

Hartford Interstate 84 Viaduct Study

Interview Summary

The consultant team conducted 2 to 3 days of interviews with key project stakeholders to explore project background, issues, challenges and opportunities. The interviews were conducted in person and by telephone. There were many common themes that emerged from the interviews:

- The highway is intensively used and critical to the city and the region
- The highway divides the city's downtown from its neighborhoods and creates a very hostile environment
- Creative solutions are needed that address community/urban design, economic development and transportation needs—there is the potential to reinvent the city's core and reconnect its street grid
- All stakeholders are seeking viable solutions that can get implemented—but it's not yet clear what the right solutions are

The following is a brief compilation of thoughts offered by interviewees. Some ideas were shared by multiple stakeholders and occur several times in the summary below.

Key comments, arranged roughly by theme, are as follows:

The Viaduct today is intensively used, plays a critical function, and needs to be fixed

- Highway is intensively used—175,000 vehicles per day
- Viaduct is in very poor condition
- Viaduct is very expensive to maintain and is a constant drain on CTDOT repair funds
- Existing Viaduct structure is of poor traffic/geometric design—weaving patterns are far from optimal
- Many downtown employers consider easy access to the highway in peak periods as a high priority – both for their businesses and their employees; improved transit is also key
- Highway is important to regional freight movements; need to consider this in planning
- Highway is already the most congested in the region and is predicted to get worse

Yet, the Viaduct is an unattractive barrier with a big impact on downtown Hartford

- Development of the highway divided the city and nothing “grows” on either side
- Division of the city created by the highway prevents the city from functioning well, and divides neighborhoods from downtown and each other, weakening the core; highway splits employment centers in downtown and Asylum Hill
- Many historic resources were lost when the highway was constructed
- City streets function as highway ramps and create a very unattractive environment

- Highway creates a horrible environment at its edges in terms of noise, air pollution, aesthetics—making its impact all the worse; result is very underutilized land and surface parking lots that are not the best use of land

This study is a welcome opportunity to look at options for the Viaduct's future

- Replacement rather than repair of the Viaduct is the most desirable future option
- Prior planning efforts have not focused on major I-84 changes because these have seemed infeasible; ConnDOT's acknowledgement that a full reconstruction of the Viaduct is likely to be necessary opens the door to thinking more broadly about options
- There has been a lot of focus on the problem of aging highway Viaducts nationally—Hartford is not alone and could be a model for others
- The Highway is not the only barrier dividing the City—the rail line and future busway are also factors that need to be mitigated when considering future replacement options for the Viaduct
- Park River conduit runs under the area—this presents challenges but also possible opportunities
- Changes to the highway need to be part of a broader effort to address the City and the region's transportation needs—including stronger commitments to expanded transit service and parking management; the long term strength of the City's core depends on this
- Study should consider multiple alternatives not focus on one solution
- CTDOT supports consideration of a wide range of viable options through the Viaduct Study

The next version of the Viaduct should help strengthen downtown Hartford...

- Reduce the impact of the highway
- Reconnect the city
- Daylighting the Park River may not be viable; resources should be targeted first to other parts of the watershed where cost/benefit relationship is more optimal
- Need an overall vision for the center of Hartford and then build the infrastructure to support it
- Should think of the center of the city as having a strong residential component on a European model—changes to the highway can create a more attractive environment that supports this goal
- Reinventing the city's core should be the outcome of this project
- Look for creative solutions—downtown I-Quilt project mixes cultural and environmental perspectives
- Make infrastructure capable of supporting smart growth—build on what you have
- There is the potential to attract more development to the areas around and adjacent to the highway
- Riverfront Recapture is one model of how creative thinking within a highway project can make a major difference in enhancing the city
- State's willingness to reconsider reuse of its extensive land holdings (including parking lots) around and below the Viaduct will be a key factor in any successful outcome; study process needs to engage state on land ownership and use issues

- Positive change occurring downtown—study outcomes should support this over the longer term

...and improve connections between neighborhoods and across modes

- Need to preserve vehicular access to jobs—get a lot of people in and out efficiently
- Restore city street network and ensure cars don't dominate
- Highway planning needs to be done with transit in mind
- Strengthening links between downtown and the neighborhoods is a central element of the Hartford 2010 Plan—changes to I-84 should support this goal
- Establishing Union Station as a major transit hub will be a big factor in the success of the area

Feasibility is important

- Study need to be anchored in fiscal reality and structural feasibility
- There are currently severe fiscal constraints at federal, state and local levels that complicate support new infrastructure—there are many competing needs within the state for state and federal funds
- Future federal funding for projects like this is likely to evolve and become more performance driven than today
- Preliminary concept plans for I-84 developed through the study process can set the stage for the federal NEPA process

This is challenging!

- Not sure what could work
- Hard to envision/communicate what a feasible improvement would look like
- Need to solve multiple problems at the same time—transportation, design, community, economic
- Availability of resources to make necessary changes
- Competing priorities within state for transportation funds; needs exceed funds

List of Interviewees

A list of those interviewed to date is included below. Additional interviews are pending.

Bob Painter - *HUB Committee Chair*

David Panagore, Roger O'Brien, Kevin Burnham, Mark McGovern, and Stephanie Kruel –*City of Hartford*

Jeff Parker, Tom Harley and Julie Georges –*CTDOT*

David Nardone, Robert Turner and Eloise Powell – *FHWA*

Paul Stacey and Maryann Nusom Haverstock – *CTDEP*

Tom Maziarz –*CRCOG*

Tomas Nenortas – *Hartford Preservation Alliance, SoDo NRZ*

Julio Concepcion and Oz Greibel –*Metro Hartford Alliance*

Bob Benzinger – *The Hartford*

Toni Gold – *West End Civic Association*

Hans Keck – *Hartford Courant*

Jackie McKinney – *Asylum Hill NRZ, ArtSpace Residents' Association*

Mike Marshall – *Aetna*

Vicki Shotland – *Union Station, Greater Hartford Transit District*

Michael Zaleski – *Hartford Business Improvement District*

Mary Rickel Pelletier – *Park River Watershed*