



Meeting Notes

Date: Monday, June 10, 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 #4

Project No.: 43283.00

ATTENDEES:

Name	Affiliation
Amanda Kennedy	SCCOG
Jim Butler	SCCOG
Nicole Haggerty	SCCOG
Kate Rattan	SCCOG
John Salomone	City of Norwich
Deanna Rhodes	City of Norwich
Dan Daniska	City of Norwich
Brian Long	City of Norwich Public Works
Tracy Montoya	City of Norwich Fire Department
Patrick Daly	City of Norwich Police Department
Kevin Brown	Norwich Community Development Corporation (Remotely Attended)
Michael Carroll	Southeast Area Transit District (Remotely Attended)
Marlon DuBois	CTDOT
Fred Kulakowski	CTDOT (Remotely Attended)
Andrew Correia	CTDOT (Remotely Attended)
Jake Fusco	CTDOT
Claudiel Merronis	CTDOT (Remotely Attended)
Joe Balskus	VHB
Daniel Amstutz	VHB
Will Britnell	VHB
Andre Singer	VHB (Remotely Attended)
Bridget Moriarty	VN Engineers

NOTES:

Welcome and Introductions

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

Recap of June 5, 2024 Public Information Meeting

- › Daniel Amstutz started by going over the public meeting.
 - Overall the June 5 public meeting was successful with a lot of positive feedback.
 - Support for the options was generally mixed, with no clear winner.
 - The Mayor shared his concern about the Westside Boulevard Bridge maintenance and pointed out the potential passenger rail location.
 - Emergency vehicle access was raised as a concern.
 - There was a comment about the aesthetics of the Bridge of Roses.
 - There was a question about bicycle/pedestrian connectivity to the bridges.
- › Bridget Moriarty said she did not find that any of the concepts created a lot of controversy except for the one comment about the Bridge of Roses aesthetics. People were taking it all in, but generally had strong support. Also a general concern about funding.
- › Jim Butler said the public information meeting went very well. Since then, he has received two emailed comments praising the study efforts.
- › John Salomone, City Manager, said there is an eagerness to do something about mobility for downtown.
- › Joe Balskus noted that the City Council was similarly mixed in which option they supported, and he expected more pushback in the public meeting, which has been the case in other Connecticut communities that are making changes to their downtowns.
- › Nicole Haggerty noted that maintenance is a concern for Option 1 (Bridge of Roses).
- › Kate Rattan noted that flooding on the W. Main Street Bridge at Falls Ave and its effect on the Transportation Center should be an important factor in deciding what to do with the Westside Boulevard Bridge. The SEAT buses need to stack on the bridge when the flooding prevents access to the Center. Michael Carroll said it has happened three times in the past year and seems to come from heavy rains combined with high tides on the river. A foot of standing water can collect there and makes it impossible for bus riders. Rattan noted that having a connection between the parking garage and the Westside Boulevard Bridge would also be important when this happens to give pedestrians and bus riders better access to where they are stacking the buses.

Review of Potential Transportation Improvements

- › The TAC reviewed the concepts for the downtown, starting with the east side of downtown.
 - The Cliff Street concept was responding to the tactical engagement event proposed for the intersection with Main Street. Cliff Street is not signalized and the idea would be to have become part of the signalized intersection. TAC

members raised a concern about the crosswalk in the middle of the intersection in this configuration. Brian Long suggestion a splitter island at the intersection instead, and didn't like having a left turn onto Main Street. The bank creates a sightline problem for the intersection. It was noted that the signal also reverts to blinking operation frequently, so the mechanical issues need to be reviewed. Kevin Brown noted people could use Park Street as well, or turn around at the roundabout. TAC members pointed out that a crosswalk shown on the concept, on Cliff Street east of the intersection, does not exist and should be removed.

- TAC members discussed the Main Street at Viaduct Road/Route 12/Route 2 concept with the right turn lane from Viaduct to Main Street. It would require widening of the bridge over the railroad and could create an overlook area of the river. A roundabout wasn't looked at here given the presence of a building and business on the northwest corner. The roadway could also be shifted to the west instead of to the east. TAC members expressed some skepticism about the need for the right turn lane.
 - Rattan asked if a bike lane had been considered on Main Street instead of Viaduct Road, as is being shown. Viaduct Road does not connect to any businesses and doesn't seem very safe. Could you have parking on one side? Dan Daniska agreed he did not like a bike lane on Viaduct Road. The TAC discussed also putting a bike lane or sharrows on Talman Street, and potentially removing the suggestion of the bike lane on Viaduct Road, due to the concerns about its safety and connectivity.
 - The TAC also discussed the usage of Viaduct Road and how it was created to divert people around downtown. It only connects to a large parking lot that is leased by the City to the state. However, removing Viaduct Road would push all that traffic onto Main Street, or people would go elsewhere, likely the Route 2A bridge. The parking lot off of Viaduct Road could also be converted into a park or some kind of new development. Balskus noted that there is less capacity on the bridge in this area compared to the two bridges on the west side of downtown, which is why this idea is more challenging. It was noted this may need to be pushed to a future study.
 - The TAC turned back to the Main Street at Viaduct Road/Route 12/Route 2 intersection to discuss the possibility of placing a roundabout at this intersection. The building at the northwest corner of the intersection would need to be removed. There would likely still be impacts to the railroad bridge even if the roundabout was shifted west and north. Daniska noted that left turns from westbound Main Street to Viaduct Road is a major problem – people are aggressive with the turn and almost run into people. TAC members also noted the need to optimize the signal timing here.
 - The TAC discussed use of automated enforcement for red-light running. There are some challenges with this as Norwich is considered a disadvantaged community.
 - VHB noted they would look at the roundabout at Main Street at Viaduct, shifting the right lane widening to the west, and the suggestions at Cliff Street. For the roundabout, the goal would be to look at the impacts to properties but not necessarily do a full concept here. At least two properties would be affected.
- › The TAC discussed the improvements for central downtown, as well as around City Hall and Franklin Street/Boswell Ave.
- Amstutz noted that the concept around City Hall is directly taken from the City's concept, which includes one lane on Broadway, Bath Street as two-way, and changes to the intersection of Bath Street/Chestnut Street/Broadway. Daniska suggested adding shared-lane markings to the concept as well on Bath Street and Broadway. Haggerty noted that more trees would be helpful. Tracy Montoya said it is important to make sure there is space to accommodate a

ladder truck on Broadway, and asked the consultant to take a closer look at that. Carroll pointed out that buses often load and unload in the right lane currently, and with only one lane and angled parking they would block traffic. Some kind of loading space is needed. Put it in the space where it says “Broadway would become one lane” (call-out on the map).

- The TAC discussed the proposed changes at Franklin Street, Oak Street, and Boswell Ave. It was noted that the new “open space” area would need some hardscape for people to cross from the parking spaces to the adjacent businesses. Brian Long noted that the impetus for making changes here was because of maintenance problems with the existing signals; VHB did a warrant analysis and found that the signal was not needed. Montoya raised a concern about fire apparatus access to the buildings.
- › The TAC turned to discussing the west side of downtown and the three bridges. Butler passed around a handout that SCCOG had put together that discusses the pros and cons of each option for the bridges on the west side of downtown. This document is included as an attachment to these notes.
 - Daniska said he preferred Option 3. He thinks it provides the most mobility, and it would be difficult to program the Bridge of Roses – they are already challenged to program the rest of the waterfront.
 - Brian Long said he also preferred Option 3, more from the perspective of future maintenance of the bridges and his concerns with that. Generally, only 80% of the cost of replacing the bridge can be covered by the state or federal funds.
 - Deanna Rhodes said the idea is to “capture” Chelsea Harbor Drive as part of Howard T. Brown Park and provide more space for the park.
 - Haggerty said she also preferred Option 3 partly because if a rail station ever ends up on the west bank of the river there would be two streets going into it and not just one dead-ending at it. She is not a big fan of the Bridge of Roses.
 - Butler suggested there be an Option 1A, where you could have traffic still going one way on Westside Boulevard but with better pedestrian accommodations and have West Main Street as two-way traffic.
 - Rattan said she likes that Option 3 for the access it provides, but the bike facilities are not optimal for all ages and abilities, which is her concern. Will Britnell noted that Option 3 is the most “vehicular” option, without the pedestrian plaza area. The TAC discussed whether there needs to be three lanes on W. Main Street if both bridges are open in Option 3. There really only needs to be three lanes at the roundabout intersection at Washington Square. Some kind of bike facility should be included on W. Main Street as part of Option 3. At the west side of downtown you will be able to connect to new bike lanes as part of the Route 82 project all the way to New London Turnpike.
 - Fred Kulakowski noted that Option 2 keeps people walking and biking closer to downtown and the main traffic further away. The TAC discussed the need for a turnaround at the end of W. Main Street if considering Option 2.
 - Rattan asked how the three options compare from a safety perspective. Butler noted several ways the options improve safety, including reduced lanes, lower speeds, roundabouts, and improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities. In a few places, conflicts are being eliminated, and they are being lowered at roundabouts. Marlon DuBois suggested that Option 1 is the safest for people walking and biking. However, it could add travel time for people walking and biking because Westside Boulevard is farther from downtown. In addition, the City has concerns about programming the Bridge of Roses.

- The TAC continued discussing the merits of Option 1 versus Option 2. It was also noted that Option 3 would not preclude the implementation of Options 1 or 2 in the future. A concern was brought up that the open space pulls things to the west as opposed to towards downtown. It was also noted that Option 2 makes it more difficult to drive to the Transportation Center, although it makes the walk from there better, despite being a steep walk up the bridge.
- Brian Long noted that there could be an opportunity to build a better connection from W. Main Street to the Howard T. Brown Park.
- Deanna Rhodes noted that Option 2 comes with a concern about accessibility to the Marina and would prefer Option 3 where you can come from either direction.
- Britnell commented that all the options should be safer, though Option 1 is the safest in his opinion.
- CTDOT PDU said they liked all the options and did not see any major concerns with them.
- The TAC discussed starting with Option 3 and potentially move to Options 1 or 2 in the future. Closing the Westside Boulevard Bridge could be done seasonally or temporarily on a trial basis. Or a lane could be removed from the travel lanes temporarily to test it. The City could also test turning some roads two-way, such as Water Street. It would be very important to have a strong public information campaign on any trials.
- Butler summarized that the TAC recommends Option 3 as the preferred alternative among the three alternatives considered for the portion of the project area west of Washington Street, and that the City should then consider testing/phasing in Options 1 or 2 in the future if additional traffic/safety/mobility improvements are deemed necessary and desirable. This recommendation will be presented to the City Council on July 15 with an explanation as to why this option was selected as the preferred alternative.

Next Steps/Action Items

- › VHB will revise the Options as discussed and recommend Option 3 to the City Council, with the ability to do the other Options at a later time or as a trial.
- › VHB will present the recommended option at the City Council meeting on July 15.
- › VHB will document the findings and write the report for the study after the City Council meeting.
- › Additional comments from the public will be reviewed through June 21.

- › The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:00 pm.