

**I-91 Interchange 19 Study
Northampton, MA
Public Meeting**

***Monday, June 14, 2010
Bridge Street School Cafeteria***

MEETING AND COMMENT SUMMARY

Attendees:

Members of the Public

1. Yvonne Boucher
2. Sydney Stern – Ward 3 Resident
3. Claudia Lefko
4. Arnold Levinson
5. Rebecca Neimark – Ward 4 Resident
6. Josh Kellogg – Northampton Media.com
7. Steve Sueco
8. Nicholas Horton
9. Fred Zimnoch – Ward 3 Resident
10. Daio Webster
11. Jessica Pascucci
12. Roger Johnson
13. Owen Freeman-Daniels – W3NA
14. Dianne Mackler – Ward 3 Resident
15. David Foley
16. Mike Lyons
17. Marvin J. Ward
18. Tara Emery
19. Dianne Kubasec
20. Rich Kubasec
21. John Bobala – Ward 3 Resident
22. Pat Nowak – Ward 3 Owner
23. Michelle Squires – Ward 3 Owner
24. Deirdre Scott – Ward 3 Owner
25. Milton Hanzel – Ward 5 Owner
26. Henry Fairlie
27. Diane Fisher Katz
28. David Starr – Green Northampton
29. Joel Dansky
30. Adam Cohen – NorthAssoc.org
31. Lilly Lombard – Grow Food Northampton
32. Luke Jaeger
33. Marianne LaBarge – City Council Ward 6
34. Lee Mongeon
35. Susan Hollingsworth
36. David Pascucci
37. Mac Everett
38. Marilyn Robin
39. Cynthia Koutra
40. Carl Knerr
41. Tom Narrigan – PVTA / VATCO
42. Jim Locey
43. Maureen Scanlon
44. Mary Serreze – NorthamptonMedia.com
45. Katharine Baker
46. Mary Biddle – Northeast Sustainable Energy Association
47. Roni Gold
48. Burr Noel
49. Greg Kline
50. Robin Levine
51. Michael Docter
52. Jesse Doctor
53. Maria Maiz

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|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 54. Susan Lantz | 66. Andy Morris-Friedman - NARTC |
| 55. Jenny Ladd – Commonwealth
Center for Change | 67. Jeremy Church |
| 56. Kate Richardson | 68. John Fisher |
| 57. Mike Anderson | 69. John Lombard – Ward 4
Resident |
| 58. Fran VanTreese | 70. Galen Winsor |
| 59. Shira Lynn | 71. Doug Winsor |
| 60. Michele Spring-Moore – Ward 4
Resident | 72. David Narkewicz – Northampton
City Council |
| 61. Lyle Haggerty – Ward 3 Resident | 73. Deb Bruce – City of Northampton |
| 62. Jackie Misa | 74. John Crosby |
| 63. Nell Lake | 75. Rachel Crosby |
| 64. Jordy Winsor | 76. Frank Olbris |
| 65. Michele Morris-Friedman | 77. Stephen Hathawa |

PAC Members

1. Jerry Budgar – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association
2. Frank J. Werbinski – Ward 3 Resident
3. Christine Cahillane – Ward 3 Resident
4. Gary Roux – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)
5. Marcus J. Boyle – Board of Selectman, Hatfield
6. Dan O'Brien – DCR

Project Team

1. Rich Masse – Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Highway Division, District 2 (MassDOT)
2. Al Stegemann – MassDOT District 2
3. Bao Lang – MassDOT
4. Erik Abell – MassDOT
5. Gautam Sen - MassDOT
6. Gary Bua – TranSystems
7. Joe Cahill – TranSystems
8. Maureen Chlebek – McMahon Associates
9. Paul Schimek – TranSystems
10. Bill Grace – TranSystems
11. Christopher Smith - TranSystems
12. Marcy Miller – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)
13. Jill Barrett - FHI

Presentation Summary

The first part of the meeting consisted of a 45-minute open house. Once this was complete, Al Stegemann of MassDOT asked everyone to have a seat for a brief presentation. Angela Plassman, Northampton Councilor and Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Member, welcomed the public. She then turned the presentation over to the project team.

Gary Bua, of TranSystems, introduced the project team members and reviewed the role of the PAC. Gary next reviewed the presentation agenda. Gary provided the audience with a project background and overview and highlighted the study team's work to date. Marcy Miller, of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc, reviewed the public involvement approach for the project.

Bill Grace, of TranSystems, began the existing conditions report by reviewing the environmental resource screening. He reviewed the natural (wetlands, farmland, water), social (people and what we do), as well as the cultural (historic, archeological) resources. Paul Schimek, of TranSystems next reviewed the existing setting for public transit, including transit conditions and issues. Maureen Chlebek, of McMahon Associates, next reviewed the traffic data collection effort, including the data collection as well as key findings. She noted that the team ran capacity analyses for year 2034.

Joe Cahill, of TranSystems, next went through the study alternatives. Currently, there is one No Build alternative, 10 roadway improvement (build) alternatives, and one Transportation Demand Management alternative. He noted that the No Build alternative is the baseline for all future build alternatives. Joe states that the roadway build alternatives could essentially be separated into two groups. The first group includes Alternatives 12 through 13 C. These are considered localized improvements. The rest, Alternatives 15 through 18, are larger interchange access improvements. Joe reviewed the evaluation matrix and discussed how each of the alternatives ranked in the preliminary portion of the study. Paul discussed how the TDM alternative ranked.

PAC Views of Alternatives

Frank Werbinski, a PAC member, provided PAC views of the alternatives. He stated that the PAC has certain goals they would like to see in the alternatives: that anything built should be built as close as possible to the current roadway footprint; that there are minimal to no land takings; that there is no disruption to agricultural land or flood plain; that it has minimal cost and minimal disruption to users and the community; that it should include traffic, bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements; and that the plan should include traffic calming on Route 9. He noted that the improvement recommendations that can be supported by PAC include 12, 13, 13 A, 13 B, and No Build.

Question and Answer Period / Open Discussion

Question: Why did the PAC not recommend TDM package? Frank stated that the PAC does support the TDM alternative. Gary noted that any of the physical alternatives can be combined with the TDM alternative.

Question: Did the study team take into account the future cost of fuel? Maureen answered that review of the traffic count data over the past 10-20 years has shown a continual upward trend and the team went with trends consistent with the past 10 years. Furthermore, the regional traffic models in this area are projecting an increase in traffic.

Comment: We have to think in a much bigger picture, including alternative energy. These alternatives make no sense. Supports the No Build alternative and the TDM alternative.

Question: Can the engineers quantify the time savings from more expensive alternatives? Maureen answered that time savings from some of the build alternatives are four minutes along the Route 5/10 corridor and six minutes along the Route 9 corridor.

Question: What are the construction impacts on travel? Gary stated that the study team is considering the impacts of the construction on traffic for each of the alternatives. He noted that the first group of alternatives (No Build, 12 – 13 C) generally would have fewer impacts on traffic because the construction timeframe is projected to be shorter.

Question: Who and what is the impetus behind the study? Gary stated that the *CT River Crossing Study* was conducted before this study. The recommendation from that study was to improve traffic to this area instead of building another river crossing, which would be very expensive. Rich Masse, of MassDOT, also noted that safety and congestion were the main incentives to complete this study. There were high crash rates in many areas of the study area. MassDOT has the responsibility to oversee that traffic moves at a reasonable rate. For example, we do not want traffic backing up onto the interstate.

Question: Were crash rates highest during construction of Coolidge Bridge? Yes

Question: Won't building new lanes bring out more traffic to the roads eventually, a concept called induced demand? Maureen agreed that congestion can act as a disincentive for traffic. Using congestion, however, as a traffic calming measure is not a good policy. Safety goes down dramatically when roads are too congested. People make rash decisions. Drivers will start taking chances they may not otherwise take, such as going through a recently turned red light. Additionally, the congestion will begin to spill over onto neighborhood streets.

Comment: Concerned that traffic will prompt development of farmland in Hadley. Supports the No Build alternative. If this area wants to provide access to jobs and

adequate transportation in the future, has to consider some sort of improvements in this area. Planning and land use are related to transportation and should be planned accordingly.

Comment: Concerned about induced demand from any roadway improvements. Maureen stated that induced traffic can consist of traffic that changes from one mode of transportation to another or traffic that changes travel patterns. In this case, the induced traffic is not likely to consist of transit users switching to vehicles, as the transit ridership is low. The project alternatives do not provide new connections that do not already exist. Therefore, the traffic anticipated at the new Interchange 19 ramps will consist of re-routed traffic that previously used the adjacent interchanges.

Question: Are the impact charts online? Yes, at http://www.interchange19.org/documents/pdf_movie/PIMPresentation%20-%20Draft6-10-10.pdf.

Comment: Taking the bus to Easthampton is difficult. There is limited parking on the east side of river. Please consider parking for public transportation in Hadley.

Question: Paving streets in Northampton should be a greater priority than building new interchanges. What will the impact be on carbon emissions? Bill stated that depending on the selected course of action, additional study of air quality may be required. In addition, there is conceptual new legislation on carbon emissions.

Question: The state is crazy to spend money on this interchange. Are you communicating with UMass? Rich answered that MassDOT has letter into UMass requesting information on their expansion plans. Christine Cahillane, a PAC member, mentioned that a request was made at the PAC meetings that freshman and sophomores not be allowed to have cars on campus. She noted that this request was ignored by UMass.

Comment: The team should consider technology as colleges increasingly go online for classes. Maureen discussed the 1% per year increase in traffic in more detail. Gary added that the traffic in this area has increased at a rate of 2% per year since the *Connecticut River Crossing Study*.

Question: Is the study team considering carpooling as an alternative? Paul answered that the team has considered additional Park & Ride facilities. There is, however, an agency that already handles carpool matching.

Question: Do any of the alternatives affect King Street? Maureen answered that the first group of alternatives (No Build, 12 – 13 C) have little impact on Route 5. The other alternatives, because of the additional ramps, do have a positive impact on Route 5 traffic.

Question: Will Exit 20 be closed if there is a full interchange constructed at Exit 19? No. Will there be more cars on Damon road then? Yes

Question: Why are there no solutions offered for Exit 20 at same time? Supports Alternative 13. Maureen noted that the team looked at both Interchanges 19 and 20, but the focus is primarily to improve situation on Route 9. Rich discussed the Damon Road / King Street improvements that are planned.

Question: Does the fact that the simulation did not include stop light at Damon Road for the rail trail have an affect on the roundabout? No, the traffic analysis shows that the anticipated traffic queue on Damon Road does not extend to rail trail intersection.

Question: For options 15, 17, 18, will the rail trail have to be closed and for how long? There will be some temporary construction impacts for these alternatives, especially for Alternative 15. During construction, there would be mitigation in the form of a detour / bypass.

Question: Supports trolley between Amherst and Northampton. Would a roundabout make a trolley unfeasible? There would have to be significant infrastructure changes.

Comment: There is a bottleneck now on Route 9 in Hadley and a developing situation on Route 10 in Easthampton. These projects should take priority over any interchange improvements. Rich answered that MassDOT is in early stages of a Route 9 improvement design and in the design process for Route 10 as well. Any of these projects can compete at the MPO level and receive federal funding.

Comment: Supports the No Build alternative and TDM alternative.

Comment: It would be helpful if the project team members wore name tags.

Question: How does the difference in price among the alternatives impact the evaluation? Gary noted that this is certainly part of the evaluation. The prices of the first alternatives (No Build, 12 -13 C) are much lower than the others. The "bang for the buck" is an evaluation criteria that the state takes seriously. It is definitely considered more in this current climate of financial crisis.

Question: Will there be other public meetings? Marcy stated that while there was not another meeting planned that will cover this same material, there are other public meetings planned in the future, when the alternatives are reduced and there is further analysis.

Question: Can you review potential the land takings? Joe and Gary reviewed these in detail and agreed to email the estimates to Angela Plassmann.

Comment: It appears from this meeting is that there is going to be a project. If the decision of the community is to do nothing, MassDOT will consider that. This desire certainly has value.

Comment: There were concerns with the state doing the project in a timely manner. Suggested computer scheduling and project management. Put information on the web. Rich stated that MassDOT is continually trying to improve project delivery for projects,

including working with utilities as early as possible. Rich also stated that all contractors are now expected to submit computer scheduling to the state.

Question: What happens next? Gary stated that the study team will take comments on the alternatives for 10 days after the June 14, 2010 meeting. The team will then reduce the number of alternatives at next PAC meeting.

Comment: Do not support land takings. If you must, please do it quickly. Support mitigation of noise and sight impacts. Money would be better spent on basic services. State should maintain sidewalks on bridges. Supports traffic calming, and reference Prospect Avenue where it was totally ignored.

Comment: Supports No Build alternative. Concerns about population forecasts. Gary Roux, of Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, spoke about forecasts and long range planning.

Comment: Thank you for a competent presentation. Hope Northampton pushes to find new ways to make improvements. Supports alternative transportation.

Written Comments Received at the Meeting

1. There needs to be a much broader, regional effort to get people out of their cars. The TDM option is good as far as it goes-but we need to think about the bigger picture. We need PVRTA to function as a rider-focused, service-oriented transit agency and create infrastructure that works.
 - More Park + Ride lots
 - Better service to from area schools (elementary / secondary as well as colleges)
2. We favor the No Build option and wish, instead, for DOT funding to invest in bike/ped infrastructure and public transit. The past 100 years have demonstrated conclusively that road expansion merely induces traffic; after a few short years of reduced congestion, more cars will use these exits and we will be back to where we started, only with fewer acres of prime farmland, fewer homes, more pollution, and degraded quality of life. Please heed the broad range of stake holders who are putting the brakes on this expansion. This is the 21st Century. Climate change and peak oil are upon us. Enough of the antiquated solutions. We need real lasting solutions.
3. How about: "First of all, do no harm." 1) Could we get by with simply widening the turn-off for northbound I-91? 2) I'm concerned about the effects on the vest-pocket park. 3) Unless you build another bridge and route through Hadley, you'll still have the same traffic problem.
4. I strongly urge approval of TDM concept. Improve bicycle and bus transportation. This is the most environmentally sound solution!

5. None of these exchanges are acceptable except No Build. The others only benefit big box stores (whose pocket are they filling to make this happen) and do not encourage alternative transportation that use less fossil fuel and in the end, decrease dependence on automobiles. How about bus lanes, or carpool- which \$22 million can pay for a lot of alternative transit ideas like TDM.
6. A good presentation. Thank you for community inclusion and transparency in the design process. I have so many comments. I'll submit them online.
7. I live on King Street north of Damon Road. Pedestrian / bike access to the bike path is unpleasant and feels dangerous-bad intersection and King / Damon, no shoulder on Damon Road. I would like any plan to address this. I am not convinced that we should plan for increased traffic. Rather, focus on bike access and better public transit, both along Route 9 and on 5/10 so I have those options. Prefer the option of not improving the intersection.
8. It would be very helpful if those people presenting information had name tags that also identified his / her organization.
9. Make the flyovers fly away! Eliminate concepts 15-18. I support the PACs goals and recommendations. I support the TDM package! With No Build or whatever concepts rise to the final three. Maybe this should be done first?! I think that the concept that makes the greatest improvement in safety, etc, at the least cost is the preferable one.
10. Preferred alternatives: No Build or 13. Proceed with the TDM alternative. Continue with public meetings. Proceed with and expand on TDM. Am also interested in the possibility of an additional span.
11. I have worked as a delivery driver and cab driver in the Northampton area over the last several years including before the Russell Road / Bridge projects. I am retired from the insurance industry today the I-91 Exit 19 and Route 9 areas are fine. I have no problems. No changes to the intersection are necessary. Damon Road is congested at King Street. Why don't you work with the City of Northampton to improve that traffic congestion? You did not include a large printout (8" x 12") of the existing roadway layout showing the No Build concept in your package of 10 concepts (blow ups). Please pass them out at the next public meeting so the No Build concept has the same exposure as the Build concepts. I favor the No Build concept.