



THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



Victoria F. Sheehan
Commissioner

William Cass, P.E.
Assistant Commissioner

July 18, 2018



The Honorable Dan Feltes
State Senator
Legislative Office Building, Room 5
33 North State St.
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Senator Feltes:

The following is in response to your June 6, 2018 letter regarding the I-93, Bow-Concord project and your concern about the NHDOT working effectively with the City of Concord as the project moves ahead.

We certainly understand the need to have a solid partnership with the City of Concord. We recognize the implications and opportunities that this major project has for the City. From the beginning, we have involved the City in the design and project development process.

To better facilitate this effort, the City of Concord recommended a small group of people to coordinate with as the project progressed. That group was made up of Mayor Jim Bouley, City Manager Tom Aspell, Deputy City Manager-Development Carlos Baia, Phil Hastings and Steve Duprey. We met with the group a number of times to exchange ideas and review concerns and issues. We also met twice with the City Transportation Policy Advisory Committee, met with City traffic and planning staff, presented the project at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon and held several rounds of well attended Public Informational Meetings in both Concord and Bow.

Through this extensive public participation process and coordination with the City, we have been weighing pros and cons of various alternatives, balancing needs and impacts, and are building consensus toward a preferred alternative. We are aware of some of the outstanding concerns and issues, many of which are longstanding and pending resolution of this Bow-Concord project. The approval of a preferred alternative will help to address some of the uncertainty around these concerns and issues. While some of these issues will continue to be a challenge due to various factors, NHDOT is committed to collaboratively working toward their resolution. With that said, let me address the four specific items raised in your letter.

1. DOT committing to the demolition and removal of DOT warehouses on Stickney Avenue within the next two years, with inclusion of such demolition and removal in the I-93 project plans;

The current preferred alternative for the I-93 Bow-Concord project in the Exit 14/15 area does not directly impact the former highway garage buildings. As such, their removal is not currently included in the environmental documentation as an historic impact, but the entire complex has been recognized as an eligible historic district. However, we realize the disposition of the former Highway Garage site and property needs to be resolved and that it should be done in conjunction with this project. Accordingly, we

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will begin the environmental and historic review process and develop a plan and schedule to address the demolition. The goal would be to have a more definitive and informed decision in conjunction with the Bow-Concord formal Public Hearing and preferred alternative approval this fall. Whether removal in the 2-year time frame recommended is achievable needs to be evaluated, but it is good goal to start with.

- 2. If Stickney Avenue's relocation is kept in the I-93 project plans, the DOT adjust the plan to allow for the development of land by the City of Concord between Loudon Road and I-393, including a right of first refusal for the potential acquisition of State property and air rights over any relocated Stickney Avenue corridor. Where property is retained by DOT in the Stickney Avenue corridor, the DOT commits to a partnership with the City of Concord on a development/redevelopment plan, including transit-oriented development and structured parking;*

The DOT agrees to work with the City regarding the design of the Stickney Avenue area to provide appropriate development opportunities while maintaining a functioning roadway system. The timing and disposition of the former Highway Garage property is an issue that will require further coordination with the City and the Bow-Concord project, particularly regarding potential needs for construction staging and access. NHDOT recognizes the interest in and development potential of the area, and that future parking provisions cannot all be handled with additional paved parking lots. Any sale of surplus State Property would by law be offered first to the City, but considering the varied interests and the complications with the Bow-Concord construction timing, a more collaborative process considering innovative or unique approaches to development of the site would seem more likely. The Department will work in partnership with the City toward an appropriate development solution that would likely include transit operations, structured parking, and vertical development/air rights, etc.

- 3. The DOT commit to working with the City of Concord to acquire federal funding (i.e. TIGER or equivalent) for select elements, such as a pedestrian bridge over I-93, that could specifically address quality of life and economic development priorities for Concord;*

A significant issue still to be resolved is funding for the Bow-Concord project. The Bow-Concord project is not fully funded in the Ten Year Plan. We expect to move forward with segments or critical pieces such as red-list bridges that can be built with funds available once the preferred alternative receives approval through the upcoming Environmental approval and Public Hearing later this year. The next update of the Ten Year Plan will need to grapple with the funding for the project. It would be premature for the Department to commit to help acquire funding for select or additional elements of interest to Concord when the project is not fully funded. We may be seeking federal funding sources such as TIGER/BUILD grants to help fund the core construction of the project. Developing support for overall project funding should be the priority focus at this point. Following that, discussion about other supplementary or interrelated aspects and how to fund and accomplish them would be applicable.

- 4. The DOT enhance access to the Merrimack River by committing to increase and maintain its right of way maintenance along I-93 through Concord, including removing dead trees and tree limbs, weeds, brush and invasive plant growth obscuring access to and views of the river.*

The DOT provides roadside maintenance to provide for the safe function of the roadways. Additional time and effort outside of the normal maintenance area to provide views of the river is not part of the operations charge. The DOT is willing to work with the City to enlist other entities to help with the efforts they feel are desired within the DOT property provided the work can be completed and maintained in a safe manner.

The Bow-Concord project is approaching a milestone of deciding on and formally approving the Preferred Alternative through the Public Hearing Process. Along with that there are many specific issues and concerns to work through, hopefully to the mutual benefit of the City and the transportation system. We will continue to involve the City coordinating group and will meet with appropriate City committees and others to build consensus and support.

We appreciate the interest of the delegation. With that interest and the obvious concern about the issues discussed here, I would like to suggest convening a forum/meeting for the delegation and City Officials to review the project and the preferred alternative, discuss further the issues brought up here and any other questions about the project, and build support for the project and its funding. If you believe that such a forum would be beneficial, the Department will arrange such a meeting.

Sincerely,



Victoria F. Sheehan
Commissioner

cc The Honorable Christopher T. Sununu, Governor
The Honorable Mary Jane Wallner
The Honorable Mary Stuart Gile
The Honorable James MacKay
The Honorable Katherine Rogers
The Honorable Christy Bartlett
The Honorable Dave Luneau
The Honorable Mel Myler
The Honorable Kris Schultz
The Honorable Beth Richards
The Honorable Linda Kenison
The Honorable Dick Patten
The Honorable Tim Soucy
The Honorable Jim Bouley, Mayor of Concord
Tom Aspell, Concord City Manager
Carlos Baia, Concord Deputy City Manager
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