

MEETING MEETINGS
PAC Meeting #3
Route 32 Corridor Study – New London, CT
Tuesday, January 17, 2023, 1:00 -2:30 PM via Teams

ATTENDEES: Jim Butler (SCCOG); Amanda Kennedy (SCCOG); Kate Rattan (SCCOG); Anna Bergeron (CTDOT); Jennifer Pacacha (CTDOT); Frederick Kulakowski (CTDOT); Claudel Meronnis (CTDOT); William Champagne (CTDOT); Shraddha Joshi (CTDOT); Marissa Pfaffinger (CTDOT); Andrew Correia (CTDOT); Emin Basic (CTDOT); Mayor Michael Passero (Mayor of New London) Victor Arcelus (Connecticut College Dean of Students) Mike Carroll (SEAT); Brian Kent (Lyman Allyn Museum Representative); Brian Wright (City of New London Police Chief); Matthew Skelly (F&O); Katherine O'Shea (F&O); Rosie Jaswal (Toole)

This meeting was held to present an analysis of three possible alternatives for the entire corridor and obtain committee feedback. The meeting began with introductions, giving all attendees the opportunity to share their organization and relation to the project. Matthew Skelly then gave a project update detailing the progress since the previous PAC meeting, including the development of two concepts for the length of the entire corridor, a public meeting, and an additional survey.

Rosie Jaswal of Toole shared that the team received approximately 200 fully completed surveys and 200 partially completed surveys, with the majority of respondents falling between the ages of 18 and 24. Additionally, she noted that the majority of respondents travel on Route 32 either by vehicle or on foot.

Matthew Skelly provided an overview of three concept plans. Concept A as presented includes a landscaped median, two travel lanes in each direction, left turn lanes at intersections, a shared use path on the west side of Route 32, and a sidewalk on the east side of Route 32. The shared use path on the west side of Route 32 is proposed to extend from Benham Avenue south to the Williams Street bridge, where it would tie into the existing bike lanes on Williams Street. The sidewalk on the east side is proposed to extend from Benham Avenue south to the intersection of Mohegan Avenue Parkway and Williams Street.

Concept B as presented removes the median but maintains two travel lanes and left turn lanes at intersections. Grade separated bike lanes and sidewalks are proposed on both sides of Route 32. On the east side, the northbound bike lane connects to existing bike lanes on Williams Street and continues north to Benham Avenue. On the west side, the southbound bike lane extends from Benham Avenue, and changes to a shared use path approximately 1,000 feet south of the Williams Street Bridge. The shared use path continues to the intersection of Briggs Street and Williams Street.

Concept C was prepared in 2017 as part of the I-95 East feasibility study. The concept re-designs the entire I-95/Route 32 interchange and proposes three multilane roundabouts along Route 32 through the study area. Additionally, a shared use path is proposed on the east side of the roadway.

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The project team received the following comments and questions from the PAC:

Victor Arcelus of Connecticut College noted that the shared use path might be better on the east side of Route 32 because students use that sidewalk more frequently. Rosie noted that it may be beneficial to have two-way bike facilities on both sides.

Amanda Kennedy of SCCOG asked why the students are more inclined to use the sidewalk on the east side of Route 32 and wondered if that may be attributed to the frequency of crossings at the pedestrian bridge. She noted that the planned improvements will make crossing the roadway at grade safer, and may lead to more pedestrian traffic on the west side of the roadway. Matt added that the idea of the improvements is to ensure that both sides of the roadway are equally comfortable for pedestrians.

Jim Butler of SCCOG noted that more destinations for students are located on the east side of Route 32, and that if students need to go somewhere on the west side of Route 32, they use the internal roads on campus. Victor added that the guardrail on the east side of Route 32 makes students feel more comfortable, as it provides more separation from vehicle traffic. Jim agreed.

Victor also noted that Connecticut College is in the early stages of designing a new pedestrian bridge because the existing bridge is at the end of its life.

Shraddha Joshi of CTDOT noted that CTDOT also feels that the eastern side of Route 32 might be better for the shared use path in order to avoid adverse impacts to the retaining wall on the west side of Route 32.

Rosie noted that consideration should also be given to destinations on the east and west side of Route 32 outside of the study area, as expansion of the proposed facilities may be an option in the future. Jim asked if a shared use path on both sides of the roadway would be a possibility.

Amanda noted that a number of alternative circulation possibilities are located on the east side of Route 32, and that the shared use path on the east side creates a brand new connection. Mayor Passero emphasized that connection to the eastern New London neighborhoods is a priority for the City.

The potential of a noise barrier for the Lyman Allyn Art Museum was mentioned. Marissa Pfaffinger of CTDOT noted that CTDOT will only install noise walls on Type 1 projects. Type 1 projects typically add capacity or shift lanes. If a project is classified as Type 1, noise studies are required to determine if a noise wall is appropriate. Marissa does not believe this project would qualify as Type 1. She also noted that noise walls are very costly.

Kate Rattan of SCCOG noted that the reconfiguration of the I-95/Route 32 interchange and the reconfiguration of Williams Street depicted in Concept C demonstrate significant potential for traffic calming for vehicles entering the study area from the south.

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Matt noted that the proposed interchange improvements depicted in Concept C would require massive land taking and would be unrealistic in the short or mid-term. These improvements are generally thought to be beyond the scope of this project.

The group discussed the potential to reduce the number of lanes coming into Route 32 from the south, and Marissa commented that this interchange will likely be further studied as a result of the ongoing I-95 PEL study.

Victor mentioned prior incidents of students stranded in the interchange area south of Williams Street as they try to return to campus on-foot from downtown New London. He noted that bicycle and pedestrian facilities in this area would be beneficial.

Rosie noted one area located in the vicinity of the New London/Waterford town line where the existing ROW is tight. She asked whether minor ROW taking would be a major impediment to the project. Marissa indicated that minor ROW impacts would not impede the project as long as the anticipated impact is outlined in the early project stages and is understood by all parties.

Katherine O'Shea of Fuss & O'Neill presented a table that evaluated each alternative based on safety, constructability, utility impacts, environmental impacts, environmental justice, speed control, congestion management, traffic operations, bike accommodations, pedestrian accommodations, aesthetics, noise control, air quality, emergency access, and maintenance. Alternatives A and B were substantially similar and generally preferred to Alternative C. Alternative C may be infeasible to construct due to ROW impacts and significant grade on both sides of Route 32. All three alternatives are thought to be an improvement upon existing conditions

Questions were raised about the size of tree that would be permissible in the center median. Marissa noted that trees are a long term maintenance commitment and she did not have a definitive answer. The project team will follow up with CTDOT to obtain further information on this topic.

Rosie noted that visual cues, such as urban signal infrastructure and the removal of guardrail will be an important component of traffic calming in addition to landscaping to make the corridor feel less like a freeway. Frederick Kulakowski of CTDOT agreed that traffic calming on each approach will be critical

Brian Kent expressed interest in a shared use path on both sides of the roadway to provide better access to destinations on both sides. He also noted that high vehicle speeds and noise are intrinsically related and suggested that effective traffic calming could eliminate the need for a noise wall, noting that a noise wall may have a negative visual impact on the corridor.

Marissa thanked the team for including the alternatives evaluation table and requested that the table, criteria descriptions, and supporting justification be included in the final report.

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The group discussed project schedule and possible next steps. Jim noted that the next engagement event should make an effort to target motorists on Route 32 and inquired on the possibility of installing roadside signs to advertise the online survey.

Similarly, Amanda emphasized that the benefit of motorist safety be emphasized in the report in addition to pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Project next steps:

- Work to develop a preferred concept.
- Consultation between SCCOG and the consultant team to determine an appropriate engagement event.