



Meeting Notes

Date: Monday, March 4, 2024
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Place: Norwich City Hall
City Manager Conference Room
(Room 335)
100 Broadway
Norwich, CT 06360

Re: SCCOG Chelsea Harbor/Downtown Mobility Study
CTDOT Project No.: DOT01030281PL
Transportation Advisory Committee Meeting #3

Project No.: 43283.00

ATTENDEES:

| Name | Affiliation |
|--------------------|--|
| Amanda Kennedy | SCCOG |
| Jim Butler | SCCOG |
| Nicole Haggerty | SCCOG |
| Kate Rattan | SCCOG |
| Patrick McLaughlin | City of Norwich Public Works |
| Deanna Rhodes | City of Norwich <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Dan Daniska | City of Norwich |
| Brian Long | City of Norwich Public Works |
| Tracy Montoya | City of Norwich Fire Department |
| Scott Merchant | City of Norwich Fire Department |
| Patrick Daly | City of Norwich Police Department |
| Kavin Brown | Norwich Community Development Corporation |
| Michael Carroll | Southeast Area Transit District <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Philip Andrews | Southeast Area Transit District <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Marlon Pena | CTDOT <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Fred Kulakowski | CTDOT <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Ed Sabourin | CTDOT |
| Jake Fusco | CTDOT |
| Claudiel Merronis | CTDOT <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Joe Balskus | VHB |
| Daniel Amstutz | VHB |
| Charlie Baker | VHB |
| Will Britnell | VHB <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Will Kresic | VHB <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |
| Andre Singer | VHB <i>(Remotely Attended)</i> |

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Bridget Moriarty | VN Engineers |
|------------------|--------------|

NOTES:

Welcome and Introductions

- › TAC members, additional attendees and consultant staff introduced themselves.

Overview of Study Progress

- › Daniel Amstutz went over the study progress since the last time the TAC met in September 2023. Among the highlights:
 - The first public information meeting was held October 25, and about 30 people attended. Overall it was a successful meeting.
 - The study public survey closed November 22. 384 responses were received, which are described in the Existing Conditions Report.
 - The Existing Conditions Report was finalized in early January.
 - The Future Conditions Report was finalized in early February.

Future Conditions Overview

- › Amstutz briefly went over the scope of work for the future conditions element of the project. The scope included:
 - Reviewing future development potential.
 - Reviewing the future traffic forecast and operational assessment.
 - Describing the bicycle, pedestrian, and transit potential in the study area.
- › CTDOT forecasted growth in traffic volumes is about 0.5% per year over 20 years for a total increase in traffic of 10%.
 - This accounts for regional traffic growth, planned transportation improvements, and most planned development projects. Amstutz showed a map of future traffic volumes in the study area.
- › Future development identified for the study area includes about 100 units of new housing plus commercial redevelopment. Developments identified are:
 - **77-91 Main Street** (42 units)
 - **201 Main Street** (17 units plus commercial)
 - **337-341 Main Street** (old YMCA)
 - **352 Main Street** (Hotel Callista/old Elks Lodge)
 - **16 Cedar Street** (26 units; site of New London County Jail)
 - **46 W. Main Street/74-78 W. Main Street** (Norwich Marina/American Wharf)
 - **36/44 Falls Ave** (Wastewater Treatment Plant reconstruction)
 - **115 Forest Street** (Cannabis cultivation facility)

- › All developments except one were assumed to be covered under the CTDOT forecasted growth in traffic as there would not be significant new vehicle traffic originating from the above developments. The only one that is likely not in the growth model is the redevelopment of the Norwich Marina/American Wharf as that was just announced in the Fall of 2023. VHB modeled new trips from the Marina redevelopment (a new sit-down restaurant and possible hotel redevelopment) and found that the number of trips generated would be minimal compared to the overall network. Therefore, it was considered covered by traffic background growth and the 10% growth from CTDOT was used for the traffic operations analysis.
 - The analysis found that existing operational issues would worsen at Route 2 at Viaduct Road/Laurel Hill Ave/Summer Street/Talman Street and at Route 2 at Route 12 (Viaduct Road & N. Main Street). Traffic signal phasing adjustments could be done but this would provide only marginal improvements.

Preliminary Analysis of Potential Transportation Improvements & Vision

- › The vision for transportation improvements was based on these overall principles, which came directly from the Mobility Study scope of work:
 - Improve safety for all
 - Create more bicycle and pedestrian space, better crossings
 - Improve access to waterfront, Howard T. Brown Park
 - Lower traffic speeds while keeping traffic flowing
 - Improve operations at worst intersections
 - Make circulation around downtown easier for all
- › Amstutz emphasized that no decisions were final on the potential improvements and all of it was up for discussion.
- › Norwich has a significant degree of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit potential:
 - Norwich retains much of its walkable urban form, although only about 2-3% of downtown trips are by walking or biking (based on data collection)
 - Need to improve safety, especially for pedestrians – overrepresented in injury crashes
 - Improve pedestrian crossings, comfort
 - Lower traffic speeds, provide separated bicycle space
 - Extend and connect Heritage Trail
 - Improve frequency, user experience of transit system
- › Additional high level notes about the potential transportation improvements are:
 - Initial modeling shows the concept plan **can work** with limited operational issues for traffic
 - Washington Square needs to be modeled using different software to develop more accurate level of service results
 - No costs developed yet
 - Diverting Route 2 through traffic can also improve traffic operations to improve viability of these options
- › Amstutz presented an overview of the transportation improvements and went over the primary concepts for the TAC:

1. Roundabout at W. Main Street/Route 82 and N. Thames Street
 2. Convert W. Side Boulevard to Pedestrian-Bike Bridge
 3. W. Main Street Bridge/Route 82 becomes two-way
 4. Install Traffic Signal at W. Main Street and Falls Ave/Norwich Marina
 5. Roundabout at Washington Square
 6. Water Street/Route 2 becomes two-way
 7. Install Traffic Signal at Water Street and Market Street
 8. Chelsea Harbor Drive becomes local street and does not connect to Water Street
 9. Simplified signal at Water Street and Courthouse Square
 10. Make Talman Street and Summer Street one-way away from the Water Street/Laurel Hill Ave/Viaduct Road intersection to simplify operations
- › The TAC discussed and asked questions about the potential improvements:
- There was a question about left turns from westbound W. Main Street onto southbound Route 32/Thames Street – would this require a turn lane? A left turn lane may be needed eastbound from W. Main Street onto Falls Ave, so there could be back-to-back turn lanes with modifications to the existing pull-off by the Transportation Center if it's found that this turn lane is needed.
 - It was discussed that one of the main concerns is that there are no queues from signals that would back up into the roundabouts.
 - Making West Side Boulevard a pedestrian bridge is likely to have maintenance implications as it's not clear CTDOT would continue to be responsible for bridge maintenance.
 - It was noted that connecting the structure to the Transportation Center may help to define it as a pedestrian access path.
 - The "history wall" should be renamed a "public art wall" to clarify its purpose.
 - Michael Carroll said he appreciated the inclusion of a traffic signal at W. Main Street and Falls Ave to help SEAT buses exit the Center. He raised a concern about making the W. Side Boulevard bridge pedestrian only because they have used the shoulder area of the bridge as a temporary bus pull-off when the Transportation Center bus area has been flooded. Could there be an emergency access or bus lane on the bridge for this need?
 - The TAC discussed simply reducing traffic lanes on the bridges instead of closing off a whole bridge. This could be another option for the west side of downtown.
 - The TAC noted there should be more attention to the area east of Franklin Square for bicyclist connections and to address concerns at the Post Office crosswalk.
 - Some TAC members raised concerns about property impacts from the roundabouts and if that would be an issue. Also, is there a slope issue at Washington Square which would prevent the installation of a roundabout? Joe Balskus noted that it has been done before in other places with similar grade issues.

- City of Norwich staff asked about including a proposal to make Bath Street two-way in the recommendations. They would like to remove the traffic signal at Main Street and Courthouse Square/Broadway, but this only works if people can go both ways on Bath Street to have another option to go south from City Hall.
 - The TAC discussed providing recommendations for loading zones in the downtown as well, and parking issues in general. Would any parking spaces be removed in these potential improvements? Amstutz noted that additional and safer on-street parking would be created by reducing traffic lanes and making Chelsea Harbor Drive a local street. Otherwise, there may be some parking impacts for pedestrian safety, but very few parking spaces would be impacted in this case.
 - The TAC also discussed the need for consistent parking signage in downtown and that should be a recommendation.
 - The improvements should include the possibility of a trail along the water, under the Water Street bridge, between Howard T. Brown Park and the parking lot behind 201 Main Street. This has been conceived as another possible connection.
 - An option discussed is to make a pedestrian plaza on W. Main Street between Falls Ave and Washington Square and keep W. Side Boulevard open for traffic instead. W. Main Street would still allow access to the Transportation Center and the Marina. The pedestrian plaza would flow into the Howard T. Brown Park and be closer to downtown than using the W. Side Boulevard Bridge. The W. Side Boulevard bridge is still considered a “new” bridge to people and there may be opposition to converting it to pedestrian use only.
 - Another option recommended by the TAC was to keep both bridges open to vehicle traffic but eliminate a traffic lane on each one while making them two-way, so they would be one lane in each direction and allow for wider sidewalks and bicycle lanes. This would allow traffic to go different directions based on their destination, and provide greater mobility around the downtown.
 - City staff expressed interest in having a roundabout at the intersection of Washington Street and West Side Boulevard if that bridge is kept open to car traffic.
 - SCCOG and VHB are scheduled to present the potential improvement changes to downtown to the Norwich City Council on Monday, March 18. The TAC decided that three options should be presented to the Council:
 - Option 1: West Side Boulevard as a bicycle/pedestrian bridge (“Bridge of Roses”)
 - Option 2: Pedestrian Plaza on W. Main Street, keeping West Side Boulevard open to traffic
 - Option 3: Keep both West Side Boulevard and W. Main Street open to traffic and include bicycle lanes on the bridges.
- › VHB will do preliminary analysis of options 2 and 3 and draw up concepts for the City Council presentation.

Tactical Engagement Event

- › Bridget Moriarty presented options for the tactical engagement event to be held in May or June. The goal of the event is to enhance the pedestrian and/or bicycle connections within the Chelsea Harbor/Downtown Norwich Mobility Study area and test out potential traffic changes. Several locations were reviewed, including the American Wharf to Howard T. Brown Park to downtown Norwich; Washington Square; Main Street near the intersection with Park Street; Courthouse Square at Broadway and Main Street; and West Side Boulevard.

- Courthouse Square at Broadway is the most feasible project within the timeframe of the Study, as well as being the safest to pull off and visible, being in the middle of downtown.
 - Moriarty showed a diagram of the potential crosswalk enhancements at Courthouse Square and Broadway, along with other temporary improvements that could be made. Public art would also be part of the engagement event.
 - Possible event dates and partners were discussed.
- › Kevin Brown noted that the City and NCDRC are working with the Connecticut Main Street Center to do something similar through their Main Street Accelerator Program. They have funding and have a group together that also includes SCCOG staff. They will invite Moriarty to their next meeting in a few days to discuss integrating their project and the Mobility Study. Dan Daniska noted that they did a tactical event in the neighborhood of Greenville a few years ago to go along with the SCCOG Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan and still have some materials from that event, like stencils.

Upcoming Public Engagement

- › Brown noted there are some Global City Norwich events coming up in the spring where VHB/VN could do their pop-up event. The next one is the Togo Flag Raising at City Hall on Saturday April 27, with a festival on Lower Broadway.
- › The next public meeting is expected to be in early June.
- › The TAC is not expected to meet again until after the public meeting.

Next Steps/Action Items

- › VHB will do preliminary analysis of Options 2 and 3 and develop concept drawings for the Norwich City Council presentation. The presentation will be on Monday, March 18.
- › VHB/VN will coordinate with the Main Street Accelerator Program on the tactical engagement event.
- › VHB/VN will determine a date/location for the next pop-up event.
- › VHB will develop additional downtown improvements based on the TAC discussion.
- › The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:00 pm.