



Meeting Notes

Date: Wednesday, June 5, 2024
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Place: Norwich City Hall
Room 335
100 Broadway
Norwich, CT 06360

Re: CTDOT Project No.: DOT01030281PL
SCCOG Chelsea Harbor/Downtown Mobility Study
Public Information Meeting #2

Project No.: 43283.00

- › This meeting was conducted as an in-person meeting at the Norwich City Hall in Norwich, CT. More than 30 people attended the meeting, including staff from the City of Norwich, the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), CTDOT, VHB and VN Engineers. Audio and video of the meeting was recorded using Microsoft Teams. The recording of the meeting can be found at the project website at: <https://downtownnorwichmobilitystudy.com/>
- › Jim Butler, Senior Advisor at SCCOG, opened the meeting, introduced himself, and thanked all attendees for coming. Joe Balskus, Director of Transportation Systems at VHB, noted that what are being shown tonight are concepts, and have been shared with the City Council and study Advisory Committee before being brought to the public.
- › Daniel Amstutz, Senior Transportation Planner with VHB, gave a brief overview of the presentation. There will be a brief note about the existing and future conditions that have been completed, but the bulk of the meeting will be to discuss the preliminary analysis of potential improvements and to get questions and feedback from the audience.
- › 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.
- › The study is being led by the City of Norwich and SCCOG. There is an advisory committee which includes staff from the City, SCCOG, CTDOT, and NCDC. Public engagement has included pop-up meetings and the first public meeting this past fall, a public survey on existing conditions, meetings with the TAC and City Council, and a downtown walk around on May 7. Upcoming next week will be a tactical engagement event near the Otis Library at Main Street and Cliff Street.
- › The existing conditions overview includes data on traffic, safety, pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation, parking, and public engagement. Traffic analysis showed that there are problem intersections at Route 2/Viaduct Road/Laurel Hill Ave and Route 2 at Route 12/N. Main Street. Pedestrians are overrepresented in traffic injuries, there are few bicycle accommodations, and the parking garages are underutilized.
- › The future conditions projected future traffic growth, operations, and opportunities for improvements. Congestion will persist at the worst intersections, and traffic signal adjustments will make only minor improvements.
- › Amstutz went over the principles of the Transportation Improvements Vision that were used to guide the proposed improvements. They include:
 - Complete Streets

- 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 also discussed the potential for bicycle, pedestrian, and transit trips in downtown Norwich. The following were noted:
- 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
- › Amstutz went over high-level notes about the conceptual transportation improvements that have been developed:
- Preliminary traffic modeling shows that the concepts are feasible.
 - The concepts have been reviewed by the City Council and the Transportation Advisory Committee, who provided feedback and guidance on the proposed changes before bringing them to the public.
 - Through traffic patterns may change if the concepts are implemented.
 - Questions and comments about the concepts are welcome.
- › Getting into the proposed transportation improvements, Amstutz started with the east side of downtown, which includes the intersection of Main Street and Viaduct Road/Route 2/Route 12, Viaduct Road, and Main Street east of Franklin Square. The main improvements suggested for this area include:
- Develop a new right turn lane from Viaduct Road to Main Street, with an overlook area next to the Shetucket River. This would require widening the bridge which passes over the railroad.
 - Bike lanes would be included on Viaduct Road.
 - Curb extensions would be included at crosswalks, including the crosswalk on Main Street at the post office and old YMCA.
 - Narrow the intersection of Cliff Street at Main Street to create a “T” intersection and allow drivers to turn left from Cliff Street onto Main Street (currently left turns from Cliff Street are not allowed). Cliff Street would also be included in the traffic signal on Main Street with Railroad Ave.
 - Shared-lane markings for bicycling would be added to Main Street.
- › The area around Broadway, Bath Street, and their intersection with Chestnut Street was discussed in detail.

- The City of Norwich has a concept plan to reduce the number of southbound lanes on Broadway from two to one between Bath Street and Main Street, convert parallel parking to angled parking on this part of Broadway, convert Bath Street to two-way, and revise the intersection of Broadway, Bath Street, and Chestnut Street.
- There would be no net change in on-street parking spaces from these changes, although one parking space may move from Bath Street to Broadway.
- › Further to the north, at Franklin Street and Boswell Street/Oak Street, a new concept has been developed to simplify this intersection.
 - The intersection would be modified to remove the west side of the roadway that leads directly into Franklin Street to the north and keep the roadway on the east approach to Boswell Street. This would simplify the intersection and make it less confusing. The removed roadway area could be converted into open space for seating to serve the adjacent businesses or other public space. No driveways would be impacted by these changes. Parking spaces would be pushed over to the east street section.
 - The intersection can be converted to a four-way stop and the signal equipment removed.
- › Moving to the central part of downtown, which includes Water Street, Chelsea Harbor Drive, Main Street, and Market Street, several changes are proposed to adjust the roadway circulation and make improvements to traffic flow, intersection approaches, and pedestrian/bicycle access.
 - Currently, Water Street is one-way westbound. The project proposes to make Water Street two-way with one lane in each direction.
 - Chelsea Harbor Drive is proposed to become one lane eastbound between Washington Square and Market Street, and a two-way road with one lane in each direction between Market Street and Water Street. However, Chelsea Harbor Drive will no longer connect to Water Street – it will dead end into a parking lot next to the road.
 - Widened sidewalks and a new bicycle facility will be created on Chelsea Harbor Drive.
 - Enhanced connectivity to Howard T. Brown Park will be created for walking and biking, with new access.
 - A new traffic signal will be installed at the intersection of Water Street and Market Street. This will allow drivers from Market Street to safely turn left onto Water Street.
 - The traffic signal at Water Street and Courthouse Square will be revised as it will become a T-intersection with Courthouse Square going away from the intersection (as it currently does).
 - Bike lanes will be added to the Water Street bridge and connect to Viaduct Road.
 - Curb extensions and crossing islands will be installed at the Main Street/Broadway/Courthouse Square intersection to improve pedestrian safety.
 - To address the congestion at Water Street/Viaduct Road/Laurel Hill Ave, Talman Street and Summer Street should be converted to one-way roads away from the intersection. Currently the intersection has six approaches, and removing these two roadways from the phasing will simplify the intersection operations and allow the intersection to operate more smoothly.

- › Finally, the west side of downtown includes Washington Street and Washington Square, the Westside Boulevard Bridge, W. Main Street and its bridges, and N. Thames Street, N. High Street, and Falls Ave. Currently, Westside Boulevard is one-way westbound between Washington Street and W. Main Street, and W. Main Street is one-way eastbound between N. High Street/Westside Boulevard and Washinton Street. All other streets are two-way.
- › There are three possible options for making changes to traffic circulation and improving bicycle/pedestrian conditions in the area. The first option was developed by the consultants and brought to the Transportation Advisory Committee. The second two options were suggested by the TAC to provide additional options for the City to consider.
- › Joe Balskus presented the three options.
 - Option 1:
 - The Westside Boulevard Bridge is converted to pedestrian/bicycle bridge. A widened sidewalk and separated bicycle facility would be included, as well as potential for street vendors and food trucks. At the east end of the project, there would not be a road intersection with Washington Street anymore, and that signal would be removed. There would also not be a vehicular connection to W. Main Street on the west side of the bridge. On the west side of the bridge, this option would unlock the green space west of the railroad line and provide more open space and park opportunities for the city. There is also the possibility of planting areas, wayfinding maps, public art, and other public amenities. This could be the city's "Bridge of Roses."
 - Washington Square (Washington Street/Main Street/Water Street/Chelsea Harbor Drive) is converted from a signalized intersection to a roundabout. While the intersection currently works from a capacity standpoint, there are many crashes here, and a roundabout would improve safety. Turn lanes are included from W. Main Street onto Water Street, and Washington Street to W. Main Street, to bypass most of the roundabout, as these would be the dominant movements for drivers.
 - Reduce the number of lanes of traffic on Washington Street since the intersection with Westside Boulevard would no longer be needed. This will allow for open space and/or better bike and pedestrian infrastructure. It would remain two-way.
 - N. Thames Street would dead end in a turnaround north of the Westside Boulevard Bridge and not connect to the W. Main Street intersection with Thames Street/Route 32. The intersection of W. Main Street and Thames Street would be converted to a "T" or three-way intersection.
 - W. Main Street would be converted to two-way traffic. There would be two lanes headed eastbound and one lane headed westbound. This would allow for better access to the marine boating business, Transportation Center, and Norwich Marina.
 - A second roundabout would be created at the intersection of W. Main Street and N. Thames Street and N. High Street. This would be a four-leg roundabout because Westside Boulevard would no longer connect with a vehicular approach.
 - It would be possible to connect the Transportation Center garage to the Westside Boulevard Bridge through an independent structure so visitors could park at the garage and access the pedestrian bridge via a walkway between them.

- A new traffic signal would be installed at W. Main Street and Falls Ave. This would facilitate SEAT buses turning out of the Transportation Center/Falls Ave and a safer pedestrian crossing. It would also allow for better access into and out of the marina.
- Option 2:
 - In Option 2, part of W. Main Street between the marina and Washington Street would be converted to a pedestrian plaza with a multi-use path. There could be vending areas, seating and planting areas, and other amenities, although it would be smaller than the Westside Boulevard pedestrian bridge concept. W. Main Street would no longer connect to Washington Street.
 - Washington Square (Washington Street/Main Street/Water Street/Chelsea Harbor Drive) is converted from a signalized intersection to a roundabout. Turn lanes would no longer be needed at this roundabout (compared to Option 1) because drivers would not be able to turn onto W. Main Street. This makes the roundabout operations simpler.
 - Install a second roundabout at the intersection of Washington Street and Westside Boulevard. This roundabout would need only three approaches and would improve safety at this intersection.
 - Reduce the number of lanes of traffic on Washington Street since the roundabouts would allow for traffic to flow more smoothly and not require multiple left turn lanes. This will allow for open space and/or better bike and pedestrian infrastructure. It would remain two-way, as in Option 1.
 - Westside Boulevard would be converted to two-way traffic with one lane in each direction, bike lanes, and new sidewalk on the east side.
 - As in Option 1, N. Thames Street would dead end in a turnaround north of the Westside Boulevard Bridge and not connect to the W. Main Street intersection with Thames Street/Route 32. The intersection of W. Main Street and Thames Street would be converted to a "T" or three-way intersection.
 - A third roundabout would be created at the intersection of W. Main Street, Westside Boulevard, N. Thames Street and N. High Street. This would be a five-leg roundabout to accommodate all movements.
 - W. Main Street would be converted to two-way traffic from N. High Street east to where it would dead end at the Norwich Marina just past Falls Ave. There would be one lane of traffic in each direction.
- Option 3:
 - In Option 3, both the Westside Boulevard Bridge and W. Main Street would be converted to two-way roads. Westside Boulevard would have one lane in each direction, bike lanes, and new sidewalk on the east side. W. Main Street would have one lane westbound and one lane eastbound until Washington Street, when a second lane will be needed for a right turn lane.
 - As in Options 1 and 2, Washington Square (Washington Street/Main Street/Water Street/Chelsea Harbor Drive) is converted from a signalized intersection to a roundabout. Only one turn lane would be needed at this roundabout (compared to Option 1) because drivers would be able to go down Westside Boulevard or W. Main Street to go south/west. This allows the roundabout to function more effectively.
 - Like Option 2, install a second roundabout at the intersection of Washington Street and Westside Boulevard. This roundabout would need only three approaches and would improve safety at this intersection.

- Reduce the number of lanes of traffic on Washington Street since the roundabouts would allow for traffic to flow more smoothly and not require multiple left turn lanes. This will allow for open space and/or better bike and pedestrian infrastructure. It would remain two-way, as in Options 1 and 2.
 - As in Options 1 and 2, N. Thames Street would dead end in a turnaround north of the Westside Boulevard Bridge and not connect to the W. Main Street intersection with Thames Street/Route 32. The intersection of W. Main Street and Thames Street would be converted to a “T” or three-way intersection.
 - A third roundabout would be created at the intersection of W. Main Street, Westside Boulevard, N. Thames Street and N. High Street. This would be a five-leg roundabout to accommodate all movements.
 - A new traffic signal would be installed at W. Main Street and Falls Ave. This would facilitate SEAT buses turning out of the Transportation Center/Falls Ave and a safer pedestrian crossing. It would also allow for better access into and out of the marina.
 - Balskus noted that part of the vision is getting rid of the freeway-scale roadways in downtown and bring back a more local scale for bicycle and pedestrian users. He noted that this is a 20-year plan, as some things will take longer to achieve.
- › Before the Q&A portion of the meeting, Bobbie Braboy from Global City Norwich gave a brief statement about the Norwich Main Street Accelerator Program. It is a program of Connecticut Main Streets that helps communities improve their main streets and downtowns/central business districts. They decided to do a project to help brighten up the downtown with a tactical urbanism demonstration and partnered with the Mobility Study Project Team to do a project a Main Street and Cliff Street and in front of the library. They will be painting the street starting next week on June 11 and volunteers are welcome.
- › At the end of the presentation was a Q & A session for attendees. Comments and questions made during Q&A included the following:
- Mayor Nystrom said he appreciated the work of the Project Team. He noted that it was likely the City would have to take over maintenance of the Westside Boulevard Bridge in Option 1, if it is converted to a pedestrian bridge. This is a concern for the City. Additionally, there is a proposed train station as part of the rail study that would be on the west bank of the Yantic River in the location suggested as “Open Space” on the west side of downtown; however this is likely years down the road. He notes he liked that Option 3 includes looking at issues all over downtown. The expansion of the Howard T. Brown Park and the waterfront is also important and welcome in these ideas.
 - The Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls is an interesting comparison although that bridge is shorter and narrower, and it’s not clear they have any vendors on their bridge. The green space/open space would be best for vendors and food trucks. For the flowers, they would need to be properly maintained. Perception of the city is important to address.
 - Initially preferred Option 2, but like the connection to the Transportation Center in Option 1. Also prefer fewer roundabouts in Option 1.
 - There was a question about funding, timeline, and maintenance of the improvements. Norwich is a distressed community, does not have much money. It’s difficult to get around Norwich the way things are now.

- Jim Butler explained that communities took advantage of federal funding in the 1970s and 1980s to make changes to downtown circulation. The idea at the time was to move people quickly through downtown to other places, but this plan is to slow people down and have them stop in the city. Making things safer is also a key goal of the study. Cost estimates will be included in the final report. Funding sources will also be identified in the report. In terms of maintenance, a few traffic signals will be removed in this plan, which will save some money; overall savings have not been calculated. The maintenance question about the Westside Boulevard Bridge would need to be discussed with CTDOT. Balskus noted that federal and state funds area available to municipalities for bridge replacement. The roundabouts would be some of the most expensive improvements, but many of the improvements in the center and east parts of downtown would not be very costly by comparison. He also noted this is the conceptual study phase and will not be a full design. In terms of funding, this is one of the best times in a generation to get transportation funding due to the IJA that was recently passed. Funding includes CMAQ, TOD, LoTCIP, Safe Streets for All, and many others. For the timeline, certain improvements could be made in the near term, while others like the west end of the downtown may take longer because they are expensive and require discussions with CTDOT.
- A suggestion was made to put a roundabout over at the intersection of Main Street and Route 12/Route 2/Viaduct Road.
- In the UK, roundabouts include crossing lights for pedestrians or full traffic lights, and may want to consider them here.
- A comment was made that the proposed Bridge of Roses has a view of parking garage/Transportation Center and wastewater treatment plant, which is not scenic. It does not seem like a viable tourist destination.
 - Butler noted that plantings and ways to beautify the bridge would be included to mitigate the views. He also said it would need to be a safe place for people and have them feel comfortable to be there. Balskus added that the goal was to create an activity area on the bridge for people walking and biking, and the view was not initially considered, but could be addressed.
- It will be important to address panhandling on the bridge and to prevent people from jumping off the bridge – what about public safety?
 - Butler pointed out that this is a concept and some of these issues would be dealt with during the design phase.
- Really like the project and idea of Option 1, but understand concerns. Option 2 brings pedestrian bridge away from Transportation Center and wastewater treatment plant. Pedestrian has view of Howard T. Brown Park and waterfront.
 - Butler noted that Option 2 was suggested by Police Chief Daly and he should be given credit. However, this option can create issues with access to the Norwich Marina and Thayer's Marine. It would need to be discussed in detail with those property owners.
 - Mayor Nystrom raised concerns about access to the Marina and marine business and said he would not want to create barriers to those business areas.
- Has anyone looked at the emergency vehicle response time for the 3 options?
 - Balskus noted this is not something that has been reviewed at this time. However, the fire station is right at the intersection of N. Thames Street and W. Main Street. During the design process this would be reviewed, but should note that roundabouts work well with emergency vehicles.

- Have we given thought to pedestrians and bicyclists continuing through the city after the Bridge of Roses?
 - The Route 82 project is expected to have bicycle lanes to the west, so they could be connected to there from the Bridge of Roses. To the east, they could continue east along Chelsea Harbor Drive in the bike facility here.
- › Butler provided his email and phone number to the audience for them to provide any comments on the concepts over the next couple of weeks, by June 21.
- › The Transportation Advisory Committee will meet next week on June 10. A presentation will be given to the City Council on July 15. The final report will be delivered in the fall. Further discussions with CTDOT will be had after that point.
- › 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.