

THE I-84 HARTFORD PROJECT

Purpose and Need Working Group Meeting #1

December 18, 2013, 1:30 p.m.

Hartford Public Library | 500 Main Street | Hartford, CT 06103

In attendance:

- Bob Painter, HUB of Hartford
- Christine Tiernan, AECOM
- Jennifer Carrier, Capitol Regional Council of Governments
- Jennifer Cassidy, Chair, Asylum Hill Neighborhood
- Khara Dodds, City of Hartford
- Lia Yim, Capitol Regional Council of Governments
- Lynn Ferrari, President, Coalition to Strengthen Sheldon-Charter Oak Neighborhood
- Michelle Herrell, Federal Highway Administration
- Mike Morehouse, Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc.
- Mike Riley, President, Connecticut Motor Transport Association
- Rich Armstrong, Connecticut Department of Transportation
- Stacy Graham-Hunt, Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc.
- Steve DelPapa, Connecticut Department of Transportation
- Tim Ryan, TranSystems, Inc.
- Toni Gold, President of the West End Civic Association

Mike Morehouse opened up the meeting. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves, stated their role on the project and the organizations that they are affiliated with.

Christine Tiernan gave an overview of the project's Purpose and Need statement. She said it is an evolving document that lays out the process for the alternatives analysis. She provided a handout with a general definition and key points of Purpose and Need statements.

Rich Armstrong explained that a draft of the Purpose and Need statement was written so that more funding could be obtained from the Federal Highway Administration for the I-84 project.

Khara Dodds asked what the time frame was for completing the Purpose and Need statement. Christine Tiernan said the Purpose and Need statement revision process will continue until the Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Assessment is drafted.

Working Group member Toni Gold said the Purpose and Need statement is the mission statement for the entire project. The current draft is way too long and too specific; it reads like a laundry list. The document seems to only talk about improving I-84 and nothing else. The last paragraph of the statement should go in the beginning of the statement.

Rich Armstrong said he agreed.

Toni Gold said she had already rewritten the first paragraph of the Purpose and Need statement. She read the following statement aloud:

“The purpose of the I-84 Hartford project is to address the highway’s structural deficiencies, congestion and safety problems while maintaining needed access, and at the same time reduce its adverse impact and footprint on the city of Hartford, integrating it more closely into the regional multimodal transportation system, both existing and planned in this key transportation hub in the Capitol City. In addition the redesign of the I-84 mainline and the interchanges between Flatbush Avenue and I-91 will support the City of Hartford’s economic development and urban design goals, and will support the State of Connecticut’s goals of energy efficiency, a gradual shift away from the automobile to other transportation modes, responsible growth, and combatting global warming.”

She said she would provide a copy of her draft to the project team and to the FHWA.

Working Group member Bob Painter said he liked Toni Gold’s proposed paragraph except the part about global warming; this is a topic that might not mean much to many people.

Toni Gold said the term “energy efficiency” maybe more appropriate.

Rich Armstrong said he liked it, but it needs to address alternatives.

Members of the group emphasized that the Purpose and Need statement should handle transportation issues first.

Working Group member Mike Riley stated that this is primarily a highway project, and the most important thing is that it the highway moves people safely and efficiently. Currently I-84 is too congested not meeting travelers’ and commerce needs.

Toni Gold said it is not just a highway project and asked about the possibility of making the highway smaller.

Mike Riley disagreed with the suggestion to make the highway smaller.

Toni Gold said the Purpose and Need statement should include consideration of shifting travel from automobile use to other modes of transportation.

Michelle Herrell said researching other modes of transportation are part of the I-84 project.

Rich Armstrong reminded the group that the role of the Working Group is to help integrate some of these opportunities into the Purpose and Need statement while making sure the statement meets NEPA regulations, and supports the selection of the best alternative.

Working Group member Jennifer Cassidy said although the highway is important, she is concerned about more streets being cut off in Hartford. Local roads and sustainability needs to be incorporated into the Purpose and Need statement.

Mike Morehouse said to simply maintain I-84, in its current configuration, would not help meet the city's goals. Currently the city has a poorly connected street grid.

Tim Ryan said the project team did not want another viaduct and that it was not looking to expand the highway, rather it is looking to reduce infrastructure and environmental impacts. CTDOT is looking into relocating the railroad track and Union Station. The project team may be talking about this at the next Public Advisory Committee meeting on Feb. 11, 2014.

Some group members agreed that "solving traffic congestion" should not be listed as a goal in the Purpose and Needs statement. It may be an unattainable goal and there may not be an alternative for this goal.

Toni Gold reemphasized her point of making the Purpose and Need statement a broad view of the project that included transportation and social objectives recognizing other modes of transportation to help meet these objectives. There is a lot of detail about the structural deficiencies in the current Purpose and Need statement.

Rich Armstrong said the structural deficiencies data is needed to defend the need for the project according to NEPA. He would rather add missing data about other modes of transportation rather than take out the information about the structural deficiencies.

Michelle Herrell suggested adding an appendix with details to the Purpose and Need Statement. That way it wouldn't overload the document, but it will still meet the federal requirements.

The group agreed that it wanted to have another 90 minute meeting prior to the next PAC meeting.

Rich Armstrong said NEPA's guidelines would be sent out to Working Group members as reference as well as other links to resources.

The meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m.