

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

**Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting # 6
Tuesday, October 5, 2010
Bridge Street School Library, Northampton, MA**

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

PAC Members

Jerry Budgar – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association
Angela Plassmann – City Councilor, Ward 3
Frank J. Werbinski – Ward 3 Resident
Christine Cahillane – Ward 3 Resident
Gary Roux – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)
James Lowenthal – MassBike Pioneer Valley
Mary Jane Bacon – Senator Rosenberg’s Office
Marcus J. Boyle – Chair, Hatfield Board of Selectman
Ned Huntley – Northampton Department of Public Works

Members of the Public

Fred Zimnoch – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association
W. Sydney Stern – Ward 3 Resident
Bill Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident
Joanne Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident

Project Team

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

Meeting Summary:

Joe Cahill, of TranSystems, welcomed everyone and reviewed the meeting's agenda. He noted that the primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the refined roadway alternatives, providing more detail on the alternatives selected to move forward in the analysis. Joe reminded the committee that the project team previously recommended that the build concepts 13, 13 A, 13 B move forward for further study. In addition, the No Build and the transportation demand management (TDM) package were recommended to move forward in the analysis. The project team recommended that no full-build alternatives (new ramps or new direct connections such as flyovers) be advanced for additional study. The PAC supported the study team's recommendations.

Roundabout Discussion

Because of the number of questions and concerns from the PAC and public about pedestrians and bicyclist at roundabouts, Joe showed videos of how these users operate in roundabouts. There was a question on whether flashing in-pavement lights can be used in the crosswalks. Ned Huntley, a PAC member, responded that in crosswalk lights were installed, and later removed, on the Smith College campus because of plow damage. Al Stegemann said that the in-pavement lights installed at Route 116 in Sutherland had the same problem with damage due to snow plows. There was another comment from a PAC member about bicyclist safety in two-lane roundabouts compared to one-lane roundabouts. Joe commented the Damon Road roundabout would have to be a two-lane roundabout and that if bicyclists do not want to use the roadway; they would be able to use the sidewalks and crosswalks. Another PAC member asked to know the design speed limit of the proposed roundabouts, and Joe answered that it was 20 miles per hour in the circulating roadway.

Additional Traffic Discussion

Maureen Chlebek of McMahon Associates next discussed the crash prediction model. She noted that the team collected four years of crash rates, and the model estimated that there would be a reduction of 40 crashes over a four year period at the Damon Road intersection if a roundabout is constructed. In addition, Maureen noted that the study team developed a memo on induced traffic to address the questions and concerns on this topic. Maureen stated that the remaining proposed alternatives are not expected to induce traffic in the study area since these alternatives are not providing new connections, are not expected to alter land use patterns, will not result in mode shifts, and offer modest time savings.

Discussion of Refined Roadway Alternatives

Concept 13 – Joe provided a refined cross section and slope limits for this alternative. In addition, Joe showed a video of the traffic in the alternative during the 2030 PM peak hour.

There would be four westbound lanes of traffic, two through lanes and two left turn lanes. There was a question if the two through lanes could merge into one further east.

Joe stated that the team can investigate how far east the lane drop can be pushed, but both westbound through lanes are needed to accept the two westbound through lanes coming off of the bridge. He noted that the north side sidewalk under the I-91 overpass would move to the other side of the pier. There was a question about the property impacts for this alternative. Joe responded that the impacts are basically unchanged from what was presented earlier with only some minor adjustments.

Al Stegemann, in response to a request, stated that MassDOT recently placed a sign on westbound Coolidge Bridge that I-91 southbound traffic should use the left lane.

James Lowenthal asked if the five-foot shoulder could be marked as a bike lane, since there is a 12-foot outside lane that could be narrowed by one foot. Rich Masse answered that the team can look at this but he isn't sure this roadway is a great candidate for a bike lane based on the traffic volumes and approved guidelines. He suspected that the requirement for the lane would have to be wider than six feet.

There was a comment that the rules related to parking, crossing, and truckers pulling over in the area west of the Damon Road intersection and near Sheldon Field are not clear and should be signed better, perhaps with No Parking signs. The commenter also said that the pedestrian crossings across Route 9 in the area are inadequate and there is no sidewalk on the south side. Rich stated that he knew the city does have plans for improvements to the area around the entrance to the fairgrounds. and that MassDOT will ensure there are no gaps between the area covered by that project and this one.

Concept 13A - Joe stated that this alternative has no major alignment changes. The roadway is mostly just moving five feet to the south (within the right-of-way). There was a question about the need for the Damon Road roundabout south to east right-turn bypass lane Joe stated that with the bypass, the LOS is predicted to be A in the 2030 PM Peak. Without it, the LOS drops significantly. One concern is that the bypass lane does not have the same deflection designed into the roundabout to reduce speed. There is nothing physical to slow them down, except the need to yield at the merge with Route 9. This could be a problem for pedestrians trying to cross here. The team noted that cars would likely have to slow some to enter traffic, but would look at again to ensure that it is in fact needed. Joe also mentioned that removing the bypass lane would reduce the pedestrian crossing distance.

There was a question on whether real traffic volumes were used in the simulations. Joe stated that the 2030 PM peak volumes were used in the simulations. Gary Roux asked how aggressive driver behavior was handled in the simulations. Maureen stated that the team attempted to be as realistic as possible and in some places, they did adjust the gaps that people were willing to accept to enter traffic. She did state that the entrance angles to the roundabouts typically do not allow for speeding.

Joe mentioned that the through traffic volume on Route 9 is driving the need for two lanes within the proposed roundabout, even assuming today's traffic volumes.

There were some comments about the roundabout recently opened on Route 9 and Bridge Road in Leeds. Ned Huntley said that traffic moves slow, the pedestrian crossing

works well, and he is a supporter. Al Stegemann said that prior to the roundabout there was generally a 100-300 foot queue waiting to turn left during peak hours, whereas now there is little or none. He observed that traffic has slowed because it is too tight to speed through the intersection.

Concept 13B – Joe stated that the north and south sections of the western roundabout will only need one lane because the majority of the traffic is east-west through traffic. A benefit of this alternative is that there would only be one lane exiting the western roundabout (heading westbound) which would eliminate the jockeying for position that currently occurs as the two lanes become one.

In this alternative, the areas south of the western roundabout will likely have property impacts. In particular, the impact on the southwest corner was the most apparent. Members of the PAC were concerned about the property impacts.

There was a question whether the construction of the western roundabout enhances the LOS of the eastern roundabout at Damon Road. Maureen answered that no, it does not. The study team, in response to a question, stated that in the 2030 build PM peak, the western roundabout would have an LOS A, while the intersection improvements alternative would have an LOS B. Maureen also stated that the traffic from either roundabout would not back up into the other roundabout during peak congestion. In addition, there were questions on the current LOS at the Damon Road intersection. Maureen answered that current LOS is F.

There was a request to check the AM volumes turning onto I-91 southbound to ensure they are not worse than the PM peak volumes. If they are, these should be modeled. In addition, there was a comment that the western roundabout appears difficult to maneuver in.

There was a question about the LOS of the Damon Road intersection with the proposed improvements but with today's traffic volume. Maureen stated that this was not calculated, but it would obviously be a higher level of service than that calculated with 2034 traffic volumes. The overall intersection LOS today is E.

There were concerns about emergency vehicles and a video was shown on this. Maureen stated the rules for operating in roundabouts when an emergency vehicle is present.

Discussion of Refined TDM Alternatives

Paul Schimek, of TranSystems, provided information on the transit and TDM alternatives. He stated that the transit signal priority project survey of intersections would likely be completed within a few weeks (with completion of installation of equipment possible by next spring). When the survey is complete the study team will have an idea of what additional equipment is needed. Enhanced bus shelters and benches could potentially be included in some existing and proposed road improvement projects affecting Route 9 in Hadley. MassDOT is currently studying pedestrian crossings of Route 9 near West Street in Hadley. In response to an inquiry from

MassDOT, the Hadley engineer said that the town would consider restriping South Maple Street to provide a single travel lane, a turn lane at intersections, and a shoulder, between the Norwottuck Rail Trail and the mall entrances. Paul stated that PVTA is currently working on deploying its ITS system which would provide real-time passenger information, but kiosks and monitors are not currently funded. Funding is also incomplete for the SmartCard program, which would enable PVTA to offer a properly priced employer-based "universal pass" program. James Lowenthal asked about the improvements proposed for West Street and Route 9. Paul responded that there are several possibilities under consideration by MassDOT, including a traffic signal or a "pedestrian hybrid beacon." Another member of the public asked if TDM elements could be included along with a build option. Joe said yes.

Next Steps

Joe went over the next steps of the study process. The team will further develop the alternatives that remain in the analysis based on the comments received and present these to the PAC. The PAC tentatively agreed to hold the next meeting on Tuesday, December 7th, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Bridge Street School Library. The snow date, (school cancellation) will be Wednesday, December 8th at the same time and location. At that meeting the study team and PAC will select a date for the public meeting, likely in January 2011. The study team and PAC will ask the public for input on the remaining alternatives and a preference for a preferred alternative at the public meeting. The study team will create another newsletter for distribution after the December PAC meeting. There was request to provide presentation drafts earlier in advance of future meetings.