done successfully for other urban highways. D. Stahnke commented that transit services would likely need to be ramped up to

make this work. He suggested the Hartford Line Commuter Rail service, set to open at the end of 2016, could potentially absorb some of this traffic.

Someone questioned whether the model factors in a shift out of single occupant vehicles. N. Mandler answered that the team uses the same assumptions that the Capitol Region Council of Governments does in their model. He noted that all options are judged using the same standards.

There was a comment that the I-91 interchange and the I-84 Hartford Project are related and should be analyzed as one project. R. Armstrong agreed that they are related, but the purpose and need of this project is primarily to fix the bridges which have reached the end of their useful life.

There was a comment that it would be interesting to have more of an analysis on how the buses will interact with the trains when the service is available. R. Armstrong answered that the Department is unsure how it will address buses until further analysis of the options is completed. The Department will be coordinating with CT*fastrak*, Greater Hartford Transit District, and the City.

An attendee questioned if the project team wants to hear whether public agrees, or does not agree, that the seven options that are performing well can solely move forward in the analysis. R. Armstrong said yes, this is what the team wants to hear at this time. R. Armstrong added that there will be a little time for the public to provide comments. This decision will not happen right away, especially with a new City mayor coming on-board.

There was a question on whether there is a City that has documented a reduction in traffic from transit and non-highway capacity improvements. Deborah Howes answered that Portland Oregon has successfully done this.

R. Armstrong asked J. McKinney to speak about her thoughts on the process. She stated that she thinks she feels okay about where and how far the project team has come in the process. She noted that there have been no surprises to her in the process so far, and she expects that trend to continue.

D. Spillane added that his role on the team, as an urban designer, is to work with the transportation team to establish the goals and objectives to reconnect the city streets, make it a stronger city. He noted that he is optimistic that this project can create tremendous opportunities.

There was a question if an impacted building is one that is "taken down". R. Armstrong answered yes. An attendee asked how this is documented. C. Tiernan stated that the environmental process will document this, and it will specify the level of impacts to all communities. There was a question on whether it is possible to move the historic buildings. C. Tiernan answered that yes, the project team would look into this.

## **5. Written Comment Received at the Meeting**

### **East End:**

Liked option of E3(S) lowered highway I-84 Asylum Avenue

Liked option E3(S) lowered highway Broad Street

Liked option E5(s) Alternative 3A Sigourney Street