

West Hartford Road Diet and Safety Study

Technical Study Committee (TSC) Meeting #1
Tuesday, September 1st, 2015
West Hartford Town Hall
DRAFT Meeting Notes

Attendees:

TSC Members

Todd Dumais – Town of West Hartford, Planning & Zoning

MaryEllen Thibodeau – West Hartford Bicycle Advisory Committee

Tracey Wilson – for Senator Beth Bye

Duane Martin – Town of West Hartford, Engineering

Robert McCue – Town of West Hartford, Police

Una Berry – Montessori School of Greater Hartford

Tom Wood – American School for the Deaf

Project Team Members

Emily Hultquist – Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)

Mike Morehouse – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)

Rory Fitzgerald – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Tom Tavella – ALTA Planning & Design (ALTA)

Patrick Zapatka – CTDOT

Introductions

Emily Hultquist, CRCOG Project Manager gave a brief overview of CRCOG's approach to transportation corridor studies and explained the work that has occurred over the past year to arrive at the launch of the West Hartford Road Diet and Safety Study. Ms. Hultquist introduced FHI staff.

Mike Morehouse of FHI led introductions of the TSC members and asked each member to describe what outcomes they would like to see come from this project, as well as their interests in the study area. Answers included;

- Ensure that the public is fully engaged in the study
- Improve safety
- Speed reduction along the corridor
- Provide a safe bike route along North Main Street
- Consider access to land use and maintain consistency with aesthetics along the corridor.

The overall sentiment was that the town can do better to improve this stretch of roadway for all users- not just vehicles.

Study Purpose /Scope of Work & Project Schedule/Early Observations

Mike Morehouse of FHI made a powerpoint presentation to illustrate the purpose of the meeting, lay out the project schedule and highlight early observations about the North Main Street Corridor. The presentation covered the corridor's functional classification, traffic count results, accident analysis and roadway geometry/lane configuration over time. Preliminary bike/ped counts were conducted at intersections between and including Albany Avenue and Farmington Avenue.

Mr. Morehouse described the study process, which is anticipated to conclude in six months and include the following phases:

- Discovery
 - i. Data collection
 - ii. Traffic analysis
 - iii. Safety analysis
 - iv. Utilization and needs
- Design
 - i. Public design charrette
 - ii. Design concepts
 - iii. Analysis/testing
 - iv. Preferred alternative
- Reporting
 - i. Simulation/Renderings
 - ii. Order of magnitude costs
 - iii. Action Plan
 - iv. Timeline
 - v. Public Meeting

Committee members made some general comments and raised the following questions which the study team responded to:

- Functional classification of Roadway
 - Why is North Main Street classified as a Principal Arterial and when was this done?
 - CRCOG offered to do some further research on this designation. A potential scenario is that the classification as a principal arterial stems from 1960's when the population of West Hartford peaked and Interstate 84 was slated to connect to Farmington Avenue at North Main Street.

MaryEllen Thibodeau was curious about how the functional classification system is designated and how it can be changed? Duane Martin, Town Engineer, said that although Trout Brook Drive seems like a more logical Principal Arterial, North Main Street connects into other towns as well as the interstate, and that could be the logic behind the current designation. Though North Main Street has become a residential

street, it still serve the function as a connector into other towns, so changing the functional classification probably isn't feasible.

- Discussion about Policy Decisions

Mike Morehouse emphasized the importance of deciding which users the town wants to benefit from any possible changes on the road... e.g. Should the town spend money to reward longer distance trips, or local trips?

In terms of traffic volumes, the PM peak hour shows that the south bound direction of North Main Street has the highest volume of vehicles during the PM peak hour. The levels during this one or two hour time frame could potentially be high for the roadway to implement a road diet and continue to have a high level of service. This will require a policy decision regarding whether to design the road to handle the amount of traffic that occurs for one to two hours per day or to accept that for that short time frame the level of service will decrease and traffic will divert to other streets.

- The majority of committee members expressed concern over roadway safety. North Main Street is viewed as an unpleasant place to walk or ride bikes as it is a very narrow road that has narrow shoulder and a small grass buffer strip.
- Triple Threat
Turning left onto North Main from a side street and crossing 3 lanes of traffic is was very dangerous, as the crash data shows. If there is some way to alleviate this, it would be safer.
- MaryEllen Thibodeau commented that although the data tells us that few bicyclists are using this road, it doesn't mean they don't want to - it may mean that potential bicyclists don't feel safe in doing so. Some interpretation of the data is necessary.
- What is the diversion potential? What will the study do, if anything to address this unknown? Will impacts to adjacent neighborhoods occur? Would Trout Brook be used as the alternate route?
Mike Morehouse stated that this study doesn't have the capacity to explore a new design for Trout Brook Drive, but that as a part of the process of looking at North Main Street, this study will analyze impacts and address the diversion potential at some point as alternatives are developed. Mr. Morehouse stated that in his professional opinion, it seems that Trout Brook Drive, with fewer homes and curb cuts and wider streets, could absorb some of the potential diverted traffic efficiently.
- Patrick Zapatka from the CT DOT, after the slide was shown comparing accident stats from North Main (4 lanes) and South Main (2 lanes), stressed that data needs to be consistent and correct, he suggested that the data be examined more closely to find out number of crashes involved with bicyclist and pedestrians.

Workshop Logistics

Mike Morehouse stated that the proposed date for the 3-Day project workshop is sometime during the week of October 12th. Mr. Morehouse asked TSC members for input on whether weekdays or weekend days would have the best chance of capturing a good cross-section of the public in West Hartford. It was determined that the workshop would be held on all weekdays from October 13-15.

Tom Wood of the American School for the Deaf offered ASD as a potential public meeting location. The project team will follow up with Mr. Wood to make arrangements to see the space.

Next Steps

The project team will begin preparation for public outreach, including an online survey, two pop-up kiosks at public events, flyers around town and a mailing. TSC members will email or call Emily Hultquist with outreach ideas.

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