

**I-91 Interchange 19  
Northampton, MA**

**Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting # 9  
Tuesday, January 17, 2012  
Bridge Street School Library, Northampton, MA**

**Meeting Summary**

**Attendees:**

PAC Members

Jerry Budgar – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association  
Frank J. Werbinski – Ward 3 Resident  
Mary Jane Bacon – Senator Rosenberg’s Office  
Marcus J. Boyle – Chair, Hatfield Board of Selectman  
Al Byam – UMass Transit  
Ned Huntley – City of Northampton  
Joanne Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident  
Owen Freeman-Daniels – Ward 3 Councilor

Members of the Public

Sydney Stern – Ward 3 Resident  
Bill Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident  
Judy Mabzunouc – Northampton property owner

Project Team

Rich Masse – Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Highway Division, District 2  
Al Stegemann – MassDOT  
Bao Lang – MassDOT  
Joe Cahill – TranSystems  
Maureen Chlebek – McMahon Associates  
Marcy Miller – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.  
Colleen Medeiros – McMahon Associates

**Meeting Summary:**

Joe Cahill welcomed everyone and stated that the purpose of meeting was to review the concepts previously under construction and discuss the new traffic projections and how they differ from the previous projections. The team would then discuss traffic operations for each of the concepts. Joe reviewed the concepts briefly.

Next, Maureen Chlebek discussed the 2010 Census and its effect on the traffic projections. Based on the 2000 Census (the previous Census), there was an estimated 28 percent background traffic growth over a 25-year period. Projections based on the 2010 Census (the most recent Census) include a 5.5 percent background traffic growth projection over a 25-year period.

Maureen reviewed the AM peak hour traffic analysis. She discussed how the level of service (LOS) improves with each of the alternatives; 13, 13A, and 13B in comparison to the projected LOS for the Future No-Build condition. She noted that the team found the same trends in PM peak hour analysis. While there were projected LOS Es and Fs in the No Build alternative, the LOSs improve slightly with alternative 13, and even more in alternatives 13A and 13B.

Next, Maureen discussed queue lengths. She noted that comparing queue lengths in a Synchro analysis, which is used for signalized intersections, to VISSIM, which is used for roundabouts, is not exact. The two programs simply have different ways to measure maximum traffic queues. Synchro estimates the 95% queue, which is the queue length that is expected to be exceeded 5 percent of the time in the peak hour while VISSIM estimates maximum queues which are the "maximum" queue expected in the peak hour and likely to occur only one percent of the peak hour. She noted that one of the concerns with queue analysis was traffic backing onto I-91 northbound from the Route 9 / Damon Road intersection.

Joanne Mackiewicz noted that the blue lines are shorter in alternative 13 than they are in 13A. Maureen stated that the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile blue line representation shown in alternative 13 is shorter than the maximum queues (represented by the blue line) in alternative 13A. Typically, the signalized intersections yielded longer average queues and shorter maximum queues in comparison to the roundabout analysis, again noting the different definitions for maximum queues (95<sup>th</sup> percentile vs. maximum length).

Maureen showed AM and PM simulations of the alternatives 13, 13A, and 13B. In all of the build alternatives, vehicles make it through the traffic signal in one cycle during the peak hours. There was a question on the number of lanes on Damon Rd in alternative 13, the signal option. In the proposal, there are two left turn and one right turn lane at this location exiting Damon Rd, same as today, however there will be two lanes entering Damon Rd, and two through lanes exiting the I-91 off-ramp, one additional from what exists today.

Someone asked how this differs from the previous analyses. Maureen noted that the simulations are essentially the same, with new, lower volumes. There was a request to explain the sidewalks and pedestrian facilities in the simulations. Maureen and Joe noted that the VISSIM software does not really graphically show this. One must look at the plans to see accurate representations of sidewalks. Jerry Budger requested to see land takings amount and locations for each alternative. Joe answered that today's meeting intent is presenting traffic volumes and operations. The next PAC meeting would focus on impacts.

A member of the public questioned the purpose and need study. In particular, she stated that she does not believe this project is a good use of taxpayer dollars during these hard economic times. She expressed her opinion that additional bicycle and pedestrian amenities are not needed and the congestion does not warrant this study.

Owen Freeman-Daniels asked whether the reduced traffic volumes reduces the priority for this project. Rich answered not necessarily yet, that this was still in the study phase. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will, in the long-term, determine the priority of projects in the region. It was noted that the public is part of MPO process. The team also discussed the role and importance of the PAC and their participation in this study process.

Joe then reviewed the alternatives under consideration in more detail. Concepts 13 and 13B are essentially unchanged from what was previously presented. Concept 13A, which was previously under consideration, is now a viable alternative again because of the reduction in projected traffic volumes. Joe next presented a new concept, Concept 13C, with two additional bypass lanes. Alternative 13C was created in response to traffic analysis associated with Concept 13B. The team wanted to know what level of operational improvements would be realized if slip lanes were added to the roundabout at Damon Road. They stated that these bypass lanes would have impacts to property, including parkland. In contrast, Concept 13 would have the least impact for land takings. Previously, Concept 13A had problems functioning at an appropriate LOS in the morning. Now, with the lower volumes, it likely can be a viable alternative.

There was a question if there are other improvements that can be combined with the No-Build that will bring substantial improvements, like the light on Bridge Street. Joe stated that concept 13 essentially provides that approach, with just relatively minor changes to Route 9. .

There was a comment that 13A might be harder to fix or expand in the future. Perhaps, the team should support the most flexible alternatives. Maureen noted that detection loops could be provided on the I-91 NB off-ramp under Concept 13A. The detection loop, working in conjunction with the traffic signal controller at the Route 9/I-91 SB on-ramp intersection, would trigger the signal phasing to change so that Route 9 EB traffic had a red indication, thereby creating more gaps in the roundabout to allow the NB approach to clear. Richard noted that if a large development were proposed, such as a casino, they would have to go through an environmental process and prove that roadway system could accommodate them. This traffic analysis includes background traffic and some other projects that are likely to happen.

Joe went over the next steps in the study. Next, the team will evaluate the impacts (ROW, Environmental, cost, etc) associated with each alternatives and present them to the PAC at a future meeting. This next meeting will be a few months from now. There was discussion about the alternatives matrix and the possibility of showing the impacts differently (numbering system, etc.) Joe stated the team would prefer to stay away from numbers because we do not want to create impression that they can be totaled and the highest number wins. Ultimately, there is support in the PAC to present material in a simple way so that the public can understand it.

It is currently anticipated that following the next PAC meeting, a Public Meeting will be held to present the concepts and to get public input. The PAC will meet again following the Public Meeting.