



Meeting Notes

Date: Wednesday, October 25, 2023
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Place: Otis Library
Community Room, 2nd Floor
261 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

Re: CTDOT Project No.: DOT01030281PL
SCCOG Chelsea Harbor/Downtown Mobility Study
Public Information Meeting #1

Project No.: 43283.00

- › This meeting was conducted as a hybrid meeting with an in-person component and a virtual component. The in-person meeting took place at the Otis Library in Norwich, CT, while the on-line meeting was conducted simultaneously on Microsoft Teams. Approximately 30 people attended the in-person meeting, including staff from the City of Norwich, the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), CTDOT, VHB and VN Engineers. Three people attended the online meeting. Audio and video of the meeting was recorded using Microsoft Teams. The recording of the meeting can be found at the project website: <https://downtownnorwichmobilitystudy.com/>
- › Jim Butler, Senior Advisor at SCCOG, opened the meeting, introduced himself, and thanked all attendees for coming. Norwich City Council President Pro-Tempore Joseph DeLucia provided opening remarks about the Chelsea Harbor/Downtown Norwich Mobility Study project.
- › Daniel Amstutz, Senior Transportation Planner with VHB, provided an introduction to the mobility study. The study has its own website. The public meeting will go over the existing conditions for the study area and have a Q&A session at the end of the meeting.
- › The goals of the study include improving livability, mobility, and access to essential services; creating safe routes to the waterfront, Howard T. Brown Park, the Transportation Center, Norwich Marina, and downtown; and development of alternatives to the current road configuration and traffic flows. The study is a key component in the City of Norwich's efforts to provide streets that are safe and accessible for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users of all ages and abilities. Amstutz showed a map of the study area, which includes much of downtown Norwich by the waterfront as well as west across Holly Hock Island and east on Main Street to just across the Shetucket River.
- › Amstutz went over the Norwich transportation context.
 - Norwich was the commercial, transportation, and manufacturing hub of the region in the 19th century. There is a convergence of state roads into Downtown Norwich due to the fact that the local topography and rivers make it difficult to route traffic around downtown.
 - In the mid-20th century the transportation concern was getting traffic quickly from Hartford to the beaches in Westerly, Rhode Island, for vacationers. There was a proposal to extend the express highway portion of Route 2 north of the downtown, but it was rejected by the City. Other proposals to route traffic south of downtown never materialized. Instead, the TOPICS traffic program was implemented, with new traffic signals and one-way streets, which was immediately unpopular with local residents and the city.
 - More recently, the City of Norwich has affirmed its commitment to transportation for all users with the recent adoption of its Complete Streets Policy (2022).

- › The existing conditions overview includes data on traffic, safety, pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation, parking, and public engagement.
- › Joe Balskus with VHB discussed the traffic data.
 - Several state routes converge into downtown, including Route 2, Route 12 (Principal Arterials), Route 82, and Route 32. Traffic data was collected over summer 2023 including Turning Movement Counts (TMCs) at intersections and machine counts along the corridor. The goal is to understand when peak traffic periods occur and get average daily traffic volumes, speeds, and vehicle types.
 - Traffic volumes this year are higher compared with CTDOT traffic data collected in 2020. Speeds are not unusually high for the type of roads in the study. Traffic tends to be spread out over the day, and some days have similar volume counts. There are also some non-traditional peak hours.
 - Traffic observations included:
 - Typical Route 2 through traffic
 - Higher speeds along Chelsea Harbor Drive and Water Street due to wider roadways
 - Signals causing congestion at key intersections
 - Queuing observed at: Water Street & Chelsea Harbor Drive/Courthouse Square, going eastbound on Route 2; and Main Street & Courthouse Square/Broadway, going westbound, backing up into the roundabout
 - Intersection capacity was analyzed and a traffic model was developed. Level of Service (LOS), indicating how well intersections serve vehicle traffic based on congestion and delay, were analyzed for each intersection. Most intersections work acceptably, except for the large intersection of Route 2 at Viaduct Road/Laurel Hill Ave/Summer Street/Talman Street, and Route 2 at Route 12 (Viaduct Road and Main Street/N. Main Street).
- › Amstutz went over crash data collected for the project.
 - For the 2018-2022 period there were 938 crashes in the study area. 291 crashes occurred at key intersections in the study area. The highest crash density with the highest number of crashes (96) was at Washington Square (Washington Street at Main Street).
 - 17% of these crashes were injury crashes. The locations where the highest number of injuries occurred include Washington Square, Water Street/Chelsea Harbor Drive, W. Main Street at Thames Street, and Main Street at Viaduct Road.
 - The most common crash types were front to rear (rear-end) at 43%, sideswipe same direction at 20%, and angle crashes at 18%.
 - December accounts for highest proportion of crashes by month (10%), while Friday accounts for highest proportion of crashes by day of the week (17%).
 - There were 20 pedestrian crashes and 4 bicycle crashes during the 2018-2022 period. 70% of pedestrian-involved crashes resulted in a KAB level injury (the most severe injuries including fatalities). Pedestrians account for nearly 17% of all KAB level injuries despite having commute to work mode share of only 2.4% and represent only 2% of total crashes. Most pedestrian crashes happened in low-light conditions (70%). The highest number of pedestrian crashes happened at Washington Square and Viaduct Road and Main Street (3 each). The four bicycle crashes occurred in daylight, and three of them resulted in injuries.

- › Amstutz went over information about pedestrian conditions:
 - As an older urban center, Norwich generally has a good pedestrian network, with not many gaps in the sidewalk network. However, the pedestrian experience varies and conditions along the state roadways are generally less appealing than the local roadways that still have a dense, walkable built environment.
 - Pedestrian observations in the field included:
 - Only some curb ramps upgraded at many intersections
 - Lack of yielding for pedestrians at unsignalized crosswalks (Water Street for example)
 - Speed of car traffic with limited buffer on some streets
 - Aggressive driving observed – including pulling beyond Stop bars into crosswalks and blocking pedestrian travel
 - Outside of immediate downtown, long distances to find safe crossings
 - Maps of existing sidewalks, crosswalks, and general conditions of curb ramps were also shown.
- › Amstutz went over information about public transportation conditions.
 - Norwich is the hub of a regional transportation network. Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT) routes travel through and around downtown Norwich. In addition, an express route of the Windam Regional Transit District (WRTD) travels to Norwich via Willimantic. Amstutz showed a map of transit in the region, and a zoomed-in map of transit in the study area.
 - Public transportation observations in the field included:
 - Google Map and GIS data show bus stops, although SEAT is a flag-down service.
 - Bus shelters lack route information; some shelters are simply not being used by transit service.
 - Some SEAT signage is present, but unclear of its purpose, and they are affixed to other signs and posts, which can be hard to notice.
- › Amstutz went over information about bicycling conditions.
 - Bicycling observations in the field included:
 - No bicycle lanes or bike pavement markings were observed in the study area.
 - There are some bike racks near the library and at the Transportation Center.
 - People were observed bicycling on Main Street and near Howard T. Brown Park.
 - The Heritage Walk Trail is the only off-road facility in the study area, but it has limited connectivity, and is oriented to pedestrians.
 - The SCCOG Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan included recommendations around the Downtown Norwich area. They are:
 - Provide bike lanes, sharrows, and “Bikes May Use Full Lane” signs in downtown
 - Bicycle accommodations for Boswell Ave and Talman Street
 - Route 12 from Water Street to the Preston Border: widen roadway for bike-safe shoulders
 - Add short-term and long-term bike parking

- Create signed bike route along Norwich Ave from the Town Green in Colchester to downtown Norwich
- The CTDOT Active Transportation Plan was reviewed for this study as well. Route 2 through Downtown Norwich is on the CTDOT On Road Bicycle Planning Network as a priority for including bicycle facilities in future projects. Additionally, Courthouse Square and Broadway are part of the network as municipally-maintained roads. A review of the suitability of the roads for bicycling by the Plan shows that many of the state roads downtown have low suitability for bicycling. Route 2 and Route 12 are in the higher implementation tiers for creating bicycle improvements, being in Tier II-1 to Tier II-5 and Tier II-6 to Tier II-8.
- › Amstutz discussed parking observations and data.
 - The VHB Team made parking observations and collected data about on-street parking regulations. On-street parking observations included:
 - There is a wide array of parking regulations and restrictions for on-street parking, often focused on directly adjacent land uses. This can make it confusing for people to know where to park.
 - Time-limited on-street parking may change in a single block (e.g., 2-hour parking from 7 am – 4 pm and 8 am – 6 pm). This was observed on Water Street between Market Street and Washington Street. This also causes confusion for residents and visitors.
 - Main Street, Broadway, and Courthouse Square had the heaviest parking occupancy observed.
 - Off-street parking observations were also made. In general, off-street parking garages and lots are underutilized. Observations were made a public and private parking garages and lots that could be accessed. Signage directing people to garages is not very effective, and some garage layouts are confusing.
 - Amstutz showed a map of on-street parking regulations in downtown.
- › Bridget Moriarty, from VN Engineers, went over public engagement for the project so far.
 - The public survey for the study is available in English, Spanish, and Chinese. As of this meeting, 275 responses have been collected. The survey will continue to be available online through the study website through November 20. Sample comments received include:
 - Requests: More events, beautification, more green space, Improved bike and pedestrian amenities, more economic development, more restaurants and shops.
 - Concerns: Driver behavior, personal safety, and congestion.
 - Specific Requests: More bike lanes, improvements at marina, improved ped crossings, parking improvements.
 - Two pop-up events have been conducted: at the Rock the Docks event on August 23, and the Celebrate Cultural Diversity event on September 19. These opportunities allowed the Study Team to share information about the project, promote the public survey, and gather feedback. The Team interacted with about 75 people.
 - Feedback was put onto maps either written on by members of the public or by the Study Team in their conversations with people. Feedback on the maps covered themes such as safety at intersections, comments about the Franklin Square Roundabout, pedestrian safety, the boat launch at Howard T. Brown Park, and general traffic concerns.

- › At the end of the presentation was a Q & A session for attendees. Comments made during Q&A included the following:
 - There was a request for future public meetings to have communication options made available for people who are low-vision or hearing impaired to make them more accessible. Also, please include a reference to wheelchair users in the public survey.
 - Ugly trash cans, blank storefronts, bad sidewalks are in downtown and need to be addressed.
 - Empty buildings and storefronts are falling into disrepair. Windows should be covered up so people do not see the empty, messy areas inside.
 - Consistent litter and weed control is needed – get property owners and businesses to help clean up.
 - Too many one-way streets make commutes longer, as you have to go on a circuitous route to get anywhere.
 - Better wheelchair accessibility is needed around downtown.
 - Encourage more use of the Transportation Center parking garage by the Marina and Park.
 - Bike lanes are needed in downtown.
 - In front of the City Hall and Post Office, drivers are not stopping for pedestrians in the crosswalks; a few people mentioned almost getting hit while walking across the street.
 - Norwich is not very walkable, yet the historical society is investing time, effort and money into promoting walking tours; need to support walkability downtown.
 - The Franklin Square roundabout is confusing for people to use.
 - There are many unhoused people around the downtown that make people concerned about their personal safety.
 - The City should try to close of a street to make it for pedestrians only to support local businesses and do what other communities are doing and testing out.
 - Public restrooms are needed downtown for events and visitors.
 - More art is needed downtown.
 - Trees and vegetation are overgrown and not maintained well. This creates an eyesore downtown.
 - Improve public transportation to support as an alternative mode of transportation for residents.
 - Making Water Street (for example) walkable may have to come at the cost of lowering the speed limit and causing some congestion. These are trade-offs that need to be made.
 - Accessibility for children to youth centers should be considered in this study.
 - Reduce on-street parking and make room for bike lanes; encourage people to use the garages instead.
 - Parking garages are blocking the view of the river/marina and could be removed to make it easier to see and access the riverfront. That property could then be used for other things, such as an extension of the Howard T. Brown Park.

- › After the Q&A session, in-person attendees were able to review maps of the project study area and ask additional questions or give comments.

- › The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm.