



ROUTE 7/15 NORWALK PRESENTATION AND Q&A

Meeting Summary

Date: November 30 at 12 PM, and Dec 1, 2021, at 7 PM

Location: Microsoft Teams (online)

1. Attendees

Connecticut Department of Transportation

Andy Fesenmeyer, CTDOT

Yolanda Antoniak, CTDOT

Mark McMillian, CTDOT

Consultant Team

John Eberle, Stantec

Chris Mojica, Stantec

Ken Livingston, FHI Studio

Laura Parete, FHI Studio

Thalia Giraldo, FHI Studio

2. Presentation Summary

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), in collaboration with the Consultant Team from Stantec and FHI Studio, hosted two virtual Question and Answer sessions on Tuesday, November 30th, 2021, at 12:00 PM and Wednesday, December 1st at 7:00 PM via the Microsoft Teams platform. The purpose of the virtual sessions was to provide an update on the project, answer questions about project status and review the upcoming schedule. Ken Livingston of FHI Studio welcomed attendees to the meeting. The CTDOT and Consultant team introduced themselves to attendees.

John Eberle of Stantec provided an overview of the project's Purpose and Need statement, which is as follows. (1) Improve the system linkage between Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway, (2) Improve mobility for all users at the Merritt Parkway, Main Avenue, and Route 7 interchanges, and (3) Improve safety in the vicinity of these interchanges.

John presented a graphic of the Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway interchange area in Norwalk, which shows the missing connections between Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway. Specifically, vehicles cannot complete the following connections:



Route 7-15 Norwalk

- Merritt Parkway Southbound to Route 7 Southbound
- Merritt Parkway Southbound to Route 7 Northbound
- Route 7 Northbound to Merritt Parkway Northbound
- Route 7 Southbound to Merritt Parkway Northbound or Southbound.

John provided an update on the project's status. He stated that the project is nearing the completion of the Environmental Documentation Phase, which compares the two alternatives (21D and 26) and their potential impacts on the natural and built environment. He anticipates a Project Advisory Committee meeting in early 2022 before publishing the Environmental Assessment (EA). The public will be able to access the EA, attend a public hearing, and provide comments. After completing the EA process, the project will begin Preliminary Design and then move forward into the permitting and final design phases. These phases are expected to be completed at the end of 2024. Construction may begin in 2025.

John provided an overview of the alternatives, starting with 21D. This concept makes the connection between the two Merritt Parkway and Route 7 via interchange ramps. Alternative 21D provides direct, "free-flow" connections in all directions between Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway.

John introduced Alternative 26. This alternative is more compact and does not rely on freeway ramps. Instead, it introduces two signals on Route 7. The signals allow vehicles to turn on and off Route 7 to and from the Merritt Parkway. Utilizing the signals and ramp connections, vehicles can complete connections in all directions between Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway.

John encouraged the public to reach out to Andy if they had further questions. He also encouraged the public to visit the project website for more information on the work completed to date and to view additional information on the two alternatives under review.

He then began the question-and-answer session.

Q&A Session 1

Q: What is the distinction between levels of service for each alternative?

A: From a traffic perspective, both are comparable in terms of levels of service.

Q: What is so groundbreaking about this project that it presumes that the alternative will solve the problem of congestion? Congestion has been an issue that planners have attempted to tackle for decades, and building highway infrastructure has not solved it.

A: This project focuses on mobility and safety. The project's purpose includes three primary goals:

- (1) Improving the system linkage between Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway,



Route 7-15 Norwalk

- (2) Improving mobility for all users at the Merritt Parkway, Main Avenue, and Route 7 interchanges, and
- (3) Improving safety in the vicinity of these interchanges.

Q: What is the cost comparison between the two alternatives?

A: The current estimated cost for Alternative 21D is about 200 million. The current estimated cost for Alternative 26 is about \$100 million. Alternative 26 has a lower cost based on fewer bridges and an overall smaller footprint.

Q: What are the strongest arguments in favor of Alternative 21D?

A: There is a free flow from Route 7 to Merritt, as opposed to using traffic signals, which may be more attractive from a regional perspective.

Q: What is the timeline for the Section 106 consultation process? When will it start again?

A: Since the pandemic began, the Native American tribes have been following emergency procedures that have limited communication and coordination under the Section 106 process. Since one of the alternatives potentially impacts Native American archaeological sites, we have not been able to complete the consultation process. It is anticipated that coordination will continue into early 2022 and be completed later this winter.

Q: Is an Environmental Assessment being done?

A: The EA is currently being conducted to meet both federal and state requirements. It will be presented to the public in 2022.

Q: In the public information session summary document listed on the website from October 23, 2019, a team member was quoted as saying, "We're looking at future traffic projections and traffic conditions in the area will deteriorate." The DOT maintains traffic count stations all throughout the project area on the highways, ramps, and some surface roads. Every single count station is showing decreasing or stagnant traffic volumes on Route 7, on the ramps, at the interchange, and Main Avenue. What's going on in your traffic projections that's going to cause this 10-year decreasing trend to suddenly reverse completely, or is the state just set on always projecting increased vehicle miles traveled even when it goes against reality?

A: The first traffic projections were in 2016, and that projection went out to about 2045. In 2019, there was another traffic projection in this area, but the team found that the baseline counts are similar to the 2016 numbers. Traffic levels have gone back to pre-COVID levels, though it is a different mix of traffic. This is still something the team is looking at and monitoring. Future traffic conditions also take into account planned development within the project area and region.



Route 7-15 Norwalk

Q: Are there anticipated impacts to the Metro-North (MNR) Railroad operations between the two options?

A: There are no impacts to MNR operations or ridership anticipated for either alternative.

Q&A Session 2

Q: In each alternative, what will be done to make the intersection more friendly to pedestrians and cyclists? Is there one alternative that is stronger in that regard?

A: For both alternatives, the improvements on Main Avenue are the same. There will be improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities to meet current, modern design standards. Both alternatives include new sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian crosswalks and signals. Connections from Main Avenue, via Glover Avenue, to the Merritt 7 train station will have bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

Q: How can I get to Main Avenue from Creeping Hemlock Drive?

A: There will be no significant changes to the connection between Creeping Hemlock Drive and Main Avenue. The current access will remain the same.

Q: How far up on Creeping Hemlock Drive are the ramps going to be placed? Will they go above West Rocks Road?

A: The off-ramp from the Merritt Parkway to Main Avenue via Creeping Hemlock Drive will remain in a similar location. There are no construction activities planned that are anticipated to impact West Rocks Road.

Q: When will the alternative be chosen? Will you conduct a public hearing and wait to get comments back and then develop the final alternative or will you wait for the Environmental Assessment and see which works better?

A: The Environmental Assessment document considers the two alternatives presented and the no-build alternative. The published draft document will identify a recommended alternative. The evaluation of both alternatives will be presented during the public hearing. The consultant team will consider all comments received during the comment period and update the EA as required before issuing the final document.

Q: Is the Glover Avenue Bridge included in both alternates?

A: Yes.

General Comments (Q&A Sessions 1&2)



Route 7-15 Norwalk

- Provide a safe bike and pedestrian infrastructure on Main Avenue.
- Provide raised bike lanes which are separated and set back from the road.
- Support was expressed for Alternative 26 because it is less intrusive to the Norwalk River.
- The project team informed the public that the new Infrastructure bill will bring over \$5.4 billion to the state in the next five years, which is an additional \$300 million more than the state normally receives. Since the estimated costs for the construction of the alternatives are about \$200 million or less, some of the infrastructure funds may be able to be used for this project.
- A comment was mentioned about giving equal visibility to the no-build alternative. The attendee was concerned less about the project's immediate environmental impact and about the potential induced demand the project may cause. They would like to see the increased demand for transportation met with more sustainable options, such as public transportation, walking, and biking. The attendee is concerned that improving highways will encourage more people to drive instead of utilizing sustainable modes of transportation.
- A comment was received, which asked the project team not to consider the no-build option. They suggested no stoplights on Route 7.
- An attendee expressed concern about the intersection at Grist Mill Village. They were concerned that the changes to Route 7 and Main Avenue would negatively impact Grist Mill Village.