
THE I-84 HARTFORD PROJECT

Purpose and Need Working Group Meeting Summary, Meeting #2

Thursday, February 6, 2014

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

Mike Morehouse, of the I-84 Hartford Project Team, opened the meeting at approximately 10:30 a.m.

The following handouts were distributed: a meeting agenda, a draft of a proposed Vision statement, a draft Purpose and Need Statement, and NEPA Guidance on Purpose and Need Statements.

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), said that improvements still need to be made to the Purpose and Need Statement. It needs to be consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidelines, but it also needs to match the values previously mentioned by members of the Working Group.

Vision Statement

Morehouse said the project team drafted a Vision statement, a document that will guide the development of project alternatives. The Vision was inspired by content that Working Group member Toni Gold wrote as an introduction to the Purpose and Need Statement. She read that content at the last meeting. The Vision statement is consistent with Purpose and Need and expands upon it by providing a holistic approach to addressing broader city, state and regional issues such as adopting Complete Streets principles in the project, being compatible with Hartford's urban design goals, and maintaining consistency with Connecticut's energy efficiency and responsible growth goals..

Morehouse said the Project Team will strive to address the I-84 deficiencies noted in the Purpose and Need Statement as well as incorporate improvements for local streets and connectivity throughout the community.

Morehouse read the vision statement aloud and asked for feedback from the group.

Mike Riley, representing the Connecticut Motor Transport Association, said he wanted to add language to the Vision statement to include and recognize the importance of freight transport.

Bob Painter, representing the Hub of Hartford, said to add the words "reduce future maintenance costs" in the introductory statement. Painter also suggested that the Vision statement be referenced in the Purpose and Need Statement.

Toni Gold, representing the West End Civic Association, said the language in the Vision statement should be more forceful, using the word "will" instead of "would." She said she would also like to see language added that says the highway will be a better neighbor to the City of Hartford.

Gold said the group needs to focus on the Purpose and Need Statement because it is the legally binding document.

Armstrong said the Purpose and Need Statement can still be improved upon. He also asked for the distinction between the words “will” and “would” and asked AECOM and FHWA to comment.

Christine Tiernan, of the Project Team (AECOM), said “would” implies that the action hasn’t happened yet. She suggested use of the word “strive.” Bob Painter suggested using the words ‘will strive’.

Michelle Herrell, of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), said the word ‘will’ is used in the Record of Decision (ROD) document or in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document that concludes the NEPA process. Therefore, the Purpose and Need statement will continue to use “would.”

Addressing Traffic Congestion

Riley said he did not agree with a statement written in the previous meeting’s notes: *“The group agreed that “solving traffic congestion” should not be listed as a goal in the Purpose and Need Statement. It may be an unattainable goal and consequently there may not be an alternative that can satisfy this goal.”*

Tim Ryan, of the project team, said while the goal of “solving traffic congestion” may not be attainable, reducing delays on the highway might be a better goal.

Armstrong said the goal is listed in the Purpose and Need Statement as “reducing” congestion and said the question is to what degree the congestion can be reduced.

Someone asked Mike Riley if truckers often use I-691 in order to bypass congestion on I-84 in Hartford. Riley said yes, that sometimes they do.

Alternatives Analysis Evaluation Process

Tiernan talked about the Alternatives Analysis process and described several other Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement processes that have taken place throughout the country. She showed the matrix evaluation systems that were used in each case. This is a process the I-84 Hartford Project will also go through in the future, she said.

Gold said she wanted “good neighbor” factors to be added as evaluation criteria in the matrix that is used for this project.

Morehouse discussed the Alternatives Analysis process in the I-84 Waterbury Interchange Needs Study.

Ryan said the highest rated alternative does not always get selected for implementation. The rankings simply aid in decision making, but are not the final word.

Gold asked questions about rating the evaluation criteria. Armstrong said there can be a lot of discussion with stakeholders about how the evaluation criteria are rated and how they will be presented when it is time to go through this process for the I-84 Hartford Project.

Riley asked where the alternatives would come from. Armstrong said the 2010 HUB Study would be a starting point for creating alternatives. There will also be a required “no-build” alternative. Ryan said more alternatives can always be added to the process.

Armstrong said alternatives would probably go before the Public Advisory Committee beginning in the first quarter of 2014.

Tiernan continued showing evaluation matrices and said the project team did not have a preference of the format that was used. Some of the matrices were qualitative evaluations; others were quantitative. She also showed a sample matrix that could be used for the I-84 Hartford Project.

Painter said it would be useful to show maps and images in the matrix used for this project.

Gold asked if the sample could be emailed to the group.

Armstrong said as long as the group understood that it was just a very preliminary draft.

Gold said the HUB Study did not look at any interchange configurations, which she thinks is important. Ryan agreed that it was important.

Gold said it is important to continue explaining the alternatives process to the public. She thinks members of the public may be okay with making drastic changes to the I-84 Hartford corridor as long as a well-thought out plan is explained to them, she said.

Guidelines for Creating a Purpose and Need Statement

Painter asked what items the Project Team would like for the Working Group to note from the guidelines for creating a Purpose and Need Statement document.

Tiernan referenced a project on page 21 of that document. Citing another example, she said improving accessibility to the local hospital was a priority for that working group, and that ended up being the alternative that was chosen for that specific project, she said.

Painter asked how the Purpose and Need Statement might be additionally modified.

Armstrong said he would like to condense some of the technical detail, and create an Executive Summary that is more public-friendly. He said he thinks the vision statement is a good guideline.

Herrell said there is a possibility that once the Working Group has submitted the final version of its Purpose and Need Statement to other federal agencies, these organizations will comment and may cause the statement to change. Some of these organizations could include the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), US Fish and Wildlife, and the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP).

Armstrong said he felt positive that the group was heading in the right direction.

Future Working Group Meetings

Riley said the Working Group could use his office at 60 Forest Street in Hartford for a future meeting.

Morehouse said he would create a slide that summarized the work the Purpose and Need Working Group had been doing to present at the next PAC meeting on February 11, 2014.

Gold asked if the project team could re-circulate an updated draft of the Purpose and Need Statement. Armstrong said yes and that it should be available in about two weeks.

Painter said PAC members need to know what issues are coming up in the immediate future. Armstrong said the project team is planning to give them a one to two month look ahead at upcoming topics.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:30 a.m.

In Attendance:

Purpose and Need Working Group

Mike Riley, Connecticut Motor Association
Jeff Cormier, City of Hartford (in place of Khara Dodds, City of Hartford)
Bob Painter, HUB of Hartford
Lynn Ferarri, Coalition to Strengthen Sheldon-Charter Oak Neighborhood
Toni Gold, West End Civic Association
Michelle Herrell, Federal Highway Administration
Lia Yim, CRCOG (sitting in for Jennifer Carrier, CRCOG)

I-84 Project Team

Rich Armstrong, Connecticut Department of Transportation
Tim Ryan, TranSystems Corporation
Mike Morehouse, Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc.
Stacy Graham-Hunt, Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc.
Christine Tiernan, AECOM