



Route 7-15 Norwalk

Routes 7 / 15 Interchange State Project No. 102-358 Norwalk, CT

Public Involvement Plan (July 2023)

Public Involvement Program

The following is a detailed description of the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) proposed for the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) Project No. 102-358 (7/15 Interchange project) which includes professional services related to the Environmental Planning Studies & Regulatory Permitting, Highway Design, and Bridge / Structural Design of the Route 7 and Route 15 Interchange in Norwalk, Connecticut.

This plan has been developed to outline how, in cooperation with CTDOT and the project stakeholders, the Stantec Project Team will inform and seek input about the plan from the public, key stakeholder agencies and organizations, municipalities, regional planning organizations, and local businesses. Many approaches will be used to let people know what is happening throughout the study and there will be a variety of opportunities for discussion and comment. Public opinion and comments will be documented and considered throughout the development of the project.

The PIP will be periodically revisited, and refinements made throughout the course of the project. The plan is provided to have flexibility to respond appropriately and efficiently to the project as it evolves. This plan will be revised per recommendations from CTDOT, other team members, and from feedback from the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) throughout the alternatives development phase and project scoping. The plan will be made public and available on the project website.

Public Participation Principles

This PIP has been developed to support civic engagement for the study by emphasizing the following principles:

- The public shall have access to information about the study: A record of all PAC and community meetings will be kept. Technical documents will be placed in locations available to the public.
- The public shall be presented with clear information: Information will be clearly written and technical terms and regulatory procedures will be explained.
- The public may learn about or become engaged in the study in a variety of ways: Methods to inform and engage the public will include PAC meetings, public meetings, stakeholder meetings, newsletters, project website, e-bulletins, social media, and newspapers (Norwalk Hour and Stamford Advocate).



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- The public shall be able to engage with a responsive study team: The public and PAC will receive sufficient notice of meetings, which will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient and comfortable. Ample time to review any materials will also be provided. All public questions and inquiries will be answered in a timely manner.
- The public shall be able to participate in a process that is well coordinated: Good coordination, communication, and collaboration among all concerned agencies and community organizations will be critical to providing the public with the most current and correct information as well as to the overall success of the project.

Elements of the Plan

The PIP has many elements to involve and inform the public in meaningful ways. The Stantec Team will be accessible to the public, share information in a complete and understandable manner, and record and respond to public comments and concerns. Specific elements of the plan will include:

1. Project Management Team (PMT)

The PMT, composed of representatives from CTDOT, will provide oversight, direction, and review for the study. The PMT will collaborate with the Stantec Team to share and review study documents as they are developed. PMT members will use their expertise to provide insights for discussion at team meetings, and will assist the outreach effort by identifying issues, information resources, key stakeholders, and committee and public meeting locations.

Mr. Kevin Burnham, CTDOT's Project Manager, will serve as the overall Project Lead and will be responsible for coordination between the PMT and the Stantec Team, and will guide the work of the Stantec Team. The PMT will provide guidance and review of study documents throughout the project.

Stantec is the prime consultant to CTDOT and, therefore, has direct responsibilities for the execution and performance of the technical services for this project. Other members of the project Consultant Team and their anticipated task responsibilities are listed in **Table 1** below:

Table 1 - Consultant Team Firms, Responsibilities, and Lead Contact Names

Firm	Responsibility	Lead Contact
Stantec	Project lead; project management-engineering design	John Eberle
FHI Studio	Project management team	Ken Livingston
FHI Studio	Public outreach program	Ken Livingston
Stantec	NEPA/CEPA tasks	Barbara Wagner

Materials including meeting agendas, study documents, and meeting announcements will be sent to the PMT in advance of meetings to allow adequate time for review. PMT members will be asked to express concerns and provide insights for discussion at Team meetings. Alternatives and impacts will be examined as the study progresses. PMT members will also be asked to assist the outreach effort by identifying issues, information resources, key stakeholders, and meeting locations. An outreach



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timeline will be developed to assign roles and responsibilities for the logistics and materials required for all meetings.

The PMT will meet in-person monthly over the course of the study (up to 36 meetings total) in order to keep all members of the Team informed about the progress of the project.

2. Project Advisory Committee (PAC)

A PAC will be created to guide the study process. Stakeholders/interests represented on the PAC may include, but are not limited to:

- Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (CTASLA)
- BikeWalkCT
- City of Norwalk
- Creeping Hemlock/Cranbury Neighborhood
- CT Commuter Council
- CT Trust for Historic Preservation
- Empire State Realty Trust, Inc
- Greater Norwalk Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Harbor Point / Building and Land Technology (BLT)
- Marcus Partners/ Merritt 7
- Merritt Parkway Conservancy
- Merritt Parkway Trail Alliance
- Merritt Parkway Trail Alliance
- Norwalk Association of Silvermine Homeowners (NASH)
- Norwalk Bike Walk Commission
- Norwalk Chamber of Commerce
- Norwalk Historical Society
- Norwalk Historical Commission
- Norwalk Land Trust
- Norwalk Preservation Trust
- Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT)
- Norwalk River Watershed/HarborWatch
- Norwalk Transit District
- Preservation Connecticut
- Sierra Club
- Silvermine Community Association
- Silvermine Community Association Board
- Sound Cyclists
- Town of Wilton
- Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG)
- Others



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PAC members will assist in the study effort by providing advice and insight on local issues, identifying challenges/opportunities in the project area, and assessing improvement alternatives.

The Stantec Team will take a collaborative approach with the PAC. The Stantec Team will share relevant technical information and study products with the PAC as they are developed. Materials will be sent to the group in advance of the meetings to allow adequate time for review before meetings. PAC members will be asked to bring concerns and insights for discussion to the full committee and the consultant team. Alternatives and impacts will be examined as the study progresses. PAC members will also be asked to assist the team in conducting community outreach by identifying issues important to their interests and the public at large, identifying other key stakeholders, and attending public meetings to discuss the progress of the project. These meetings will be held at a location to be determined by CTDOT in the vicinity of the project area.

The PAC will meet as needed during the course of the project. The Stantec Team will coordinate the efforts of the PAC with the input and assistance of CTDOT.

3. Project Website (www.7-15norwalk.com)

A project website will be developed and maintained by the Team throughout the course of the project. This website will be an effective way to support the public participation efforts for this transportation project, by following the progress of the study (including calendar and schedule), advertising meetings, providing access to minutes of meetings and documents, providing media information, including news releases/articles, and allowing people to make comments and ask questions. All content will be fully reviewed and vetted by CTDOT prior to posting on the website. The website will be updated by the Stantec Team monthly, up until the end of the project.

4. Newsletters

The Stantec Team will prepare and electronically distribute newsletter updates at key milestones over the course of the project to a project mailing list. These newsletters will cover significant successes, lessons learned, public responses, and other elements that are important to the project's completion. Newsletters will generally be distributed to coincide with upcoming public meetings. Up to nine (9) two-page newsletters in electronic PDF-format will be prepared and distributed.

5. E-bulletins

E-bulletins will be prepared by the Stantec Team as appropriate to disseminate project information to all parties on the contact list. E-bulletins will contain updates to the project schedule, announcements of upcoming meetings, and relevant information that the team would like to expeditiously distribute to the public. All e-bulletins will be coordinated and reviewed by CTDOT prior to distribution. Up to eighteen (18) E-bulletins will be prepared and distributed.



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6. Public Information Meetings

The Stantec Team will coordinate with CTDOT to conduct up to six (6) public information meetings during the course of the project. The first meeting will be held shortly after the beginning of the project to present the project and its purpose and need to the public. The priority for this meeting will be as a listening session to hear about stakeholder issues and concerns. This is an opportunity for the public to obtain information about the study and provide their input early in the process.

The subsequent public meetings will be held later in the project development and will present and engage the public for feedback on the alternatives under review.

In collaboration with CTDOT, the Stantec Team will determine that as part of the public outreach process for public information meetings, one (1) public scoping meeting will be held at the outset of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) process, likely between the first and second public information meetings, to receive public input and in order to meet requirements under NEPA/CEPA. A public hearing will be held following the release of the EA/EIE for public review. The Public hearing may include a virtual component. Information regarding virtual public involvement opportunities will be posted to project webpage as it becomes available.

The public meetings and hearings will be generally conducted as open houses. This will allow for public review of documents, opportunities for one-on-one discussion with members of the study team and CTDOT officials, and a formal presentation of the study's purpose and progress followed by a question and answer period. There will be display materials that are graphically rich, written in clear language, and easy for the public to understand at the meetings. Display materials may include maps, timelines, and visualization tools where feasible within the project budget. The Stantec Team will work with CTDOT and the PMT to identify and secure meeting venues and publicize upcoming meetings. There will also be a formal comment period and formal transcript taken of the public hearing with comments received and responses made documented for the NEPA/CEPA record.

The Project Team will develop a press release before each of the public meetings. CTDOT will provide to the appropriate media outlets for such announcements. In addition, to publicize upcoming public meetings.

7. Stakeholder Outreach

There are approximately thirty-five (35) specific groups of stakeholders that have been involved in past efforts and the intention is to maintain contact with these groups throughout all phases of the project. This continued coordination could be through one-on-one meetings, agency coordination meetings, on-line surveys, workshops, etc. The Stantec Team will conduct up to ten (10) stakeholder outreach meetings throughout the project.



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An initial priority at the outset of the project will be to meet with key stakeholder groups to notify them that the project is underway and ask for their input and participation. In general the meetings will be held at the offices and/or public locations near the project area. The team will prepare the materials and handouts for these meetings in consultation with CTDOT.

Stakeholders/interests that will be targeted for these meetings may include, but are not limited to:

- Merritt Parkway Conservancy
- City of Norwalk
- Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG)
- Silvermine Community Association
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Sierra Club
- Norwalk Land Trust
- Norwalk River Watershed Association
- Norwalk Preservation Trust
- Preservation Connecticut
- Area businesses
- Others

8. Social Media

The Stantec Team will utilize numerous communication tools, traditional and non-traditional, throughout the study process to obtain public input. Recognizing the rise of electronic communication, especially among younger populations, social media will be integrated into the study.

A Facebook page and a Twitter page will be created for the project by the Stantec Team. The Facebook and Twitter accounts set-up during the initial phase of the project will be maintained through the alternatives development and scoping phase of the project. This will include updating information and maintaining the accounts in conformance with the latest information provided on the project website. Links to the social media accounts will be provided on the website for quick access to users. The Stantec Team will work with CTDOT and other project partners to provide updates via their existing social media channels (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) as well.

All social media posts and materials will be coordinated through CTDOT.

9. Facilitate Comment Response

The Stantec Team will document and maintain a database for cataloguing comments received from the public through the various social media outlets, project website, public meetings, and general write-in and through email. This comments catalog database will be maintained throughout the alternatives development and scoping phase of the project. It is anticipated the e-Builder website will facilitate the storing, cataloging and response to these comments. The entire procedure will be set up and maintained to comply with all project NEPA and CEPA requirements.



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10. List of Outreach Activities

Below is a list of the public involvement activities with agencies and stakeholders that CTDOT has conducted as of June 2023.

<u>Activity Outreach Activities as of 6/30/2023</u>	<u>Date</u>
City of Norwalk	6/1/2016
Town of Wilton	6/7/2016
Merritt Parkway Advisory Committee	7/5/2016
Merritt Parkway Conservancy (MPC)	7/29/2016
Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG)	8/15/2016
Norwalk Association of Silvermine Homeowners (NASH)	10/17/2016
Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission	11/7/2016
City of Norwalk Officials	11/9/2016
Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT)	11/9/2016
Norwalk Preservation Trust	11/9/2016
Norwalk Chamber of Commerce	11/15/2016



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<u>Activity Outreach Activities as of 6/30/2023</u>	<u>Date</u>
Western Connecticut Council of Governments	11/16/2016
Town of Wilton	11/21/2016
Merritt 7/Marcus Properties	11/21/2016
Norwalk First Taxing District	12/21/2016
Creeping Hemlock Neighborhood	12/7/2016
Norwalk Transit District	12/8/2016
Merritt Parkway Conservancy	12/12/2016
Building and Land Technology (BLT)	1/11/2017
Norwalk River Watershed	1/11/2017
Norwalk Association of Silvermine Homeowners (NASH)	1/30/2017
Meeting with local Historic Groups	2/15/2017
Project Advisory Committee (PAC) #1 Meeting- Introduction to the Project	3/27/2017
Marcus Partners/Merritt 7 Meeting	4/6/2017
Empire State Realty Trust, Inc.	5/3/2017



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<u>Activity Outreach Activities as of 6/30/2023</u>	<u>Date</u>
PAC #2 Meeting - Purpose and Need Discussion and Introduction of Traffic Conditions	5/23/2017
Norwalk River Valley Rail and Bike Group	7/25/2017
Purpose and Need PAC Subcommittee	9/12/2017
Meeting with local Historic Groups (Section 106 Consultation)	9/15/2017
PAC #3 Meeting - Review of Project Alternatives and Upcoming Public Scoping Meeting	9/19/2017
Public Scoping Meeting	10/17/2017
Agency Scoping Meeting	2/28/2018
WestCOG	6/29/2018
PAC #4 Meeting - Review Needs and Deficiency Report and Review Revised Purpose and Need Statement	9/17/2018
PAC #4/MP Landscape Workshop	9/17/2018
PAC #5 Meeting - Alternatives Assessment Screening Overview/Approach (Level 1 and Level 2 Explained)	11/14/2018
Town of Wilton	11/30/2018



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<u>Activity Outreach Activities as of 6/30/2023</u>	<u>Date</u>
PAC #6 Meeting - Level 1 Alternatives Screening	4/30/2019
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting	5/7/2019
Merritt Parkway Conservancy Board	6/20/2019
PAC #7 Meeting - Level 2 Alternatives Screening	6/20/2019
PAC #8 Meeting – Complete Level 2 Alternatives Screening and Selection of Alternatives for Assessment in the EA/EIE	7/11/2019
Public Information Meeting	10/23/2019
PAC Landscape Subcommittee meeting	11/21/2019
PAC Landscape Subcommittee meeting	12/16/2020
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting	1/15/2021
Norwalk Bike/Walk Commission	2/8/2022
City of Norwalk Staff	4/28/2022
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting	9/29/2022
Pac #9 Meeting- Review of EA/EIE Document	6/29/2023