

I-91 Interchange 19 Neighborhood Walk

**Saturday, November 28, 2009
10:00 AM**

Comments:

- There was skepticism about whether there was really a problem that needed fixing. Residents want to understand what the purpose of the study is and they also want the facts to back up whatever problem is identified.
- Many people who live in the neighborhood grew up there and have lived there for many decades. They said they do not want their area negatively impacted by roadway improvements. One person said when the highway was built in the 1960s; it cut off the people who lived on Damon Road. Their houses were moved to Bridge St to the meadow area in the shadow of the Coolidge Bridge.
- Damon Road at King St. is a major area of congestion, with the main source of congestion being vehicles heading onto I-91 northbound on-ramp at Interchange 20. Others said the main source of the problem is vehicles heading into hill towns, not the I-91 northbound on-ramp.
- There is concern about the potential impact additional passenger rail traffic on the CT River line could have such as at the grade crossing on Damon Rd. which currently sees limited freight train traffic.
- UMass is a large contributor to traffic issues, especially during special events and at beginning and end of semesters as students arrive/depart.
- Congestion has improved since the left turn signal was installed on Bridge St. at the I-91 Southbound On-Ramp.
- The I-91 southbound loop ramp from Concept 15 of the CT River Crossing Study would impact at least 12 residences including affordable housing.
- The vehicles heading west off of the bridge towards downtown travel at very high speed, a safety concern. The speed, however, drops quickly with the lane drop west of the I-91 Southbound on-ramp.
- Reducing Route 9 east of Interchange 19 from a 4-lane section that existed previously to 2 lanes has been much better for cyclists as they have more room. Another attendee observed that this lane reduction causes cars to jockey for position when lanes go from 2/1.
- Drivers have difficulty exiting Day Ave. during peak times.

- The Norwottuck Trail serves as major Northampton to Amherst connection. There are plans underway to reconstruct/widen the trail. It is anticipated in usage will increase with connection to other trails in and around Northampton; an important resource which needs to be considered.
- The parking at the trail head on Damon Rd. is insufficient esp. on weekends and is used somewhat as a Park and Ride lot.
- Residents do not perceive reduced level of service for eastbound traffic on Route 9 (caused by new left turn light for vehicles accessing I-91 southbound) as a problem. Traffic line may now back up quite a bit but it is offset by the benefits of having the light.
- The new left turn lane (now 2) onto Coolidge Bridge from Damon Road makes traffic flow better. It's a big improvement.
- People were interested in learning what the traffic analysis would show – the topic of next meeting.

Suggestions:

- On westbound Route 9 in Hadley approaching the bridge, there should be more prominent signage for I-91 southbound on-ramp traffic to keep left.
- There was a recommendation to just do something for peak / seasonal events (e.g. timing changes, police detail, etc.)
- There was a recommendation to improve signage on I-91, use better notice / information to travelers to know what to expect.
- There is a high level of interest in some sort of traffic calming for westbound Route 9, especially at the merge area from 4-lanes to lanes. Often, speeds are 45-50 miles per hour.
- There was a recommendation to move the pedestrian signal on Route 9 near Sheldon Field to the Day Ave. intersection to maximize benefit for drivers trying to exit Day Ave. Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), asked residents to consider what road would be best to locate a signal.
- There was a request to please stay out of the meadow along I-91. It is prime agricultural land, attracts wildlife, and residents don't want to lose that or see concrete structures here.
- A general theme that resonated with many was that MassDOT should try to complete smaller, incremental improvements that don't cost a lot of money first and see how they work before going for major, costly improvements.

- Whatever kind of work is proposed, carefully plan and control the construction schedule, deliveries etc to minimize the duration and inconvenience.
- It would be beneficial to the neighborhood residents to hold future meetings at the Bridge St. School.

Other Observations:

- Several members thanked the team for participating in the neighborhood walk. Residents said, after team members summarized the information they heard during the walk, that they felt MassDOT and the consultants had listened. They said this experience and the communication to the PAC to date was positive, a welcome departure from what they experienced prior to the creation of this PAC.
- Attendees represent a cohesive, connected group of residents interested in matters affecting their neighborhood. There is a long-term stability of the neighborhood, not just adjacent to the highway but throughout Ward 3, that needs to be protected and they will want to continue to be engaged in the study in a meaningful way.
- It will be important to continue the dialogue and information sharing that has been developed in the initial PAC activities throughout the study.