

## Report of Meeting

**Date and Time: Wednesday, November 12, 2014, 9:00 AM**

**Location: FHI, 416 Asylum Street, Hartford**

**Subject: Urban Design Working Group #1**

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### 1. Project Briefing

The meeting began and everyone introduced himself / herself. Rich Armstrong provided a brief background on the I-84 Project efforts, including community involvement, Public Advisory Committee efforts, and previous and current Working Group efforts. Michael Morehouse next provided an overview of the agenda. He briefly presented the history of the I-84 corridor, its construction, and the subsequent 1970 *Environmental and Joint Use Study*.

## 2. Urban Design Concepts

M. Morehouse discussed the concept of complete streets. In addition, David Spillane discussed why urban design is important, as well as what Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is.

M. Morehouse discussed the concept of moving the rail to the north of its current location near the station. This could better connect the Asylum Hill neighborhood to the downtown area, a common goal of many. Frank Hageman stated that he supported connectivity to the downtown as well as complete streets planning. He noted that his walk to the FHI office from Asylum Hill this morning was terrible because of the poor pedestrian environment that results from the construction, limited pedestrian signals, high traffic speeds, and vacant lots. He noted that Hartford roadways could benefit from complete streets types of improvements. He questioned if the purpose of the study is to try to redesign the highway around the other on-going and future developments. He further explained that the new stadium planning and projections should better consider *CTfastrak* in their parking projections.

F. Hageman questioned whether there are calculations on the impacts/benefit of *CTfastrak*. D. Stahnke stated that the estimated mode shift to *CTfastrak* from I-84 is not a significant percentage.

Michael Zaleski voiced his support for better connections between Hartford neighborhoods and the central business district (CBD). Khara Dodds added that the City is interested in connectivity between Downtown North and the CBD. The City generally does not support additional surface parking. There was additional support from Working Group members to better connect both Frog Hollow and Asylum Hill to downtown.

M. Morehouse questioned the group on how they suggested improving the existing street network, especially to create better connections. Are there underutilized streets that can be enhanced to improve the overall network? Some expressed the desire to improve the walking experience, especially the experience between downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.

F. Hageman voiced his support for complete streets. Deborah Howes referenced small town main streets and that light congestion is generally perceived favorably. K. Dodds added that Hartford has too many one-way directional roads that lead straight to an I-84 ramp. Some of these easy access points are good, but too many encourage a high-speed entrance / exodus into or from the CBD.

There was discussion about the number of ramps that I-84 has in the project area and the potential for reducing this number with corridor improvements. There was discussion of whether all the interchanges are needed and whether the city network can be enhanced / expanded to better serve the traffic in the downtown area. R. Armstrong noted that the concept of complete streets is a challenge because of all of the ramps and the real estate they occupy.

F. Hageman suggested that there will be resistance to reducing the number of ramps from government and corporations. T. Ryan stated the benefits of fewer interchanges, including that the I-84 mainline will be less congested with fewer ramps. M. Morehouse agreed that too many ramps have a negative impact on the highway safety. Bob Painter stated that Aetna would likely want to keep the Sigourney Street ramps.

Norman Garrick disagreed with the concept of ramp reduction, stating that the problem in Hartford is the type, rather than number, of ramps that exist. He stated that fewer ramps would concentrate traffic more so onto certain city streets. He cited other examples, such as those in New Haven, where the

ramps essentially merge into city streets. There was additional discussion on ramp design and how they could better integrate into the street network.

B. Painter voiced support for: 1) efficiently moving truck traffic through the corridor on I-84, 2) reducing the number of ramps in the study area, and 3) reconnecting the city streets as much as possible. He questioned whether it would be better to keep full interchanges or partial interchanges, if in fact, the number of ramps is reduced. T. Ryan stated there is a delicate balance between reducing the number of interchanges, which will improve the mainline traffic operations, and potentially introducing more traffic on some local roads due to the reduced mainline access. Lynn Ferrari stated that too many people use the highway as a local road, getting on and off between Sisson and Capital Avenues. If the local roads were more functional, the public would not do this. She suggested focusing on better moving vehicles on Capital Avenue.

It was stated that the project should strive to strike a balance between traffic congestion, number of ramps, flow and character of city streets, i.e. take a holistic approach.

F. Hageman questioned the difficulty of moving the rail line. D. Stahnke stated that there are clear benefits to Amtrak if the rail line were relocated. The existing horizontal and vertical geometry approaching Union Station is substandard and the existing rail viaduct in front of Union Station is structurally deficient and needs to be replaced. L. Ferrari supported the concept of building a new rail station, north of the highway and turning the existing Union Station into a bus station. There were other suggestions to improving east-west transit connections in Hartford.

### **3. Next Steps / Future Meetings**

M. Morehouse asked the group what they would like to specifically discuss at upcoming meetings. Would people like to discuss the potential design of particular areas? He noted that it would be most useful if the group provided guidance for future discussions.

There were questions and interest on how different interchanges could be eliminated and how traffic would be impacted (e.g. Sisson Avenue). In addition, there was interest in further discussing specific concepts related to untangling city streets.

The next meeting will be scheduled for early 2015.