



## Route 7-15 Norwalk

### PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC) MEETING #9

#### Meeting Summary

Date: June 29, 2023

Merritt 7 - City Hall Community Room

Time: 6:30 pm

#### Attendance

PAC Members	
Jo-Anne Horvath	Creeping Hemlock Neighborhood
Drew Berndlmaier	City of Norwalk
Todd Bryant	Norwalk Preservation Trust
Jim Carter	Norwalk River Valley Trail
Kristin Hadjstylianos	WestCOG
JoAnne McGrath	Marcus Partners/Merritt 7
Nancy Rosett	Merritt Parkway Trail Alliance
Peter Viteretto	CT ASLA
David Waters	Harbor Point/Building and Land Technology
Christopher Wigren	Preservation CT
Jim Travers	City of Norwalk
Connecticut Department of Transportation and FHWA Staff	
Kevin Burnham	CTDOT
Neil Patel	CTDOT
Krishalyn Macrohon	CTDOT
Mark McMillan	CTDOT
Project Consultant Team	
Ken Livingston	FHI Studio
Kevin Rivera	FHI Studio
John Eberle	Stantec
Emily Valentino	Stantec
Gary Sorge	Stantec
General Public	
Barbara Kinn	

#### 1. Welcome



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Krishalyn Macrohon, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone to the 9<sup>th</sup> Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting for the Route 7/15 Norwalk Project. Members of the CT DOT team, as well as the project consultant team then introduced themselves. Attending members of the PAC also introduced themselves.

### 2. Meeting Overview

Krishalyn M. reviewed the meeting's agenda items:

1. Introduction
2. Where We Started
3. What We Have Found
4. EA/EIE Recommendation
5. Next Steps
6. Discussion

Krishalyn M. provided project updates, discussing the status of the EA/EIE, as well as the Draft Section 106 and the 4(f) evaluation. Krishalyn M. stated that the EA/EIE will be released for public review on July 18<sup>th</sup>, and the public will have 45 days to review and comment on the document. With an official public hearing scheduled for August 16<sup>th</sup>. She then discussed that a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) has been developed with consulting parties, which guides treatment and mitigation if impacted cultural resources. Krishalyn M. stated that the Department of Interior (DOI) then has 45 days to review concurrent with EA/EIE comment period and signed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) prior to issuing a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI).

Krishalyn M. turned over the presentation to John Eberle, of Stantec.

### 4. Presentation

John E. presented an overview of the NEPA/CEPA process, including steps that have already been taken, such as developing a purpose and need, data collection, alternatives analysis and commence impact analyses, refining project purpose and need statement, and preparing a draft environmental assessment/environmental impact evaluation. He expressed that conducting a public hearing would be the next step in the NEPA/CEPA process.

Next, John E. recapped the project's stated purpose and need: The purpose of the Route 7/15 Norwalk Project is to complete and improve roadway system linkages (between Route 7, Route 15 (Merritt Parkway), and Main Avenue in Norwalk) , improve safety, and increase mobility options for all roadway users.

John E. discussed the alternative analysis process, where the project team reviewed over 20 initial concepts, ultimately deciding to evaluate Alternatives 21D and 26, as well as the No-Action/No-Build alternative, which is used as a benchmark to measure the environmental impacts of build alternatives.

John E. then provided an overview of the no build, 21 D, and 26 alternatives. He emphasized that alternatives 21D and 26 would both improve traffic operations and address safety issues.

John E. presented a list of the resource analysis sections within the EA/EIE document. He highlighted key topics that have come up in discussion during previous PAC meetings such as traffic, bicycles and pedestrians, noise, historic & archaeological resources, visual impact assessment, Merritt Parkway landscape, and cost analysis.

John E. discussed bicycle and pedestrian assessment, adding that both alternatives have the same benefits and impacts to bicycling and pedestrian conditions.

John E. presented findings from the highway traffic noise assessment, noting that neither alternative will increase noise level by more than 1 dB(a).



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John E. then provided an overview of the potential effects to historic properties and resources. He noted that both Alternative 21D and Alternative 26 would have an effect on historic properties including the designed landscape of the Merritt Parkway Historic District, Metro-North Bridge, Norwalk River Bridge, Main Avenue Bridge, and the Glover Avenue bridge.

John E. discussed anticipated impacts/effects to NRHP eligible archaeological sites, noting that Alternative 26 would have impacts to two sites, while Alternative 21D and the no build alternative would have no impacts to sites.

John E. turned the presentation over to Gary Sorge, of Stantec, who discussed the Merritt Parkway Landscape Assessment. Gary S. noted that the landscape of the Merritt Parkway was designed to blend and enhance natural surroundings, expressing that preserving the character of the parkway was strongly considered in developing both alternatives 26 and 21D.

Gary S. also discussed the visual differences between Alternative 21D and Alternative 26, noting that 21D has a larger footprint and impact to the landscape as compared to alternative 26.

John E. provided an overview of the cost analysis of both Alternative 21D and 26, providing a summary of total magnitude of each alternative along with preliminary capital construction cost estimates (2022). The cost analysis showed that Alternative 21D would have a preliminary capital construction cost of \$240-260 million, while Alternative 26 would have a cost of \$140-160 million.

Krishalyn M. then reported to the PAC that Alternative 26 was the recommended alternative to move forward for preliminary design based on less impacts to natural/cultural resources, less visual impacts, lower capital and ongoing maintenance costs, and ease of construction.

Krishalyn M. discussed next steps beginning with the release of the EA/EIE to be released for public review on July 18<sup>th</sup> with a public hearing scheduled on August 16<sup>th</sup>. She noted that the 45-day comment period closes on August 31<sup>st</sup>.

Ken Livingston of FHI Studio announces to PAC members that in addition to being able to provide comments at the public hearing on August 16<sup>th</sup>, the public can also provide comments through the project's website and emailing the project team directly.

### 5. Discussion

1. Jo-Ann H. asked the reason for the delay of the EA/EIE release and expressed disapproval of the preferred alternative (Alt 26). She found it difficult to picture how the preferred alternative will work and was convinced that the EA/EIE only favored the preferred alternative because of its cost savings. She suggested that the project team should look into other alternatives. She also mentioned that zoning in Norwalk is proposed to be rewritten and was not supportive of this too.
2. Barbara Kinn noted in regards to the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) that there is no perfect solution but expressed support of Alternative 26 as it has less visual impact to MP, reduces the access entry points and, as a result, less crashes in the Route 7/15 interchange.
3. Peter Viteretto mentioned in addition to the benefits of Alternative 26 as presented, the increased green space that Alternative 26 creates would significantly increase the economic value and, eventually, economic development to the city.
4. Kristen H. (WestCOG) said that she looked forward to hearing the comments from the public. She also brought regional concerns to the project team:
  - a. She suggested that the 7/15 Norwalk Project Team should coordinate with NRVT. NRVT is awarded funding for planning and designing for Trail bike/ped expansion



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- b. She asked to consider the electrification of rail in the 7/15 Norwalk design.
5. Nancy Rosett of NRVT noted that the handout is missing the bike/ped slide. She also stated that Alternative 26 will result in positive impacts to the City and believed that this will mitigate the illegal racing on Super 7.
6. Jim Travers of Norwalk thanked the project team for the presentation and supported the benefits that Alternative 26 offers. He suggested/asked the following things:
  - a. He suggested considering including enhanced visualization such as providing street view for future presentation.
  - b. He asked if the proposed improvements to Main Ave are viable. He would like to see the bike/ped improvements on Main Street and recommended a ribbon-cutting event to celebrate the opening of new interchange.
  - c. He asked if the project could extend the Main Ave improvements. Since the 7/15 Norwalk project will remove traffic on Main Ave (by directing them to Route 7 to access Route 15), he asked the project team to look into giving back to the residents in return.
  - d. He also suggested working with City's communication to spread the word on upcoming public hearing.
7. Drew B. of Norwalk agreed with Jim Travers and suggested using the previous rendering/visualizations from the past presentations.
8. Jim C. of NRVT said that his group has been working with other Stantec design staff on alternative trails and believed that the recommended alternative is not the better alternative necessarily. He added that Alternative 26 presented challenges on how it will accommodate the future trail. He suggested that the project team should revisit other alternatives and consider how NRVT can pass the trail, "Think of a clean slate with open mind to make the trail work."

He believed that accommodating the trail to the 7/15 Norwalk will also bring value to the City.
9. Jo-Ann H. asked how the traffic growth will affect Grist Mill.