



REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Tuesday, October 20, 2015, 4 - 8 PM

Location: Whiton Memorial Branch Library, Manchester

Subject: Public Meeting

1. Meeting Schedule and Attendance

The public meeting took place on Tuesday, October 20, 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 3-D 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 question and answer period.

Thirty-one (31) members of the public signed in at the public meeting.

2. Boards

Several boards were placed around the 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. He asked how many people were new to the project and/or if this was their first I-84 public meeting. The majority of attendees raised their hands.

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 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 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 that poor intersection operations affect the mainline. The team suggested closing the Trumbull Street and High Street ramps. The intersection analysis tells us that we need to keep the Sigourney Street ramps, and that the Broad Street and Asylum Street ramps should be relocated / reconfigured to improve traffic operations.

Alternative Screening Process

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 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.

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 Performing Well

Dennis Goderre, of TranSystems Corporation, 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, 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.

Next Steps

D. Goderre 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. Question and Answer Period

One attendee asked if it is feasible to close the highway during construction. If it is feasible, when and how long would the closure be? R. Armstrong answered that the project team plans to look into this, but does not know yet if it is feasible and when it would occur and how long it would last. He stated that other urban areas in the country have successfully closed highways to shorten the construction duration. He emphasized that the team does not have the answers to this question yet.

There was a general comment on how frustrating the congestion on I-84 can be; a 20-minute trip can take three hours. It will only get worse during construction. R. Armstrong acknowledged that the construction will have some impact on congestion. The Department will manage the traffic as best it can. There was a suggestion to consider improving many of the local roads before construction starts, to help absorb some of the traffic overflow during construction. R. Armstrong agreed that this would be helpful during construction.

There was a comment that when I-84 is not a parking lot, it is a speed zone with very tight curves. This attendee questioned whether the improvements raise the design speeds. T. Ryan answered that we can create a new highway for a 55 mile per hour design speed. R. Armstrong also stated that the inability for state police to regulate speeding, because of inadequate shoulder space, is a real problem on the current highway. Any design improvements will also include adequate shoulder space for ticketing and breakdowns.

There was a question on how many lanes the reconstructed highway would have. R. Armstrong answered that the reconfigured highway would have three lanes in each direction of the project area, and more traditional on / off ramps.

There was a comment that the congestion that travelers coming from east of the river experience is not a result of the I-84 Hartford Project area, but rather the I-91 interchange area. R. Armstrong acknowledged that the I-91 interchange is a bottleneck and noted that the primary need of the I-84 Hartford Project is to address the structural deficiencies of the viaduct.

He continued on to say that there could potentially be another study to address this in the future.

An attendee questioned whether high capacity roundabouts are being considering at some of the on / off ramps, such as Sigourney Street. R. Armstrong stated that the Department favors roundabouts, if the traffic flow can work. Tim Ryan added that roundabouts are considered safe, but the team has learned that finding enough space for them is a challenge. R. Armstrong stated that the City of Hartford is currently proposing a roundabout on Sigourney Street at Park Terrace.

There was a question on the timeframe for construction on I-91 north to the Charter Oak Bridge eastbound. R. Armstrong answered that this project will be complete by the time work on I-84 in Hartford begins.

There was general discussion how through traffic can bypass Hartford during construction. Is I-691 an option? R. Armstrong stated that this is something that the team needs to evaluate, and the team does not have all the answers yet.

Someone questioned whether I-291 could be expanded to serve as a beltway. R. Armstrong noted that this solution still has some challenges, mainly that it would not divert enough traffic during rush hour. More than 60 percent of traffic gets on or off in Hartford during rush hour.

An attendee questioned when potential economic impacts will be assessed. R. Armstrong stated that economic impacts will be assessed as part of the NEPA process in the next year.

There was a comment that a monorail from Hartford to Manchester would be really cool. R. Armstrong agreed.

Someone questioned the impact that the I-84 Hartford Project would have on CT*fastrak*. T. Ryan discussed the potential area of the service that could be affected (east of Sigourney Street). He noted that the goal would be to reconstruct what has to be reconstructed on CT*fastrak* first, so that service is not interrupted during the construction of I-84.

An attendee questioned if Union Station would remain a bus station if the rail line is moved and a new annex is constructed. R. Armstrong answered that Union Station will likely not be removed or impacted, because of its historic integrity. Currently it's envisioned that the bus service would there.

An attendee asked if there could be improvements to the rail viaduct as part of this project, and how Amtrak viewed this possibility. D. Stahnke stated that the rail viaduct is also reaching the end of its useful life and needs to be rebuilt. Amtrak is willing to work together on the two projects. The rail improvements could also be funded as part of the I-84 Hartford Project.

Someone asked who would operate the rail service on the Hartford Line. D. Stahnke stated that while Amtrak owns the line, the service will be administered by CTDOT. CTDOT will seek an operator for the service, and it will be priced competitively with commuter rail. There was a question on whether there will be a rail connection to Bradley Airport. D. Stahnke stated that there have been studies that looked at using the Griffin Line for this. This is not part of the construction of the Hartford Line now, but there will be bus shuttle service with connections between the airport and rail as part of that project.

There was a comment on the overall need to make rail a more feasible option for freight. D. Stahnke agreed, noting that New England is a challenge for distributors because it is a bit of a cul-de-sac for freight rail movement. Right now, it is not cost effective for many freight carriers to choose rail over highway.

There was a question on whether there has been discussion with the General Assembly on the I-84 Hartford Project. R. Armstrong answered that he has not had any direct interactions with the General Assembly. He works through the CTDOT Commissioner, who coordinates directly with Governor Malloy.

5. Written Comment Received at the Meeting

Partial solution for traffic congestion during I-84 re-construction:

Before any re-construction of I-84 is starting the ECG Bicycle and Pedestrian trail should be completed to Hartford from the East, through Hartford, and to the west into Bloomfield.

Additional temporary protected trails be built on city streets separated from motor vehicles to make connections within the city by using parking on one side of streets using smaller Jersey style barriers to provide protection. These trails would intersect with the main ECG trail making bicycle travel to and within the city safe.

If alternative safe / protected travel by bicycle were available to get to work and other destinations in Hartford and adjacent locations it would greatly reduce the car traffic on I-84.

It has been found that only about 15% of people will bicycle on roads with or without bike lanes but 40% would bicycle if bicycle routes / trails are free of motor vehicles.

Those coming from greater distances could / would use surrounding commuter parking to bicycle into Hartford.