



## INTERSTATE 84 VIADUCT STUDY

### **Community Summit Meeting Summary - DRAFT**

#### **ABOUT THE EVENT**

Over a hundred attendees gathered for the I-84 Viaduct Study Community Summit held at the Hartford Public Library on October 27, 2010. The Summit concluded the study with a presentation of the alternatives that were developed with input from residents, major employers, local organizations, the City of Hartford, ConnDOT, and other stakeholders. Representatives from the City of Hartford, ConnDOT, CRCOG, and the HUB of Hartford Committee expressed their satisfaction with the study process and findings and a desire to keep this positive momentum moving forward.

The event began with an open house session, held from 4:30 pm – 5:30 pm. Attendees viewed posters illustrating each study alternative and assessments from economic development, urban design, and transportation perspectives. Study team and HUB Committee members circulated the room to discuss the study with members of the public. Several attendees also submitted written comments on the forms provided.

The Summit began at 5:30 pm with a welcome from Dr. Robert Painter, HUB Chairman. Dr. Painter described the HUB Committee's history, diverse membership, and service as the study Steering Committee. Dr. Painter also reviewed the study goals and the enthusiasm the HUB Committee has for the promising alternatives that have been developed through this process.

David Spillane of Goody Clancy provided a brief study overview and explained in detail the baseline and composite alternatives developed. Mr. Spillane reviewed the economic development, urban design, transportation, and cost estimating analyses that the project team completed on each of the study alternatives.

David Panagore, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Development Services in the City of Hartford, and Roger O'Brien, Planning Director of the City of Hartford, emphasized that these alternatives are consistent with One City, One Plan, the City's Plan of Conservation and Development. These options create great opportunities for the City to reconnect neighborhoods, improve the local street network, enhance livability, bolster economic development, and revitalize the City.

Jennifer Carrier, CRCOG Director of Transportation Planning, was pleased with the study process. The HUB Committee provided excellent guidance and public outreach efforts were very successful. CRCOG looks forward to seeing this work come to fruition for the neighborhoods, the City, and the region. CRCOG will continue to work with its partners, ConnDOT and the City of Hartford, to further advance this project.

Tom Maziarz, Bureau Chief of ConnDOT's Planning Division, acknowledged that the Viaduct is nearing the end of its useful life. This study was the first step in the planning process. ConnDOT has reviewed these alternatives and will build upon the solid foundation formed under this study. The State is currently in a difficult economic time, but the Department is reviewing potential funding sources for the next planning stage.

### **QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Verbal public questions and comments presented at the Summit are summarized below:

- Can we re-route the 50% regional traffic via I-691 or similar? Tom Maziarz noted that 2/3 of this traffic is traveling shorter distances, for example from East Hartford to West Hartford, and would not be conducive to this type of diversion. Additionally, study analyses indicate that there is potentially high economic value in this traffic.
- High Speed Rail is hard to imagine through the City of Hartford. Tom Maziarz explained that High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail is being looked at; the portion that will link through Hartford is lower speed, but will create the intercity connection.
- Do the cost estimates include the rail shift and new annex for Union Station? It was assumed that these costs would be included by the rail project. Bob Painter added that it is important to keep in mind that long-term maintenance costs of an at-grade highway are much lower than an elevated structure.
- Is there a possibility of continuing the plans for a beltway system? The HUB did not feel the continuation of I-291 was a feasible option due to right-of-way impacts and the lawsuits that originally dismissed this plan.
- Will relocating the rail line affect the freight line? Dr. Painter explained that the Griffin Line would not be affected; the shift actually brings the rail line back to its original elevation. Tom Maziarz added that a double track will benefit freight rail.
- What are the right-of-way impacts of these alternatives? Since this was a very high level planning study, these details have not been closely reviewed. However, the alternatives are largely in the existing public right-of-way. Bob Painter noted that the ramp structures in place today are more extensive than necessary; these alternatives illustrate how this land might be reclaimed.
- Do these alternatives impact the New Britain Busway plans? Tom Maziarz explained that because of the scale, complexity, and potential of the Viaduct replacement, we did not want the Busway to restrict this study. Some of these alternatives may affect a small portion of the current design, but construction plans may be issued in sections allowing for small portions to be redesigned as needed. It should be noted that the long term relocation of the rail viaduct has

the potential to improve the Busway design. Additionally, any Viaduct reconstruction will need traffic management; the Busway can help mitigate the traffic impacts of this major construction.

- How long will this rebuild last? Tom Maziarz replied that most bridge structures are designed for a 50 year lifespan. At grade alternatives however last for much longer.
- Is a regional transit hub envisioned for Union Station or do these alternatives preclude this possibility? ConnDOT and the City understand the need for a true transit hub; a bridge could connect Union Station and the annex. Transit-oriented development on the newly available land parcels may help support this hub.
- Is there a big difference in construction times among these alternatives? David Spillane replied that this level of detail was not reached in this study, but the tunnel is more complex.
- Dr. Painter stated that the ConnDOT promised to review the alternatives identified in this study, but not necessarily implement one from this range. Additionally, this study lays out several ideas that can be mixed and matched; the intent is not necessarily to select one alternative over another.
- What is the best way for members of the public to express their preference for one of these alternatives over the baseline? Tom Maziarz noted that this study's public involvement process was very successful and ConnDOT plans to continue in a similar fashion. It is important to note that after the environmental analysis, the alternatives may be modified based on findings.

Written public comments collected at the Summit are summarized below:

- "Something must be done about that ugly Viaduct!" The tunnel is the best option even though it is the most expensive. The Park River Conduit can be moved and upgraded. New parks are a great benefit.
- "Congratulations! This is an extraordinary product that gives the City and Region something that is both practical and exciting to work toward"
- Asylum Avenue is currently a mess. Getting to/from Union Station is really confusing; "I often get lost...awful!" The Surface Alternative is a hands down improvement from I-84 today, much better than the "spaghetti nightmare". Removing the Viaduct will eliminate the possibility of vehicles falling off of it like the high school robotics student tragedy. Hartford needs help and this has so much potential.
- Thoughtful point that this project advances intercity high speed rail. Hartford's future is tied into mobility in the region (Boston to NYC to D.C.).
- Concerned that community development options will be "squandered to build high-end condos with high vacancies and store fronts that will sit empty á la Front Street and much of downtown."
- Could we have a double-decker surface/subsurface highway with local/express lanes?
- Can the Park River be relocated to its original layout around Bushnell Park?
- Economic development potential should be weighted more heavily.
- "Great!"