



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

**Date and Time: Thursday, April 20, 2017, 4 - 8 PM**

**Location: Hartford Public Library 500 Main Street, Hartford**

**Subject: Open Planning Studio #12**

### **1. Meeting Advertising**

The Project Team advertised the twelfth Open Planning Studio in the following ways:

- Creating a press release and sending it out via the Connecticut Department of Transportation Communications Office and a direct email to select news sources.
- Creating a visually appealing double-sided English / Spanish postcard which was distributed and displayed at libraries, community centers, neighborhood meetings, schools, pop up events, and local business gathering places.
- Sending two e-bulletins to the 2,600 person contact list before the event. One e-bulletin went out two weeks prior to the event, and the other went out three days before the event.
- Posting the event details to social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) at least two times prior to the event.
- Developing English / Spanish newspaper display ads which were submitted and printed in the following publications before the event:
  - Hartford Courant
  - Hartford News
  - La Voz Hispana
  - Identidad Latina
  - The West Indian American
  - Viva Hartford
  - Northend Agent's
- Submitting event information to the following local / neighborhood communications:
  - West End Civic Association Newsletter
  - Hartford 2000
  - Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association Newsletter
  - Farmington Avenue Alliance
  - SoDo Neighborhood Revitalization Zone
  - Broad Street Happenings (Trinity / Behind the Rocks)
  - Real Hartford

### **2. Meeting Schedule and Attendance**

The Open Planning Studio (OPS) took place on Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 8 PM. The event included a public presentation, workshops on the multimodal station planning process and I-

84 / I-91 Interchange Study, as well as an open house where members of the public could obtain project information and speak directly with Project Team members.

68 members of the public attended the OPS.

### **3. Informational Boards**

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

1. I-84 Study Area Map
2. Integrating I-84 Into the City
3. Building Impacts: Lowered Alternative
4. Multimodal Station Design Goals
5. Multimodal Station Planning and Design Schedule
6. Multimodal Station Planning Concepts (5 boards)
7. Multimodal Station Programming Matrix
8. Multimodal Station Study Area
9. Complete Streets
10. Capital Gateway Study Limits (City of Hartford Board)
11. Successful Master Plan Precedent: Union Station, Denver, CO (City of Hartford board)
12. Successful Master Plan Precedent: Union Station, Washington, DC (City of Hartford board)
13. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study Basemap
14. I-84 / I-91 Transit Map
15. Interchange Rendering: Coltsville Reconnected to the River
16. Interchange Rendering: New Riverfront Park and Boulevard with I-91 Below
17. Interchange Rendering: Connecticut River as Focus Between Hartford and East Hartford
18. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study: Preliminary Alternatives
19. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study: Three Preliminary Alternatives
20. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study: Wetlands - CT Soils and National Wetlands Inventory
21. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study: Flood Prone Areas
22. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study: Potential Environmental Justice (EJ) Population
23. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study: Key Constraints
24. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study Workshop (5 boards)

### **4. Event Overview**

The Open Planning Studio began at 4 PM, during which time members of the public were invited to engage with several boards related to the I-84 Hartford Project, multimodal station planning process, and I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study. The Project Team delivered a presentation at 5:30, followed by concurrent workshops on the multimodal station planning process and I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study.

### **5. Presentation**

#### Introduction

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), began the presentation by thanking all those in attendance for their interest in the project. He outlined the presentation agenda, explaining that it would begin with an update on the I-84 Hartford Project, followed by a discussion of the multimodal station planning process, and concluding with an introduction to the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study.

R. Armstrong began the presentation by stating that the Federal Highway Administration has agreed with the I-84 Hartford Project Team's determination to eliminate Alternatives 2 and 4, the elevated and tunneled highways, from further consideration. The Level 1 Screening

recommendations are now being reviewed by the Cooperating and Participating Agencies for concurrence. He explained that the Level 2 Screening process would likely result in a reasonable range of two or three variations of Alternative 3, the lowered highway, for consideration in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

R. Armstrong said the Project Team recently refreshed their cost estimates for the project following several refinements to the lowered highway. He said the projected cost for the lowered highway remains unchanged from earlier estimates of \$4.3-5.3 billion. He explained that further study of the lowered highway, including refinements to the east end of the project area, multimodal station planning, and construction staging, would help narrow cost estimates.

R. Armstrong concluded this segment of the presentation by noting that the consulting firm AECOM is conducting an ongoing technical analysis of environmental concerns. He said a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will be available for public and agency comment in the summer of 2018. He concluded that a final EIS is anticipated in the summer of 2019, followed by a Record of Decision in the fall of 2019.

#### Multimodal Station Planning

Gina Trimarco, of TranSystems Corporation (TSC), introduced the multimodal station planning process and study. She explained that relocating the railroad tracks west of their current alignment to lower I-84 would require the construction of a new rail station. She said ongoing station discussions focus on the feasibility of including local and intercity bus transit in a unified multimodal station.

G. Trimarco outlined the study area, which consists of roughly 20 acres encompassing the historic Union Station and extending as far as Cogswell Street north of Asylum Avenue. She said the distance between Union Station and the relocated rail platforms would be roughly 1,000 feet, or a four-minute walk. She explained that the study will evaluate several concepts over the course of the year, and define the station's programming and site layout. She noted that the study would not determine the station's architectural design.

G. Trimarco explained that the study would examine various modes of transportation, including regional and corridor rail, buses, taxis, private vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians. She said the programming process for the station would consist of a six-step process with a heavy focus on gathering and verifying relevant information, including the station's needs for amenities, equipment, and access. She said the project team already knows the projected ridership of expected rail systems, the number of parking displacements, and that the station will include two 1,000-foot-long island platforms, each 24 feet in width and serving four tracks. She stated that the project team will evaluate integrating the historic Union Station into the larger transit facility, and how to encourage development concordant with the City's new form-based zoning code.

G. Trimarco invited attendees to participate in a multimodal station planning workshop following the presentation, and to take a survey on design goals and priorities. She said the project team aimed to conclude its data gathering at the April 25<sup>th</sup> OPS in East Hartford, identify a preferred site layout in September, and complete a conceptual station layout by the end of the year. She invited Jamie Bratt, of the City of Hartford, to continue the presentation.

#### Capital Gateway Master Plan

J. Bratt explained that the City of Hartford was invited by CTDOT to work closely on the I-84 Hartford Project. She said the City began discussions with key stakeholders, including the Greater Hartford Transit District, employers, residents and their own consulting team of HOK and WSP (formerly known as Parsons Brinckerhoff) to develop a master plan around the new

multimodal station. She noted the plan would seek to identify a connection between the new station structure and the historic Union Station. She concluded that HOK and WSP (formerly known as Parsons Brinckerhoff) are renowned locally and internationally, and that they would assist City staff in evaluating technical considerations.

J. Bratt identified Washington, D.C.'s Union Station and Denver, CO's Union Station as successful models of what the City hopes to achieve in Hartford. She said this would be one of the most transformative civic projects in Hartford's history, and that it is important that the historic Union Station be integrated into the fabric of new development. She explained that the master plan would examine long term economic development opportunities, how development guides the cityscape and connections, and how residents and employers are included. She said the City is concerned about impacts to surrounding neighborhoods, and that the masterplan will look beyond where the highway ramps end.

### I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study

R. Armstrong said the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study has been ongoing for several months. He provided a brief history of the interchange, explaining that it was built in the 1960s and modified in the late 1980s. He stated that the interchange now carries 275 thousand vehicles each day, and that its obsolete design is constrained by the Connecticut River, the dike system, railroad, and built development.

R. Armstrong explained that the I-84 Hartford Project will make improvements along the I-84 corridor between Park Street and the existing downtown tunnel, shy of the I-84 / I-91 interchange. He said that despite dramatic improvements and opportunities, the viaduct project would not address the primary cause of congestion on I-84 and I-91. He demonstrated how the interchange acts as a bottleneck when both I-84 and I-91 are reduced from three lanes to two lanes in all directions of travel. He concluded that the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study seeks to address the interchange bottleneck and examine the feasibility of providing three continuous through lanes on I-84 and I-91 in Hartford.

R. Armstrong outlined the three potential alternatives for improving the I-84 / I-91 interchange. He said the first would examine the feasibility of improving the interchange in its current location and widening the Bulkeley Bridge. The second would realign a portion of I-84 to the north along the railroad and across the Connecticut River into East Hartford, meeting a reconfigured I-84 / Route 2 interchange. The third would realign I-84 along to the south towards the Charter Oak Bridge. He said the study would examine the feasibility and associated impacts of each vision.

R. Armstrong emphasized that the study also seeks to understand the greater vision for Hartford and East Hartford. He said the study will explore how changes to the transportation system could result in improvements to quality of life for area residents, river access, development opportunities, and new public spaces. He noted the study will examine both the regional and local transportation systems and multimodal transit. He concluded that the team is six months into the study and is still gathering information on existing conditions. He said conclusions would be available next year following the narrowing and thorough vetting of alternatives, including the concept presented by Congressman John Larson. He encouraged the public to come to the next Open Planning Studio in the fall to receive updates.

Christine Tiernan, of AECOM, spoke to the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study's environmental considerations. She said environmental considerations would more so relate to the natural environment than the I-84 Hartford Project, which includes many developmental and environmental justice (EJ) considerations. She explained how the environmental process would examine existing wetlands and flood zones, and identify ways to avoid and minimize wetland areas under various potential alignments. She noted that any interchange reconfiguration

project will include complex permitting processes with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Environmental Protection, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

C. Tiernan noted that there are robust EJ communities in the Hartford area, and that CTDOT will perform their due diligence in ensuring not to disproportionately impact minority and low-income communities. She said an interchange reconfiguration project would require an EIS that examines environmental impacts, socioeconomic impacts, and overall project feasibility from transportation, cost and mobility perspectives. She concluded that an interchange project would be wholly separate from the I-84 Hartford Project, inclusive of an independent Purpose and Need Statement and National Environmental Policy Act process.

M. Glass spoke to the opportunities that relocating the I-84 / I-91 interchange could bring. He said the study will look at opportunities that could be realized over the next few decades in Hartford and East Hartford. He said both municipalities have constrained and fragmented cores with distinct districts separated by built and natural barriers. He said I-84 is a barrier to growth in Downtown Hartford, the interchange generates significant congestion on both highways and the local road network, and I-91 and the flood control system create barriers between the Connecticut River and Downtown Hartford and East Hartford. He noted that the flood control system is in suboptimal condition and would need to be considered alongside any improvements to I-91. He said the infrequently used railroad along the Hartford riverfront should also be considered. He asked how reducing the highway infrastructure's footprint could benefit East Hartford.

M. Glass began his detailed explanation of each interchange reconfiguration alternative by noting the I-291 bypass concept. He said the project was not completed due to local community and environmental opposition. He emphasized that the completed bypass would only have removed 5-10% of trips from I-84 because so much traffic is destined for or originates in Downtown Hartford.

M. Glass presented a southern interchange relocation alternative which considers Congressman Larson's plan to tunnel I-84 through southern Hartford, but come to grade near the Charter Oak Bridge for an aboveground interchange with I-91. He said this alternative also differs from the Congressman's concept in that it includes capping I-91 in its existing alignment rather than tunnel the north-south highway linearly beneath the Connecticut River. He said capping I-91 could still create land above the highway.

Turning towards the conceptual northern interchange relocation alternative, M. Glass said I-84 could take a new alignment north of Union Station parallel to the railroad, interchanging with I-91 in the North Meadows before crossing over the Connecticut River into East Hartford. He noted that both northern and southern realignments could allow the Bulkeley Bridge to become a local boulevard between Hartford and East Hartford, supporting development and multimodal transportation. He concluded that all interchange alternatives are being considered.

M. Glass highlighted Hartford and East Hartford's great parks, including those belonging to Riverfront Recapture, Coltsville National Historical Park, and the iQuilt Plan efforts. He said removing the highway barriers could create a combined framework of public space for cities and a powerful green network connecting destinations. He noted the potential of these networks to catalyze development by providing riverfront amenities. He contrasted cross sections of the existing I-91 corridor and the potential capped I-91. He noted the 500-year flood elevation and flood control barriers, and the potential for park space overtop the highway cap.

Turning to economic development opportunities, M. Glass said relocating the I-84 / I-91 interchange could result in reinvestment, new development, improvements to the public realm and complete streets in sites as far as Brainard Airport. He said the relocation could catalyze development on 100 acres of land in Hartford and 50 acres in East Hartford. He noted

opportunities for improved mass transit, including the north, south and eastward expansion of **CTfastrak**. He invited attendees to participate in the interchange workshop following the presentation.

## **6. Multimodal Station Planning Workshop**

G. Trimarco led a public workshop on the multimodal station planning process immediately following the presentation. About 20 members of the public participated. The purpose of the workshop was to gather data on the public's needs and priorities for a multimodal station in Hartford. It consisted of an exercise using the Multimodal Station Design Goals board followed by the review of Concepts A - D for the multimodal station site layout.

The workshop resulted in the following key takeaways:

- Station concepts A, B, C and D- Phase 1 can be built independently of a highway cap; concept D- Phase II makes use of the highway cap
- All concepts should provide strong economic development opportunities on surrounding land
- Good bus circulation and access is important for both local CTtransit services and intercity (i.e. Peter Pan and Greyhound) buses
- Any design should incorporate good pedestrian and bicycle access, maintaining pedestrian connectivity is important during construction
- Union Station will be preserved under all concepts but based on the concept selected may not serve a transit purpose in the future
- Average annual Greyhound and Peter Pan bus ridership is expected to rise with the construction of new facilities and rail expansion
- A structured parking garage of 500-600 spaces should be integrated with Transit-Oriented Development principles and be accessible to non-station users

### Multimodal Station Survey

There was also a survey conducted during this workshop. The results include:

Many of the respondents preferred that all modes be co-located in the same station, although that was not a deal breaker.

There was no clear consensus on which of the concepts, A through D, were preferred

There was some concern with proceeding with concept D, as it relied on a two-phase construction plan to work; however, others favored this concept as it provides a strong physical connection to the downtown by building over the cap

Respondents liked the central location and the architectural features of the current Union Station, but felt that the space is underutilized

Any new station constructed should include:

- Parking
- Restaurants
- Restrooms
- Free Wi-Fi
- An information center

Respondents frequently visit Union Station. They visited the station for many reasons, and their activity suggests that they used the station to access all modes of travel (rail, local bus and

intercity bus). Many of those who use Union Station get dropped off while others walk or take local bus.

## **7. I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study Workshop**

M. Glass and M. Coulom led a public workshop on the I-84 / I-91 Interchange Study immediately following the presentation. Five members of the public participated. The purpose of the workshop was to gather data on the public's vision, priorities and questions about the future of transportation in the Hartford Area. It consisted of a guided discussion using the five workshop boards. Participants were invited to ask the study team their questions about the interchange and transportation, and to identify their own vision for transportation in Metro Hartford. They were asked what Hartford and East Hartford's greatest assets are, what their concerns are for environmental and property impacts, and how big or small the study should imagine.

The workshop resulted in the following key takeaways:

- Most participants and OPS attendees favor rethinking the transportation system entirely
  - Comparisons were made to Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Providence, RI, and Boston, MA
  - Multiple people supported improved neighborhood connections and bike facilities
- Questions included:
  - Requests for more information on the Connecticut River esplanade
  - Why and how many historic properties may be impacted
  - The cost of maintenance
  - The goals of development adjacent to highway ramps and in neighborhoods
- Visions for transportation in Metro Hartford included:
  - Investment in multimodal transportation, including rail and bicycle infrastructure
  - Improved safety for all users
  - Reliability of service, particularly bus
  - River access
- The public identified the following as regional assets and opportunities:
  - The Connecticut River
  - Diversity
  - Trail systems
  - Small-scale development
  - Bushnell Park
- Concerns for potential environmental and property impacts included:
  - Historic structures
  - Affordable housing
  - Maintenance and constructability
  - Integration of the highway and development into the urban fabric
  - Congestion and air pollution