

I-91 Exit 19 Interchange at Route 9 / Damon Road DRAFT Public Involvement Plan

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Public Involvement Program

Successful community outreach and public involvement on a project, such as the I-91 Exit 19 Interchange project, requires not only familiarity with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation planning and design process, but also recognition of the key stakeholders and issues in the study area. A willingness to listen and respond to these stakeholders and issues can greatly assist in incorporating community concerns in project decision-making and design. Many approaches will be used to notify public of what is happening throughout the study and there will be numerous opportunities for discussion and comment. Public opinion and comments will be documented and considered in the development of recommendations for improvements to the interchange.

Public Participation Principles

The public involvement plan has been developed to support civic engagement in the study by emphasizing the following principles:

- The public shall have access to information about the study: A record of all community and Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings will be kept. Technical documents will be placed in locations available to the public.
- The public shall be presented with clear information: Information will be clearly written and technical terms and regulatory procedures will be explained.
- The public may learn about or become engaged in the study in a variety of ways: Methods will include community meetings, PAC meetings, study website, stories in the local newspapers, and project newsletters.
- The public shall be able to engage with a responsive study team: The public and PAC will receive sufficient notice of meetings, which will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient and comfortable. Ample time to review any materials will also be provided. All public questions and inquiries will be answered in a timely manner.
- The public shall be able to participate in a process that is well coordinated: Good coordination, communication, and collaboration among all concerned agencies and community organizations will be critical to providing the public with the most current and correct information and the overall success of the project.

Elements of the Plan

The Public Involvement Plan has many elements to involve and inform the public in a meaningful way. The study team will be accessible to the public, share information in a complete and understandable manner and record and respond to public comments and concerns. Specific elements of the plan will include:

1. Project Advisory Committee (PAC)

A PAC has been created, many of its members having been formerly involved in the Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study, to guide the planning process in the project development and design phases of the project. Stakeholders/interests represented on the PAC include the project area neighborhood, bicycling advocates, regional planning and transit agencies, colleges and universities, environmental/water resources, recreation and municipal, state and federal government. PAC members will assist in the study effort by providing advice and insight on local issues, identifying deficiencies in the network, and assessing improvement alternatives.

The consultant will take a collaborative approach with the PAC. The consultant will share relevant study documents with the PAC as they are developed. Materials will be sent to the group in advance of the meetings to allow adequate time for review before meetings. PAC members will be asked to bring concerns and insights for discussion to the full committee and the consultant team. Alternatives and impacts will be examined as the study progresses. PAC members will also be asked to assist the team in conducting community outreach by identifying issues important to their interests and the public at large, identifying other key stakeholders and attending public meetings to discuss the progress of the project.

It is estimated that between four to six (4-6) PAC meetings will be held during the project development phase. An additional estimated four (4) meetings will be held during the design phase of the project.

2. Public Meetings

The consultant will conduct two (2) public meetings during the course of the project development phase. The first meeting will be held after the second PAC meeting, after the study area, goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria for the project are finalized. This public meeting will be held while alternatives evaluation is underway and a substantial evaluation of environmental impacts has been completed. A final public meeting will be held near the conclusion of the project development phase when final recommendations have been drafted.

In addition, the consultant will conduct one (1) public hearing during the design phase of the project, at 25% completion, if necessary.

The format for the public meetings and hearing will be open house. This will allow for public review of documents, opportunities for one-on-one discussion with members of the study team and Massachusetts Department of Transportation officials, and a formal presentation of the study's purpose and progress followed by a question and answer period.

4. Neighborhood Walk

Shortly after the first public meeting, the consultant will take a guided walk/drive of the study area with members of the public. This will be an opportunity for the consultant team to actively listen to concerns/observations of people most directly affected by the I-91 Interchange Exit 19 Project. It will also present an opportunity to get an "on the ground" view of the study area through the eyes of the public.

3. Project Website

Project websites are a very effective way to support public participation efforts for transportation projects. FHI will develop an interactive website for the general public. This site will follow the progress of the study, advertise meetings, provide access to minutes of meetings and documents and allow people to make comments and ask questions. The website will be designed to be graphically rich, while adhering to all ADA and Section 508 Website Accessibility Standards. The website will be hosted on a private, third party server to allow quick and efficient updating and maintenance. Specifically, the consultant will develop web pages with information on:

- Project Overview
- Project Schedule
- Project News
- Meetings / Meeting Summaries
- Project Documents
- Contact Information (including a comment submittal form)
- Resources/Links

The study website will be updated on a regular basis up until the end of the project. In addition, the website will be linked to a database of area residents and

organizations that would receive notices of meetings or announcements. This database in (Microsoft Access) will also be used to track comments and responses from the website. These comments and responses will be coordinated with Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

5. Newsletters / Fact Sheets

The Study Team will publish and distribute periodic updates in a newsletter or fact sheet format. The newsletter / fact sheets will be distributed electronically to the fullest extent possible to members of local boards and commissions, neighbors and abutters, local college communication networks, and the press.

It is anticipated that four (4) printed newsletters will be published and distributed. These newsletters will likely be released at the initiation of the study, midway through the project development phase, the completion of the draft plan, and prior to the 25 percent design public hearing, if necessary.

6. Media Coordination

The Study Team will reach out to the media in advance of public meetings to announce the upcoming meetings. The PAC can provide assistance in identifying the appropriate media outlets for such announcements. In between meetings, all press inquiries will be coordinated through MassDOT's public affairs section.