

**Route 44 Corridor Study, Canton
Public Information Meeting #1
Meeting Notes
December 7, 2023, 6:00pm
Canton Community Center, Meeting Room F**

On December 7, 2023, the first Route 44 Corridor Study Public Information Meeting was held at the Canton Community Center. This meeting was conducted as a hybrid meeting with an in-person component and a virtual component. The in-person meeting took place at the Community Center in Canton, CT, while the on-line meeting was conducted simultaneously on the Town of Canton's Zoom Meeting account. Approximately 55 people attended the in-person meeting, including staff from the Town of Canton, the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), CTDOT, VHB and VN Engineers. Twenty people attended the online meeting. Audio and video of the meeting was recorded using Zoom. The recording of the meeting can be found at the project website: <https://crcog.org/rt44/>

- › Pramod Pandey, Principal Planner II at CRCOG, opened the meeting, introduced himself, and thanked all attendees for coming. He gave a brief overview of the Route 44 Corridor Study and the purpose of the meeting. He noted that staff from the Town of Canton and CTDOT were at the meeting as well.
- › Joe Balskus, Director of Transportation Systems with VHB, provided an introduction to the corridor study and introduced other staff from VHB and VN Engineers, the public outreach consultant. The meeting is on a tight timeframe to complete by 7:30, when another meeting will start. The public meeting will go over the existing conditions for the study area and have a Q&A session at the end of the meeting, then an opportunity to review maps and provide comments.
- › At 7:30, the Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee will have their meeting. The Committee advises the Board of Selectmen about Canton's traffic and transportation needs. The purpose of the committee is to make recommendations to improve the safety and effectiveness of all modes of travel within Canton, including roadways, bikeways and walkways.
- › Balskus briefly discussed the Route 44 Corridor history and noted that a previous Corridor Study was completed in 2000. The goal was to address safety and access issues particularly on the eastern side of Canton; a center median was proposed. The Corridor Study also covered other towns along Route 44. US 44 is part of the National Highway System, which can impact what changes can be made to the road and makes it more important as a through-route for traffic. Additionally, traffic volumes on the road peaked at 31,000 vehicles per day before the Great Recession in 2008 and have fallen to about 26,000 vehicles per day as of 2023.

- › The study corridor limits are US-44 from the Simsbury Town Line to approximately Old Canton Road (near the Canton Village Shops) and Dowd Avenue from US-44 to Canton Hollow. These limits have been set by the Town and CROCOG. Route 44 itself is a high-volume, high-speed arterial road with substantial through traffic that connects to Hartford in the east and points west in Connecticut. There has been significant new development on the roadway in recent years and it is dominated by automobile traffic.
- › The goals of the study are to review the corridor and develop recommendations to create a multimodal transportation corridor with transportation options for residents and visitors. Opportunities have been created by recent development to make the corridor more walkable and new development more compact to make walking easier. The Town has also created new Design Village Districts to support this and improve access to alternative modes. The Farmington River Trail runs through the corridor and is planned to be extended east by the Town. As part of the study, there may be potential changes identified for Route 44 for the next 20 years.
- › Balskus went over the Corridor Study process, which includes collecting data on existing conditions, assessing the existing conditions, looking at future conditions, identifying and analyzing alternatives, developing concepts, and creating a Transportation Improvement and Development Management Plan. Public outreach is included throughout the process. We are currently in the existing conditions for the project to understand what deficiencies exist.
- › Balskus discussed the traffic data collected.
 - Observations of traffic found that there are high speeds compared to posted speeds and weaving movements along Route 44; there are issues with Dowd Avenue from queuing to get onto Route 44 and with turning left onto Dowd Ave from Route 44; and the Route 177/Lawton Road intersection has recurring congestion and backups.
 - Traffic volumes for Route 44 area about 26,000 vehicles per day in both directions, which translates to about 2,000 vehicles during each peak hour (peak hours being about 8-10% of total daily traffic). Dowd Avenue carries about 8,600 vehicles per day, and for both facilities Tuesday has the highest volume with traffic declining through the remainder of the week.
 - Part of the traffic analysis includes looking at the various data points of traffic volumes and speed using computer models to understand the capacity of the intersections and roadways. These are standards set by CTDOT and CROCOG as well as national standards. Capacity is looked at in various ways, including volume to capacity, levels of service (graded at A to F), and queuing. From the data collected on Route 44, levels of service range from A to E, with Lawton Road/Lovely Street having the worst level of service at D and E grades. That is the worst intersection in the corridor. Some of the intersection movements are at level of service F and are over capacity.
- › Daniel Amstutz, Senior Transportation Planner at VHB, went over crash data collected for the study.
 - Crash data was collected through the Connecticut Crash Data Repository at UConn, which collects and tabulates crash reports from around the state. For the January 2018-July 2023 period there were 456 crashes in the study area, with 39% at key

intersections, 21% angle crashes and 46% rear end crashes. 79 crashes were injury crashes, most of which (44%) were angle crashes. One fatality occurred in the study area on Route 44 west of Canton Valley Circle, which was a pedestrian crossing the road.

- The highest crash density (where most crashes occur) is at Route 44/Lawton Road/Lovely Street with 70 crashes, and the second highest is at Route 44/Dowd Avenue with 50 crashes. However, the most injury crashes occurred at Route 44/Dowd Avenue and Dowd Avenue and Canton Springs Road.
 - There were 2 pedestrian crashes during the January 2018-July 2023 period. As noted earlier, one of these was a fatality. No bicycle crashes were reported in this period.
- › Amstutz discussed pedestrians, bicycles, and trails.
- The lowest pedestrian activity was seen on Route 44, where there are limited sidewalks in many places and issues of sidewalk maintenance, and the highest pedestrian activity was in the Shops at Farmington Valley. Flashing beacons help assist pedestrians to cross Dowd Avenue. In the Canton Village Shops, there is no defined pedestrian circulation.
 - Maps of pedestrian infrastructure including sidewalks and crosswalks were displayed.
 - For bicycling, some bike parking was found in the study area, and the Farmington River Trail is the primary bicycle accommodation. Part of the on-road portion of the trail north on Lawton Road is within the CTDOT On-Road Bicycle Planning Network that was developed in the recent CTDOT Active Transportation Plan. The Plan also developed a bicycle suitability map for understanding which state roads are more or less suitable for biking. In general, Route 44 has low suitability for bicycling, while Dowd Avenue is more suitable for biking.
 - As noted before, the Farmington River Trail passes through the study area and connects to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail as a key spine of the bicycle and pedestrian access to the area. The Town is planning an extension of the trail from the intersection of Route 44/Lovely Street/Lawton Road through the Shops at Farmington Valley and to continue east. The first phase of this section is under design. For this Corridor Study, the Study Team will need to look at a potential crossing of Route 44 by the trail near the Simsbury Town Line.
- › Amstutz went over information about public transportation conditions.
- Three express bus routes travel through Canton: the 901, 926, and 927, as well as a combined 926/927 in the mid-day. The service runs only on weekdays and has 9 round trips per day. There are three bus stop pairs along Route 44 where the buses, when making local service runs, will stop. Generally, they all stop at the Canton Park and Ride farther west along Route 44, outside the project area. In addition, there are three school bus routes in the study area for the Cherrybrook Elementary School, Canton Intermediate School, and Canton High School.
 - Transit usage is generally low, with about 2,500 rides per month for the three express routes. Prior to the pandemic, Route 901 was seeing over 140 riders per day; this dipped significantly during the pandemic and has not gotten back to its previous high. Routes 926 and 927 also had decreased ridership during the pandemic, but have

gotten slightly higher ridership than pre-pandemic, with about 37 daily riders in 2023 compared to 18 and 26 riders per day pre-pandemic, respectively.

- › Amstutz briefly went over information about land use.
 - Route 44 primarily has commercial development in the study area. Some is new construction while others are former residential properties converted to commercial use. Residential development is confined to the side streets, except on Dowd Avenue. More development is expected and planned in the study area over the coming years, and the desire is to keep this development walkable and support more compact site designs.
 - Amstutz showed a land use map of the study area and a zoning map. Many properties in the study area are under different Design Village Districts to keep them walkable and compact, including the East Gateway Design Village District, Canton Village Design Village District, and the Applegate Design Village District.
- › Bridget Moriarty, from VN Engineers, went over public engagement for the project so far.
 - Public engagement in many forms is being conducted for this study. A pop-up meeting at the Collinsville Farmer's Market was done on October 1, a public survey has been circulated, stakeholder meetings have been conducted, and there is the public meeting happening this evening.
 - Stakeholder interviews with various key businesses and organizations were done to understand their concerns and ideas about the study area. Stakeholders included the Shops at Farmington Valley, the Avon/Canton Chamber of Commerce, Canton Village Shops, Mitchell Subaru, Bike Walk Canton, transit users, Favarh – the Arc of Farmington Valley, Farmington Valley Trails Council, Shoprite of Canton, Canton Senior and Social Services, and Benidorm Bikes. Additionally, CRCOG staff visited 41 businesses along the corridor.
 - Stakeholders noted that 97% or more of their workers and clients/customers arrive by private car. Others may use a shuttle, dial a ride, or bike and walk.
 - Many concerns were shared by the stakeholders about the corridor, including: speeding, safety, signal coordination, access management, illumination, sidewalk connectivity, wayfinding, traffic delays, connection to the Farmington River Rail Trail, insufficient places for left turns, congestion, safety for people biking and walking as well as crossings, and possible construction impacts on mobility and its effect on businesses.
 - The public survey has received 838 responses as of November 30. About 80% of responses have come from people in Canton, while the remaining 20% are from Avon, Simsbury, and other nearby towns. Almost half of respondents (43%) note that biking and walking safety and comfort is poor or very poor for both questions. Traffic concerns include high speeds, congestion, unsafe driver behavior, and long signal wait times. Improvements that people suggested most include better bicycle and pedestrian facilities, safer drivers, and traffic calming. Finally, improvements for non-motorized users people suggested include extending the trail, improving crossings, improving bike facilities, slowing traffic, and improving pedestrian facilities.

- › At the end of the presentation was a Q & A session for attendees. Questions and comments made during the in-person Q&A included the following:
 - A suggestion was made to create a center left turn lane to make left turns safer in the corridor. An example from Bradenton, Florida was provided. In addition, stop bars for vehicles in the left turn lanes should be moved back to help trucks to make wide turns without cutting corners.
 - A commenter stated that the study does not pay enough attention to residences on Dowd Avenue or address issues that affect them, such as speeding, pollution, and road rage issues of drivers. They further stated that Dowd Avenue/State Route 565 is not suitable for heavy truck traffic and should not be considered a highway. Most of the corridor is not suitable for bicycling. The vision of the plan is outdated because it is based on an old Plan of Conservation and Development and there are concerns about the Town's form-based code. A roundabout should be considered Route 44 and Route 179/Lovely Street and Lawton Road.
 - Is there a way to see the goals and what was implemented in the Route 44 study from 2000, and what previous recommendations were not implemented? At what point will decisions get made on the Corridor Study? Also, it would be preferable for the study to include parts of Route 44 further to the west.
 - Pramod Pandey noted that conditions may have changed after the previous study from 2000 to make certain recommendations infeasible, which is why they were not implemented. Staff will go back and look at this study and more information about the older study will be included in the new study's report.
 - Does being a national highway mean that Route 44 has limits on construction/countermeasures? Is it possible to put bridges over Route 44 for crossing it? Will bus stops be protected and have sidewalk accessibility as part of the recommendations?
 - Pandey noted that CRCOG visited many businesses as part of their investigation and had a hard time finding people who ride the bus. The next step is to talk with people at the bus stops to understand their commute patterns. The recommendations will look at bus and access improvements in the corridor.
 - Balskus explained that the Federal Highway Administration will need to be involved with changes to the corridor. USDOT is using a safe systems approach to transportation that has been embraced by CTDOT. He can't say if a bridge would be approved, but things are evolving at the state and federal level that is changing how they look at possible projects.
 - There is a need to protect the character of Canton. The Canton Planning & Zoning Commission is actively encouraging multi family development, and this will lead to more traffic. It's important to also keep trees along the road corridor to keep the small town character of Canton. In addition, it's difficult to cross Route 44 as a pedestrian.
 - The bus stops are not in places suitable for people who go to work in Hartford. They may have to cross the street after being let off in places where it's hard to cross.

- There are many crashes caused by people turning left into commercial areas off Route 44, especially the Dunkin' Donuts west of Lovely Street. A center turn lane may help.
 - The traffic light cycles are too long, and do not seem synchronized. In the early morning hours, they are no longer blinking like they used to. It is confusing and seems dangerous, and people don't know what to do.
 - Planted medians would help with traffic calming. Please don't make the roads wider, as it will make people drive faster. The traffic signal at Route 44 and Lovely Street is OK for a pedestrian to cross but it's very slow to change for the pedestrian signal. Sidewalks on Dowd Avenue are in need of repair but are OK for most people.
 - Balskus noted that planted medians were put on Route 44 in front of the Shops at Farmington Valley, and that is from the 2000 plan. Whether medians will be recommended for this study remains to be seen.
 - The bike trail is great. Speed bumps are needed on side roads like Dowd Avenue to slow people down. Do tractor trailers really need to go down Route 44?
 - Balskus explained that speed humps could potentially be used on Dowd Avenue but not likely on Route 44 due to the high speeds. Prevailing speeds limit locations where speed humps can be placed.
 - Will there be some kind of gap analysis of what people are doing and what they want to do in terms of travel?
 - Moriarty noted that the public survey does ask questions about suggestions like this.
 - Traffic signal coordination is very important to help address traffic congestion at signals. There is a bridge over Route 6 near Tunxis Community College for the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail that seems to work well – bridges should be considered. Tunnels for trails could also be considered if they are not too long and dark. Snow plows may have issues getting around roundabouts.
 - Please do not let Route 44 look like Route 2 outside Boston, with jersey barriers down the middle and no place to turn.
- › Questions were also asked by online attendees during the Q&A session. They were:
- There was data collection on vehicle traffic, was there any data collection on bicycle and pedestrian traffic? Is there a breakdown of those modes available? Also, will the slides be available?
 - Answer: yes, data was collected on all modes. A breakdown of modes will be included in the final report.
 - The meeting slides will be made available.
 - The lady speaking is making my point. We need center turn lanes. I grew up in Detroit and center turn lanes are very common and definitely help with traffic flow and safety.
 - Answer: the two way center left turn lanes can operate really efficiently in certain circumstances.

- Could you please share a link to the website?
 - Answer: Crcog.org/rt44
 - Will the corridor study team make a point of walking and biking the study area to gain insight from both a pedestrian and bicyclist perspective?
 - Answer: we will discuss this with the Team. I will say that I have run a lot in Collinsville and our team has several avid bicyclists, so we understand being vulnerable users. It's very scary at times. Thanks for suggestion and participating.
 - Are there any successful communities similar to ours that we can visit and use as a model?
 - Answer: email Pramod Pandey at CRCOG for this question. His email is ppandey@crcog.org. Great idea!
 - Can traffic lights be timed so that cars driving the speed limit don't have to stop every 50 feet?
 - Answer: the timing of traffic signals so that they move vehicles efficiently through intersections is something that will be reviewed as part of the study. Thank you!
- › Two written public comment forms were submitted at the end of the meeting. The comments were:
 - My concern is that Route 44 traffic will be diverted down Route 565 – my solution is for the traffic to travel Route 44 to Route 179. No through trucks on Route 565.
 - CT Transit needs to provide more trips west in the day and more trips east. They only have service for a 9-5, traditional work schedule.
 - › 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.
 - › After the Q&A, attendees were invited to talk to the Study Team and make comments on maps of the study area around the room.
 - › The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.