



Route 7/15 NORWALK

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2019

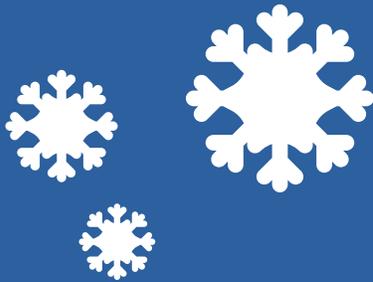
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A public workshop was held in **September 2018**. See the Meeting Materials page of 7-15norwalk.com for more info!



A Focus On Merritt Parkway's Landscape

The Merritt Parkway (Route 15) was historically characterized by its open vistas to showcase rural Connecticut.

Much has changed since the Parkway was designed nearly 100 years ago. Although it has retained its green median and forested shoulders, the aesthetics of this heavily commuted route have evolved greatly.

In September 2018, the Project Team held a Public Landscape Workshop. Community members shared perspectives on the project area's landscape characteristics and viewsheds (lines-of-sight).

The conversation focused on the existing condition of the Parkway and surrounding landscape.

A brief presentation showcased historic and current images of the Merritt Parkway. The images illustrated key view corridors and perspectives, existing visual impacts to the historic landscape character, as well as how the landscape surrounds and focuses attention to specific locations.

After the presentation, attendees broke into two work groups to discuss landscape characteristics. They were asked to consider three questions:

- What are the most appealing landscape/visual features within the project area?
- What are the least appealing landscape/visual features within the project area?
- What is most important to you?

Participants were asked to assess value of Parkway features at distinct areas: *along* the Parkway, *entering* the Parkway from Route 7, and *exiting* the Parkway onto Route 7.

Generally, the groups felt that views of the natural and built environments, traffic calming effect of the Parkway and the plant variety and visibility were the more appealing features.

The least appealing features generally included the Glover Avenue Apartments and the existing construction staging areas along with non-original bridges.

Finally, participants generally agreed that views, bridges, scale and natural resources were the most important features.

The public identified these key features:

- Water and rock ledge views
- Views of stone bridges
- The roadway's park-like quality
- Plant variety and visibility

As the alternatives are developed, additional meetings will be scheduled to continue the discussion.



The Merritt Parkway is distinguished by its median and forested shoulders. Image by Thomas McDonald for The New York Times

Project Continuing Into 2019



Community representatives on the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and the public met in the Fall of 2018 to discuss the landscape characteristics of the project area.

The Route 7/15 Project Team has met with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and members of the public on a number of occasions to gather input on how best to improve the Route 7/15 interchange through a variety of alternatives.

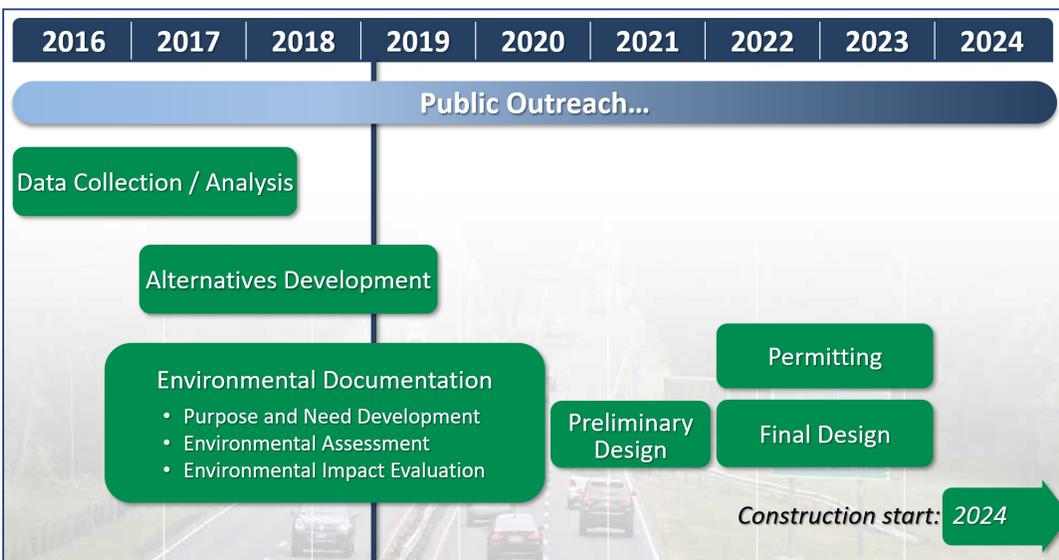
Our work to date has included holding a scoping meeting that allowed the public to provide input on the scope of the project and the preliminary alternatives. Over the past year, we have worked with various public agencies and the PAC Purpose and Need subcommittee to reach consensus on the Draft Purpose and Need Statement. Most recently the PAC and the community weighed in on existing landscape features and various ideas for integrating project roadways with the environment.

Now, the Project Team is moving forward into 2019.

Over this upcoming year, the Project Team expects to complete the existing condition analysis of the environmental documentation, continue with the alternatives screening process, eventually completing assessments of viable alternatives and completion of the Environmental Assessment document and selection of the preferred alternative. Read more about this process on page 4!

Looking forward, we plan to complete the environmental documentation process in 2020, with Preliminary Design potentially beginning in 2020, and the permitting phase and Final Design to follow, concluding in 2023. If funding is secured, construction could begin in 2024.

For additional information, visit 7-15norwalk.com and sign up for our mailing list!



The blue line indicates where we are now.

Bike/Walk Commission Explores Project Area on Foot

In October, CTDOT and the Project Team joined the Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission for a morning site walk along Glover Avenue and Main Avenue. The site walk was coordinated by the Bike/Walk Commission to provide an overview of walking and bicycling conditions on the roadways, potential connections to the Merritt 7 Station, and future connections to the Norwalk River Valley Trail. Also joining were Norwalk River Valley Trail representatives, Norwalk city staff, elected officials and members of the public.

The site walk provided *a great opportunity* for the Project Team to meet with the community and see the roadway conditions firsthand, from the *perspective of pedestrians and bicyclists.*

The group walked along Glover Avenue, Grist Mill and Main Avenue. The walk included a review of bicycle and pedestrian connections and concerns, highlighting

opportunities to enhance the walking and bicycling environment.

Overall, the site walk provided a great chance for the Project Team to meet the community and see the roadway conditions firsthand, with an eye toward the walking and bicycling experience. Everyone agreed that there were challenges for bicycle and pedestrian users.



The team looks forward to more occasions to join the community in site walks and meetings as the development and evaluation of alternatives for the 7/15 Norwalk project continue.



Screening The Alternatives

The Project Team has established an alternatives screening process to guide the evaluation of alternatives. This process uses a “tiered approach” to assess each alternative against a set of project criteria.

The first screening level (Level 1) evaluated whether each alternative satisfied the project’s Purpose and Need Statement (see box at right). Over the past few months, as part of that Level 1 screening, the Project Team evaluated over 25 alternatives.

Over 25 alternatives
were reviewed within
the first tier of screening.

At the November 2018 PAC meeting, working with the PAC, the first level of screening left us with four alternatives. These four alternatives can be found on the project website.

The next tier of screening (Level 2) will occur in early 2019. During this screening, these four alternatives will be evaluated further based on a variety of factors such as, but not limited to, integrating the improvements into the environment and historic character of the Parkway, costs, and other potential impacts.



WHAT IS PURPOSE & NEED?

From the Federal Highway Administration:

The National Environmental Policy Act, also known as NEPA, is an environmental law that established the decision-making process that agencies must follow prior to the design and construction of transportation projects using Federal funding or requiring Federal approval.

These transportation projects are intended to meet an important purpose and need. The purpose and need is the starting point for developing any necessary transportation project alternatives.

A Statement of Purpose and Need explains to the decisionmakers, the public, and the stakeholders why the proposed project should be implemented. It should be a full and honest explanation of why an agency is considering an action. It must clearly state the problem, along with any existing evidence that supports that problem.

Source: FHWA Environment NEPA Regulatory Framework and Process Purpose & Need, and Alternatives (Companion Guide to Video), August, 2012

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federal-aidessentials/companionresources/41purpose.pdf>

Each alternative was assessed against the project Purpose and Need:

- **Roadway System Linkages:** Does the alternative provide all connections between Route 7, the Merritt Parkway, and Main Avenue?
- **Mobility Improvements:** Does the alternative improve mobility for all users (motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists) at project interchange areas?
- **Safety Considerations:** Does the alternative improve safety in the vicinity of Interchange 39 and 40?

*Public input
is encouraged
throughout the process!
Presentations from the PAC
meetings are posted to the
project website
(www.7-15norwalk.com).*

