



PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC) MEETING #5

Meeting Summary

Date: November 14, 2018

Norwalk City Hall Community Room

Time: 6:30pm

Attendance

PAC Members	
David Waters	Building and Land Technology
Drew Berndmaier	City of Norwalk
Dorothy Wilson	City of Norwalk
Mike Yeosock	City of Norwalk
Chris Wigren	Connecticut Historical Trust
JoAnn McGrath	Marcus Properties
Jo-Anne Horvath	None
Alan Kibbe	None
Nancy Rosett	Norwalk Bike Walk Commission
Tod Bryant	Norwalk Preservation Trust
Peter Viteretto	Silvermine Community Association
Francis Pickering	Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG)
Connecticut Department of Transportation and FHWA Staff	
Yolanda Antoniak	CTDOT
Tom Doyle	CTDOT
Andy Fesenmeyer	CTDOT
Kim Lesay	CTDOT
Kurt Salmoiraghi	FHWA
Project Consultant Team	
Ken Livingston	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Marguerite Carnell	Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc.
John Eberle	Stantec
Gary Sorge	Stantec Consulting Services Inc.
General Public	
Erica Muniz	



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1. Welcome

Andy Fesenmeyer, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), welcomed everyone to the 5th Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting for the Route 7/15 Norwalk Project. He noted that this meeting is going to focus on Alternatives Screening.

2. Meeting Overview

Andy F. reviewed the meeting's agenda items:

- Reviewing role of PAC
- Summary of 9/17/18 Meetings
 - Purpose & Need Comments
 - Summary of PAC #4
 - Landscape Workshop
- Alternatives Review
- Alternatives Assessment Screening
- Next Steps/Questions

3. Reviewing the role of PAC

Brief overview of the role of the Project Advisory Committee

The PAC serves as an advisory body to the agencies which are charged with making transportation decisions in the public interest (CTDOT and FHWA). PAC input will weigh strongly in decision-making but will not determine final alternatives.

4. Summary of 9/17/18 Meetings

Purpose & Need Subcommittee

Andy F. noted that the Purpose and Need Subcommittee meeting took place before the PAC meeting. Subcommittee input resulted in an updated integration goal that includes "landscape": "*Integrate the Project Roadways and Landscape with the Environment and Neighborhood context*".

The footnote on landscape guidelines was incorporated into the full goals & objectives text: "*as documented in the National Register of Historic Places nomination and State Scenic Road designation, following recommendations in the Merritt Parkway Guidelines for General Maintenance and Transportation Improvements, Merritt Parkway Landscape Master Plan, and Merritt Parkway Bridge Restoration Guide*".

PAC Meeting #4 Review

Needs & Deficiencies Report

At PAC meeting #4, the PAC asked the following questions regarding the Needs & Deficiencies Report:

Question: Are you considering bicycle and pedestrian access at Grist Mill?

Answer: The areas of concern are outside the Route 7/15 project limits, but there are roadway improvements being proposed at Grist Mill that may provide opportunities to address bike/ped deficiencies. PAC member Nancy Rosett invited the project team for a walk along the Grist Mill area, and the team was able to see existing bike/ped deficiencies.

Question: Why was there little reference to "landscape" deficiencies?



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Answer: The team reviewed guidance posted by FHWA that reflects the expectation of needs and deficiencies as being solely transportation related. Team experience with past documents also confirms the general practice that 'needs' are transportation related and not peripherals (environment, landscape etc.). The report is focused on creating a safe and efficient transportation facility, and as landscaping doesn't usually play into traffic operations or safety, it is not considered an actual deficiency. However, landscape considerations are captured in the latest Purpose and Need Statement (Goals and Objectives).

Following PAC meeting #4 a landscape workshop took place, to which the general public was invited. Andy F. reviewed the key comments from the workshop.

5. Alternatives Review

John Eberle (Stantec) presented an overview of the alternative review process. The purpose of Level 1 Screening is to evaluate alternatives to see if they meet project Purpose and Need criteria. This step is followed by Level 2 Alternative Screening, which evaluates alternatives to see how they address project Goals and Objectives and possibly other considerations.

Level 1 Screening

John E. detailed that during this initial Level 1 screening process, the team has been re-examining previous alternatives to evaluate their merit, based on current Purpose and Need criteria. Level 1 screening examined whether an alternative met the project Purpose and Need, and if it did not, the alternative was eliminated.

The key criteria to meet the Purpose and Need:

- Roadway System Linkages: Does the alternative provide complete connections between Route 7 and the Merritt Parkway?
- Mobility Improvements: Does the alternative provide connections between Main Avenue and Route 7 and 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 on the Merritt Parkway?

PAC members were asked to review the Level 1 screening matrix provided at the beginning of the meeting, and John E. briefly explained color coding. In the screening matrix, green symbolized that the alternative fully meets purpose and need; yellow indicates moderately meeting purpose and need; and black notes that the alternative does not meet purpose and need and is therefore eliminated. John E. also explained that those alternatives that were labeled as gray have been refined to a slightly different alternative and have been renamed (for example, Alternative 2 is grayed out because it has been refined to Alternative 2A).

In order to show the process and methodology used, an example alternative was presented, Alternative 15, which was unable to meet purpose and need due to its inability to provide effective linkages and mobility. This alternative has been eliminated. Alternative 12A, which is an older alternative, meets purpose and need. John E. noted that the remaining older alternatives were eliminated because they did not meet purpose and need. Along with Alternative 12A, the additional three alternatives that meet purpose and need are Alternative 20B, Alternative 21C, and Alternative 26 summarized as follows:

- Alternative 12A: an older alternative (developed after the previous project). Ramps were lowered from the height of the original design but remain higher than the Merritt Parkway. 12A makes road linkages, has good mobility, but has some apparent geometric deficiencies.
- Alternative 20B: an older alternative found in project archives that features traffic signals on elevated ramps (unlike 26, which has signals on Route 7). 20B passed a basic traffic evaluation and meets all three Purpose and Need criteria.
- Alternative 21 C: a "consensus" alternative that makes road linkages and has good mobility but has some geometric deficiencies.



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- Alternative 26: a compact design making various connections between Route 7, Merritt Parkway and Main Avenue via proposed signals on Route 7. It meets all three Purpose and Need criteria.

The following questions/comments were made regarding the alternatives and the Level 1 screening process.

Alternative 20B

The PAC had questions about Alternative 20B and its signalized ramps:

Question: Are the ramps elevated?

Answer: They are elevated, and do not stop traffic on Route 7.

Question: How do you get from Super 7 from Main Avenue?

Answer: John E. provided a detailed review of ramp coordination.

Question: Would this alternative cause traffic backup on these elevated ramps?

Answer: There will be traffic queues, but not beyond normal levels. These queues will be part of the extended Level 2 screening analysis or formal assessments if the alternative progressed far enough in process. Initial Level 1 traffic evaluation showed that the level of service was acceptable.

Regarding Alternative 20B, John E. also noted that the team has not yet determined the ramp profile, heights, structures, cost or any other details. The next phase may include a workshop that will present all these elements.

Alternative 21C Refinements

John E. then described in detail the Level 1 screening of Alternative 21C. The team refined some elements, and it is now renamed Alternative 21D. Alternative 21D has the following updated elements:

- Improved or eliminated ramp weaving
- Additional lanes to accommodate traffic
- Tighter ramp geometry
- Reduced number of bridges
- Additional southbound Route 7 ramps to the Merritt Parkway and Main Avenue

7. Alternatives Assessment Screening (Level 2)

John E. noted that the team is now working on a draft Level 2 screening criteria that examines how each alternative may address the project Goals and Objectives as identified in the project's Purpose and Need statement and other considerations.

He added that a PAC meeting will occur, most likely in early 2019, to present this Level 2 criteria and matrix evaluation. A public meeting may also occur after the PAC presentation. This Level 2 screening will likely include landscape, historic, cultural, and cost considerations, among other considerations. The project team will send the Level 2 screening criteria to PAC members before the workshop so that they have time to review and comment.

John E. noted that when the project team completes the Level 2 screening, the number of alternatives may be reduced to one or two alternatives and those can be carried into the EA document for assessment..

8. Next Steps



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Andy F. noted that the next round of meetings will include a Section 106/historic and landscape subcommittee meeting, which will likely be combined, as both groups have similar concerns and interests. This meeting will likely be in January 2019.

The Level 2 screening workshop will most likely occur in February 2019.

Andy F. requested that the PAC review the project Goals and Objectives described in the latest Purpose and Need Statement, so that they can be familiar with the screening content when presented with Level 2 findings.

The following discussion ensued:

Comments/Questions

Comment: Regarding the footprint of the project, we need to see a diagram that shows where impacts will be on the landscape, even using the color green could help, as the public does not understand these impacts just by looking at a plan design.

Comment: The elevated ramp concept of Route 7 is hard to think about it in scale and how it will function.

Comment: Need to consider trucks and truck traffic on these new ramps.

Question: Will these alternatives be available on the website?

- Team responded that the presentation will be on the website.

PAC members had differing opinions about the role Route 7 should play in each of these prospective alternatives. One PAC member suggested that Route 7 should remain unsignalized and act as a major connector between the Merritt Parkway and I-95, and that each alternative should prioritize traffic flow along Route 7. Another PAC member suggested that perhaps it is time to rethink the function of Route 7 entirely and restructure it as a slower speed road that allows for signals. A lower speed, signalized Route 7 therefore would not be a fatal flaw in the alternative analysis.

In general, PAC members would like to see these maps larger format. The project team will develop more scalable maps and provide them at the workshop and online.

The project team noted that they will be developing 3D perspectives for landscaping, as 3D is critical to assessing a deeper level of detail and clearly identify impacts. For alternatives 26 and 21D, the team already has some profiles and cross sections available. Alternative 20B still needs to be reviewed at a profile/cross section level.

Andy F. suggested that if PAC members had any questions or feedback on the alternatives posted to the website, they can email him directly. The team will be sending an email to the PAC within the next two weeks to let them know when materials are available online.

Note, the PAC presentation is now on the project website: http://7-15norwalk.com/documents/2018-11-14-Route_7-15-PACMeeting5.pdf