

Report of Meeting

Date and Time: Tuesday, June 27th, 2023, 12:00 PM – 1:30 PM

Location: Stamford Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard, Stamford

Subject: Project Advisory Committee Meeting #1

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS		
Phil Magalnick	Stamford Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory Council	IDEASforADA@StamfordCT.gov
Terry Adams	South End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ)	tadams@stamfordct.gov
Marc Schneider	Glenbrook Neighborhood Association	Marc721131@att.net
Aris Ristau	UConn Stamford	aristide.ristau@uconn.edu
Angelo Bochanis	People Friendly Stamford	angelob1999@hotmail.com
Frank Petise	City of Stamford	fpetise@stamfordct.gov
Luke Buttenwieser	City of Stamford	LButtenwieser@StamfordCT.gov
Vasili Kelesidis	City of Stamford	vkelesidis@stamfordct.gov
Mike Moore	Stamford Downtown	moore@stamford-downtown.com
Heather Cavanagh	Stamford Chamber of Commerce	hcavanagh@stamfordchamber.com
Lyle Fishell	Cove Neighborhood Association	fishellarchitecture@yahoo.com
Aaron Miller	Stamford Mayor's Office	Amiller1@stamfordct.gov
Cynthia Bowser	West Side NRZ	cynthia.l.bowser30@gmail.com
Francis Pickering	Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG)	khadjstylianos@westcog.org
Alec Slatky	American Automobile Association (AAA)	aslatky@aanortheast.com
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION		
Jonathan Dean	Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)	jonathan.dean@ct.gov
Joe Belrose	CTDOT	Joe.Belrose@ct.gov
Neil Patel	CTDOT	nilesh.patel@ct.gov
Carlo Leone	CTDOT	carlo.leone@ct.gov
CONSULTANT TEAM		
John Eberle	Stantec	john.eberle@stantec.com
Emily Valentino	Stantec	emily.valentino@stantec.com
Marcy Miller	FHI Studio	mmiller@fhistudio.com
Kevin Rivera	FHI Studio	krivera@fhistudio.com

2. Welcome & Introductions

Jonathan Dean, of CTDOT, thanked everyone for attending the first Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting for the I-95 Stamford Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) study. He introduced the project team from the Department as well as the consultants, including those who would present during the meeting. He then provided an overview of the agenda, which included:

- 1) Welcome & Introductions

- 2) Project Advisory Committee
- 3) Study & PEL Process Overview
- 4) Existing Conditions Assessment
- 5) Schedule & Next Steps
- 6) Keys to Success
- 7) Discussion
- 8) Adjourn

Marcy Miller, of FHI Studio, provided highlights of the organizations represented on the PAC. She stated that the study team appreciates additional suggestions of new participants. She discussed the composition of the PAC noting that each organization represented is encouraged to have one PAC member and one alternate. M. Miller stated the roles of PAC members are to distribute information to their respective group, share feedback with the study team, provide input on draft recommendations, and review and comment on study materials. She spoke about the study and meeting materials available on the project website.

M. Miller next asked the group about date and time preferences for future PAC meetings. She asked the group if there are days that do or do not work. Heather Cavanagh, of Stamford Chamber of Commerce, said that Wednesdays are not desirable. Luke Bittenwieser, of the City of Stamford, added that Fridays are not desirable because many work from home on Fridays. Terry Adams, from the Stamford Board of Representatives, suggested a virtual option. Neil Patel, of CTDOT, responded that the study team is considering a mix of virtual and in-person meetings.

3. Presentation

John Eberle and Emily Valentino, of Stantec, gave the technical portion of the presentation. They discussed the following key points:

- The study limits.
- The benefits of conducting a PEL study.
- The importance of collaborating with community partners and stakeholders to identify issues as well as alternatives to address them.
- Ongoing work being performed by the study team, including analysis of the existing and future needs in the corridor and development of the Preliminary Purpose and Need.
- An overview of the constraints in the study area, including limited right of way as well as the presence of the railroad and major utilities.
- An overview of traffic conditions along the study corridor, including delays on the mainline and summary of level of service (LOS) at intersections during AM and PM peak times.
- A summary of crashes in the study area.
- Key environmental resources that the project team will examine as part of the study.
- The project schedule and next steps.
- Different ways that the PEL process can help benefit the City of Stamford and residents.
- The 12 stakeholder meetings held to-date.

A downloadable PDF of the presentation is posted at <https://www.i95stamford.com/pac>.

4. Discussion

L. Bittenwieser asked for clarification on NEPA. M. Miller answered that NEPA is an acronym for the National Environmental Policy Act. It is the environmental documentation process that all federally-funded projects go through. It will occur after the PEL is complete. Depending upon the complexity of a project, a Categorical Exclusion (less complex) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (more complex) will be prepared for potential alternatives. If a project falls somewhere in between, an Environmental Assessment will be prepared to determine whether there are no significant impacts or an EIS is needed.

Lyle Fishell, of Cove Neighborhood Association, asked whether East Coast Greenway enhancements in Stamford would be affected by the PEL study or improvements. J. Dean answered that the PEL is considering improvements for all modes in the corridor. The PEL study has met with People Friendly Stamford several times to better understand the needs of pedestrians and cyclists in the study area. N. Patel added that the PEL study team will be coordinating with the East Coast Greenway leaders as the planning process moves forward.

Phil Magalnick, of the Stamford ADA Advisory Council, asked about accessibility for disabled residents and how their needs would be considered, particularly pedestrian travelers. He felt it was important to address and not as an afterthought suggesting that these issues relate directly to equity. J. Dean responded that accessibility improvements considering mobility equity will be included in the study. Examples include signal replacements, crosswalk improvements, accessibility barrier removal, and more. H. Cavanaugh added that these concerns have also come to the Chamber committees.

H. Cavanaugh asked if the study team is coordinating improvements associated with the Stamford Transportation Center (STC). J. Dean responded that the study team has been meeting with the STC team and that they are meeting with each other and the City to coordinate efforts. It is known that traffic congestion along I-95 is a major issue. Carlo Leone, of CTDOT, added that with all the studies in Stamford, coordination is critical.

L. Bittenwieser asked whether the study was looking at how to improve Metro-North operations as part of the PEL study. J. Dean responded that improving Metro-North is not specifically in the scope of this study; however, improving Metro-North operations is being considered by other CTDOT units. C. Leone added that there are coordinated efforts across CTDOT and Metro-North to improve services.

Marc Schneider, of Glenbrook Neighborhood Association, expressed concerns about Exit 9 and travel times near U.S. Route 1. He described bottlenecks and confusing signals/lane arrangements. J. Dean answered that signal improvements will be considered as an option to reduce congestion and improve mobility.

L. Fishell questioned whether express lanes/high occupancy vehicle lanes or encouragement of commuting can be considered to remove cars from the roads. J. Dean responded that express lanes are something to be considered. He noted that there are constraints along the corridor such as its limited right-of-way (ROW). He suggested auxiliary lanes as a tool that could eliminate some of the weaving between lanes on I-95.

The recommendation of consolidating ramps was raised by several PAC members. J. Dean stated that this would certainly help with the weaving between lanes on the highway, but a traffic analysis would better assess if removing any ramps would positively or negatively affect the City streets. He added that the study team is developing a “universe of alternatives” to help identify all possible recommendations. H. Cavanaugh asked if the CTDOT has considered closing ramps elsewhere in Connecticut to improve operations. M. Miller noted that the I-84 project in Hartford recommended closing two ramps. N. Patel added that these closures are identified as early action breakout projects and are proceeding through the funding process. Angelo Bochanis, of People Friendly Stamford, asked the study team to consider the destinations of the drivers on the highway in Stamford. J. Dean responded that the team is gathering Origin-Destination data to better understand where people are coming from and going to.

Alec Slatky, of AAA, asked how crashes contribute to congestion and traffic volume. J. Dean answered that high traffic volumes cause most of the congestion, but crashes do contribute as well. The team is considering recommendations that will improve safety.

A. Bochanis expressed concerns about any ROW expansion of I-95, especially since there is no emphasis on improving train operations. J. Dean responded that identified transit needs would be coordinated with

other units at CTDOT. J. Dean added that the NEPA process would explore further options and solutions related to all modes. N. Patel discussed the Greater Hartford Mobility Study (GHMS) which explores multimodal options to address mobility around that region. One comment that was heard from the GHMS was that there was not enough frequency for evening service. As a result, the GHMS Team is working with the City and Public Transportation to improve evening service operations. This process could follow suit.

Cynthia Bowser, of West Side NRZ, expressed concerns about the pace of Stamford's growth and its impact on I-95 congestion. She discussed disproportionate impacts associated with Stamford's growth on the City's low- and moderate-income residents who have been displaced through gentrification. J. Dean responded that understanding the needs of those living in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods are critical as part of this process. Cynthia Bowser expressed concerns for the quality of life for many low-income residents in Stamford and hopes that there will be a balanced process that helps move forward in an equitable and honest way. She also discussed eminent domain and the need for residents to be paid fairly for takings. J. Dean responded that CTDOT follows a federal process for acquisitions. If that were to be a part of any improvements, this process would ensure there is an equitable approach to acquisitions. N. Patel asked C. Bowser if there are other groups that the study team should meet with. The team would like to meet with them to understand their concerns and ensure they are considered.

Terry Adams, of South End NRZ, stated that he supports the work at I-95 at Interchange 14 in Norwalk. He asked the team to consider these types of lane modifications in Stamford. N. Patel stated that there is a separate but similar type project anticipated to begin construction next year that will provide an operational lane between Exit 6 and 7.

A. Bochanis asked whether the project team has or will be modeling impacts of traffic with increased bus and Metro-North service. J. Dean answered that has not been modeled but could be reviewed in conjunction with other CTDOT units (Transit, Rails). J. Eberle added that Phase 1 of the study has focused on looking at existing conditions and existing environmental resources. Transit improvements could be incorporated into the Phase 2 work.

M. Miller asked the PAC members if they desired more information on data collection at the next meeting. J. Eberle suggested that this group may be interested in more information on existing traffic conditions.

5. **Adjournment**

M. Miller closed the meeting at 1:30 PM.