Meeting Notes

Date: Tuesday, September 12, 2023
10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Place: Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG)
5 Connecticut Avenue
Norwich, CT 06360

Re: SCCOG Chelsea Harbor/Downtown Mobility Study
CTDOT Project No.: DOT01030281PL
Transportation Advisory Committee Meeting #2

Project No.: 43283.00

ATTENDEES:

Name	Affiliation
Amanda Kennedy	SCCOG
Jim Butler	SCCOG
Nicole Haggerty	SCCOG
Kate Rattan	SCCOG
Patrick McLaughlin	City of Norwich
Deanna Rhodes	City of Norwich (Remotely Attended)
Dan Daniska	City of Norwich (Remotely Attended)
Brian Long	City of Norwich
Marlon Pena	CTDOT
Fred Kulakowski	CTDOT (Remotely Attended)
Jake Fusco	CTDOT
Claudel Merronis	CTDOT (Remotely Attended)
Quinn Becotte	CTDOT (Remotely Attended)
Joe Balskus	VHB
Daniel Amstutz	VHB (Remotely Attended)
Will Kresic	VHB (Remotely Attended)
Eric Tang	VHB (Remotely Attended)
Charlie Baker	VHB
Andre Singer	VHB (Remotely Attended)
Bridget Moriarty	VN Engineers

NOTES:

Welcome and Introductions

› TAC members and consultant staff introduced themselves.

Existing Conditions Presentation

- Joe Balskus briefly went over the scope of work for the existing conditions element of the project.
- Daniel Amstutz discussed the transportation context of Norwich and particularly downtown. In the mid-20th century the goal was to speed traffic through Norwich so it could get east to the beaches in Westerly, Rhode Island. The topography of Norwich makes travel north or south of downtown difficult; downtown ends up being a bottleneck for people trying to go east and west. Hilly terrain and rivers limit the ability to circumvent downtown. In 1970 a proposal to extend the freeway portion of Route 2 north of Norwich and continue east was rejected by the City. The TOPICS program was instituted in the 1970s with traffic signals and one-way streets, but it was widely unpopular with travelers and residents. Other proposals to push traffic south across the Thames River Bridge never materialized. More recently, the City has adopted a Complete Streets Policy and planning for other modes has been a shift in focus.
- Balskus presented on traffic data:
  - Route 2 and 12 are principal arterials and converge downtown, along with other arterial and collector streets. Most other roads are classified as Local.
  - Traffic volumes were compared between 2014, 2020, and June 2023 counts. In general, traffic volumes have been steady, with not much change.
  - Turning Movement Traffic counts were collected in June at 12 intersections. There is a high variability in traffic volumes throughout the day with traffic spread out over the day.
  - The 2023 traffic counts collected in June of this year are similar to what CTDOT has for the ADT. They are higher than the CTDOT 2020 ADT. There are some non-traditional peak hours showing up in the data, with weekday mid-day peaks and 3 pm afternoon peak hours, likely due to school and summer time traffic.
  - In terms of speeds, the 85th percentile speeds are not unusually high – not many instances of speeds being 10 mph over the speed limit or higher. However, there are higher speeds along Chelsea Harbor Drive and Water St due to these roads being wider.
  - Observations showed congestion caused by congestion at the key intersections studied, and queuing was observed at Water St & Chelsea Harbor Drive/Courthouse Square, trying to go eastbound on Route 2. Additionally, there was queuing at Main St and Courthouse Square/Broadway, going westbound, backing up into the Frankling Square roundabout.
- Charlie Baker went over the intersection capacity analyses and modeling data.
  - VHB developed a traffic model in Synchro from the turning movement count data collected. It modeled three peak periods – weekday morning and evening peaks, and the weekend peak. It includes information about the signal timings and phasing, roadway geometries and storage lanes, and was calibrated from existing observations.
  - Most intersections are operating at level of service (LOS) C or better. Two intersections have poor LOS: the intersection of Route 2/12 at Viaduct Road/Laurel Hill Ave/Summer Street/Talman Street, and Route 2 at Route 12 (Viaduct Road at N. Main Street). The first intersection operates at a failing condition partly because there are too many approaches, with a long signal cycle. The second intersection operates at LOS E and F and there are long queues.
  - The Stop-controlled intersections analyzed for the project do not have any capacity issues.
- Eric Tang presented the crash data analysis:

- Crash data was collected from the CT Crash Data Repository (CT CDR) for the 2018-2022 period, the most recent period of five full years of data.
- For this period there were 938 crashes total. 17% of this were injury crashes. One fatality occurred during this period.
- The most common crash types were front to rear (rear-end) crashes at 43%, sideswipe same direction at 20%, and angle crashes at 18%.
- December accounted for the highest proportion of crashes by month (10%), and Friday accounts for the highest proportion of crashes by day of the week (17%).
- There were also 20 pedestrian crashes and 4 bicycle crashes.
- For all crashes, the location with the highest number of crashes was at Washington Street and W. Main Street/Water Street/Church Street/Chelsea Harbor Drive (Washington Square) with 96 crashes total. For crashes of high severity (fatality [K], serious injury [A], and minor injury [B]), several intersections had high densities of these crashes, including Washington Square, Water Srteet/Chelsea Harbor Drive, W. Main Street/Thames Street, and Main Street/Viaduct Road.
- 70% of pedestrian crashes resulted in a KAB level injury. Pedestrian crashes account for nearly 17% of all KAB level injuries despite having a commute to work mode share of only 2.4% and represent only 2% of total crashes in the area. Most pedestrian crashes happened in low-light conditions. Locations of pedestrian crashes were generally scattered over the project area.
- 408 crashes occurred at intersections. Other emphasis area crash types include aggressive driver (334 crashes), older drivers (192 crashes), young drivers (175 crashes), and roadway departures (115 crashes).

› Amstutz discussed pedestrians, bicycling, and transit services.

- Observations made of pedestrians include:
  - Only some curb ramps are upgraded at many intersections. In many cases, only one or two curb ramps are upgraded at an intersection, instead of being comprehensively fixed. This leaves a disjointed experience for pedestrians with mobility issues or who are low-vision.
  - Lack of yielding for pedestrians at unsignalized crosswalks was observed. At a crosswalk across Water Street at the Market Street intersection, two pedestrians were observed waiting to cross the street. About a dozen drivers sped by without yielding to them to cross. They had to wait until the road was clear before they could cross.
  - Some sidewalks are located along corridors with high-speed of car traffic with a limited buffer, creating uncomfortable conditions for pedestrians. In addition, lack of shade trees expose pedestrians to sun and the weather that also reduces the comfort of walking in the area.
  - Aggressive driving, particularly pulling forward into crosswalks while waiting for signals, was observed.
- Maps of crosswalks and curb ramps were shown. It was noted that the crosswalk map needs to be updated.
- The following observations were noted about public transportation:
  - The Southeast Area Transit Service (SEAT) is a "flag-down service" meaning that the bus can be flagged down and boarded at any point, and riders may also stop the bus at any point to get off. However, Google Map and

GIS data show bus stops, and there are bus stop signs in certain locations. It is unclear if transit users are expected to use these locations as bus stops.

- There are several Bus shelters in the area, but they lack route information or bus service information that would be helpful to riders.
- As noted above, some SEAT signage is present and is affixed to other signs and posts, which can be hard to see or notice for transit users.

- Maps of the local SEAT bus services in downtown Norwich and the greater region were displayed. The maps also include a route run by the Windham Region Transit District (WRTD) which runs a service from Willimantic to Norwich.
- Observations of bicycling in downtown were made:
  - No bicycle lanes or bike pavement markings were observed in the area.
  - Two bike racks were identified near the library, but no other bike parking was observed.
  - During the field visit, few people observed bicycling, except near Howard T. Brown Park.
  - The Heritage Walk Trail is the only off-road facility in the area, but it has limited connectivity and is oriented to pedestrians. It is unclear if bikes are allowed on the trail.
- The SCCOG Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan includes several bicycling-related recommendations for downtown Norwich and on the fringes of downtown:
  - Provide bike lanes, sharrows, and "Bikes May Use Full Lane" signs in downtown.
  - Bicycle accommodations are needed 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.
  - Add a signed bike route along Norwich Ave from the Town Green in Colchester to downtown Norwich.
- Maps were displayed showing the CTDOT On Road Bicycle Planning Network from the CTDOT Active Transportation Plan, as well as the Bicycle Suitability Map for state roads in downtown and the Bicycle Facility Implementation Tiers from the same Plan. Generally, the roads in the study area have lower suitability for bicycling, including Washington Street, Route 82, and Viaduct Road. These roads have planned Bicycle Facility Implementation Tiers which are in the higher ranges (Tier II-1 to Tier II-5 and Tier II-6 to Tier II-8).

› Amstutz briefly discussed parking.

- On-street parking observations included:
  - There is a wide array of on-street parking regulations and restrictions focused on directly adjacent land uses. For example, there are spaces blocked off for police vehicles only on Water Street, and for DCF vehicles only on Courthouse Square.
  - 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). There are also locations with very short durations, such as 10- or 15-minutes, next to longer-term spaces.
  - Main Street, Broadway, Courthouse Square had the heaviest parking occupancy observed.

- Some off-street parking garages and lots were observed. In general, they are underutilized, and few people park in them.
- A map was displayed of the locations of on-street parking and their regulations downtown.

› Bridget Moriarty discussed public outreach for the project to date and future outreach:

- A public survey for the project is now available. English and Spanish versions have been created. The survey is planned to be up through the end of September. So far, only about 10 people have taken the survey. Comments include wanting more downtown events, safety is an issue, and more bike lanes are needed. Locations that are unappealing or unsafe include Washington Square, the Franklin Square Roundabout, and places without sidewalks.
- VHB, VN and SCCOG staff attended the Rock the Docks event on Wednesday, August 23 from 6-8 pm at Howard T. Brown Park. The Study Team interacted with 30+ individuals. In summary, many people came from the surrounding region and don't usually come downtown except for events. There was general concern about safety in downtown. Overall, engagement was limited for completing the survey because most people came to the event to listen to the music.
- Comments on the map that was brought to the event included concerns about safety at Route 82 and N. High Street/N. Thames Street (red-light running and u-turns), Route 82 and Route 2/Washington Street, and Route 2 at Water Street/Courthouse Square (lane jockeying). Franklin Square roundabout had mixed comments, and Route 82 over the Yantic River was a concern.
- The Study Team will attend the Celebrate Cultural Diversity Event hosted by the Rotary clubs of Norwich on September 18, and will have an event table and share information about the study and collect comments.

› The TAC further discussed public outreach during the presentation.

- The public survey needs more promotion to get people to take it. Putting flyers at the Transportation Center bus waiting area was recommended instead of inside the station. Flyers can be placed at a coffee shop downtown, restaurants, convenience stores, the post office, and Howard T. Brown Park. The City should put the survey up on their Envision Norwich 06360 website. Potentially do a news article with the Day – contact Claire Bessette. The City can also do a press release for the survey and when the public information meeting is scheduled.
- The location of the public information meeting was discussed. Otis Library was recommended as the best location for the meeting, they have good size rooms and you can pay to stay later than they close, which is typically 7 pm. Parking is also easier than other locations. The TAC members agreed that Wednesday, October 25 should be the day to schedule the meeting. Deanna Rhodes has a meeting there but she can move it. October 23 is another potential date.
- The public information meeting will include existing condition information, similar to this TAC meeting. Tabletop exercises and games for kids were discussed; could be workshop style format. The goal is to show the public what we found and to respond to that – did we get it right, and what to do about it? Include maps and pictures of locations so people can remember what they look like.

› VHB staff discussed some missing information and data requests. Norwich Public Utilities will reach out to the Study Team regarding the GIS data request. Rhodes should be contacted about planned development projects as some are not as likely to occur. Rhodes will also forward the draft parking study from a few years ago. CTDOT may have an

update about the Route 82 project in mid-November. VHB should follow up with Marlon Pena about the CTDOT ADA map.

Discussion/Next Steps

- The VHB Team will draft the existing conditions technical memo. It will be finalized after the public information meeting in October.
- Once the public meeting date and location is established, make a flyer and send to Rhodes. Staff will bring it to Council Members. A draft press release should be done as well.

- The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:00 pm.