

# Capitol Region Council of Governments

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## MINUTES OF REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

March 17, 2011

### ATTENDANCE

#### Members and Alternates

Sandra Bobowski  
Sue Errickson  
Lamont Aheart  
Mark S. Drake  
Karl Robert Profe  
Horace Brown  
Tom Derlinga

#### Town

Hartford  
Tolland  
Vernon  
Simsbury  
Windsor  
Manchester  
East Granby

#### Others Present

Mary Ellen Kowalewski                      CRCOG  
Emily Moos                                      CRCOG  
Jennifer Carrier                              CRCOG

Chair Sandra Bobowski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

#### Adoption of Minutes: January 20, 2011

A motion was made by Sue Errickson and seconded by Karle Profe to adopt the minutes of the January 20, 2011 meeting as presented. The motion was passed with 5 abstentions.

#### A New Vision for I-84 in Downtown Hartford – Presentation of the I-84 Viaduct Study by Jennifer Carrier, CRCOG Transportation Director

Jennifer Carrier gave a presentation of the study process and alternatives associated with the I-84 Viaduct Study. Ms. Carrier spoke about the existing condition of the Viaduct and stated that the structure is nearing the end of its functional life span. In 2006, ConnDOT recommended replacement in kind. In response citizens gathered and posed the question “Is there a better solution?” If a large amount of money is being spent on rebuilding I-84, is there a better way to satisfy transportation needs while better integrating into the neighborhoods, re-knitting the community, and bolstering economic growth? The City listened and proposed a study of Viaduct alternatives; ConnDOT agreed and CRCOG signed on as project manager for the study. ConnDOT began advancing short-term repairs to the Viaduct while this study explored long term replacement options.

The study included three phases:

Phase I: a review of the Viaduct Today – included an assessment of economic development, urban design, and transportation issues

Phase II: Preliminary Alternatives – screening level assessment to determine what kind of alternatives were most suitable for further analysis

Phase III: Composite Alternatives – included development of composite alternatives and a more in depth evaluation of each

Each phase culminated in a public workshop or meeting and a study newsletter to keep the public informed and the dialogue open. The study process included coordination with City, Regional & State initiatives including One City, One Plan (Hartford's POCD). Three major transit projects that the study coordinated with as well are the New Haven, Hartford, Springfield Rail, the New Britain – Hartford Busway and the East Coast Greenway.

Goals of the study were to develop a range of alternatives that considered urban design, economic development and transportation issues, to foster public discussion and awareness of the project issues and to establish a starting point for future DOT studies of the I-84 Viaduct

At our second public workshop we reviewed a wide range of alternatives. We discussed the concepts of creating a Boulevard and an elevated section / Skyway but these concepts were not recommended for further study as they do not adequately address the study goals. The public process also revealed that we should consider relocating the rail line within the corridor if feasible. So we left the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop with a series of options to evaluate further. Following public input and further evaluation by the study team, 4 Composite alternatives were developed: Two of the alternatives (identified as the baseline and Alt Concept 1) incorporate an enhanced viaduct structure. One alternative involves a surface roadway. And one alternative relocates the highway into a tunnel structure. Study concluded with well attended Community Summit on October 27, 2010. Study findings received City and CRCOG Endorsement

Next Steps for the study are to continue dialogue with the City, HUB Committee, and ConnDOT and to partner with ConnDOT to advance planning and feasibility study. A drawback is that there is no financing currently in place; however, DOT is aware that something needs to be done in the next 15 to 20 years. CRCOG will continue to work in partnership with DOT, the HUB and the City to advance the project.

Several Commission Members had questions such as:

Does the High Speed Rail project create a problem? How does the Busway fit into the plan?

- The rail and busway projects were considered in this plan. Amtrak was included in discussions and has made positive comments associated with the realignment of the track. The busway may need to undergo minor modifications associated with this plan.

Where does the Highway go under Asylum Street?

- Just north of where it stands now.

How does the study address the Park River?

- Study does not give specifics, but acknowledges that the Park River will need to be addressed

Will there be a need to expand I 84 as a part of this project? Will there be a significant impact to buildings and residences in the area if the project is constructed? How will the project impact the Underground Infrastructure?

- Further studies will need to be undertaken to determine need for extra capacity – impacts to surrounding areas should be minimal and dependent upon phasing

Will the planning process continue throughout the next fifteen years of the Viaduct's functional life?

How do we know that this plan will avoid similar mistakes to those that were made with the last Viaduct construction?

- The planning process should be ongoing for the next 15 years. This process has been about community involvement and has its foundation in good urban design and community development principles.

**Presentation and Opportunity for RPC Input on the CRCOG Long Range Transportation Plan, Update by Jennifer Carrier, CRCOG Transportation Director**

Jennifer Carrier gave a presentation on the 2011 update of the Long Range Transportation Plan which is a comprehensive program for improving our transportation system to meet travel needs through the year 2040 - approximately 30 years. This plan is mainly a systems level plan that provides general policy guidance, defines the regions greatest needs, identifies which problems are the region's highest priority and outlines how the region should spend its limited capital funds. The plan is also a summary of many specific, detailed studies and recommendations of those studies such as the Regional Transit Strategy, Bicycle and Pedestrian plans and several corridor studies.

The Long Range Transportation Plan is updated every four years – it was last prepared in 2007. A draft will be issued a draft for public comment on Monday March 21, 2011.

The latest plan reaffirms the Council's commitment to policies set in previous editions. There is a strong commitment to developing a transportation system that offers more travel choices and continues its emphasis on developing a good regional transit system as an alternative to the automobile. It includes a commitment to linking land use and transportation and creating a sustainable transportation system, managing our highways and arterial systems (such as the I84 Viaduct), reaffirming our commitment to developing a bicycle and pedestrian system, supporting Bradley International Airport and the beginning of a freight planning program. The Plan also makes a commitment to environmental justice – ensuring our system addresses needs of minority groups, low income residents and transit-dependent residents.

The 2011 Transportation Plan continues to coordinate transportation policies with the regional Plan of C&D. Emily Moos, CRCOG Senior Planner and Policy Analyst described the update of the Sustainable Transportation System Chapter in more detail stating that in 2007 this chapter had placed an emphasis on Linking Land Use and Transportation and that the increased emphasis on sustainability in the Capitol Region caused the update to emphasize how the core issue areas of sustainability (Environment, Economy and Equity) relate to transportation planning. Ms. Moos stated that Federal guidelines require CRCOG's Regional Transportation Plan to be consistent with the Regional POCD and that in order to determine consistency the plans were physically compared at a high-level. Ms. Moos explained that the two maps utilized for this comparison were the Economic Development Areas of Regional Significance Map and the Land Use Policy Map. The evaluation identified that the RTP generally serves the areas to be promoted for development and avoids areas for conservation. As projects are considered for funding, each will be subjected to a more detailed review for consistence with the Regional POCD.

Ms. Moos highlighted that to aid the effort to incorporate sustainability principles into this chapter's update, data from the Growing Economy Shrinking Emissions report and Redesigning the Edgeless City course illustrating the impact that transit supportive development has on lowering carbon emissions and annual household vehicle miles traveled.

Ms. Carrier also noted that the Sustainable Transportation System chapter includes information and policy on green infrastructure. The updated chapter emphasizes encouraging implementation of green infrastructure elements in corridor studies and roadway reconstruction projects, continuing to work

with our regional partners on green infrastructure planning, educating communities in the latest “Green Streets” design and maintenance requirements and researching funding opportunities. One commission member asked for clarification on review process.

Mary Ellen Kowalewski stated that RPC members are encouraged to comment on this chapter and the plan as a whole through the public comment process and that the CRCOG Policy Board, made up of town elected officials will take action on adopting this plan when the update is complete.

**Report on Zoning and Subdivision Referrals**

Emily Moos gave a report on the zoning and subdivision referrals. John Larensen made a motion to approve the report as presented. Sue Errickson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

**Status Report on 2011 Appointments to RPC**

Mary Ellen Kowalewski stated that she will continue to follow up with towns that have not yet made appointments to the RPC. Ms. Kowalewski asked if those at the meeting who have served will continue to serve. Linda Keith stated that she will continue to serve on the commission.

**What’s New in My Town – An Opportunity for Members to report on Local Planning and Development Activities of Interest to the RPC**

Sandra Bobowski of Hartford reported that in Hartford, the Greening America’s Capital’s program is underway. The city received a grant from the U.S. EPA to study greening the Capital area and a recent Charrette to place at the Capitol building to study the Capitol Avenue Corridor. Ms. Bobowski reported that the city’s new Capital Improvement Plan will fund many of the green initiatives from this study and that the plan is in alignment with the Frog Hollow NRZ’s new neighborhood plan.

Linda Keith of Avon spoke about a new zoning and planning initiative in the area of the Ensign Bickford property on RT 44. A new zone would allow development in PODs encouraging a mix of uses in this area such as housing, retail and entertainment uses. This effort is to encourage the development of a town center for Avon.

Thomas Manning of Bolton stated that the town is working with money from the HomeConnecticut program to look at Incentive Housing Zones. The town is currently studying RT 44 for TOD opportunities.

**Other Business**

Mary Ellen Kowalewski stated that she will put together a background package for new members on their roles and responsibilities as RPC members.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.