



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Transportation Policy Advisory Committee

DATE: September 30, 2022

SUBJECT: Report from the Transportation Policy Advisory Committee regarding NHDOT's I-93 Bow-Concord Interstate Widening Project.

Recommendation

Accept this report.

Background

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) presented an update on the I-93 Bow-Concord Project (the "Project") at a special TPAC Meeting held on August 9, 2022. TPAC also met on August 25th to discuss the project with representatives from NHDOT, as well as McFarland-Johnson (NHDOT's consultant for the project). Both meetings were recorded and are available through ConcordTV. TPAC continued to solicit public input and discussed all aspects of the project at subsequent meetings held on September 15th and September 29th.

Discussion

If implemented properly, TPAC believes that the proposed Project has the potential to improve bicyclist and pedestrian safety throughout the City, as well as support economic development activities in Downtown and the Opportunity Corridor. After lengthy discussions and weighing all public input received, TPAC offers the following recommendations to the City Council for its consideration.

1. Exit 12

Subject to review of final designs and maintenance details, the NHDOT's proposed conceptual improvements to Exit 12 are acceptable to the Committee. The Committee recommends requesting that the NHDOT use industry standard design principles to incorporate safe access for bicyclists and pedestrians through the proposed roundabouts at this location.

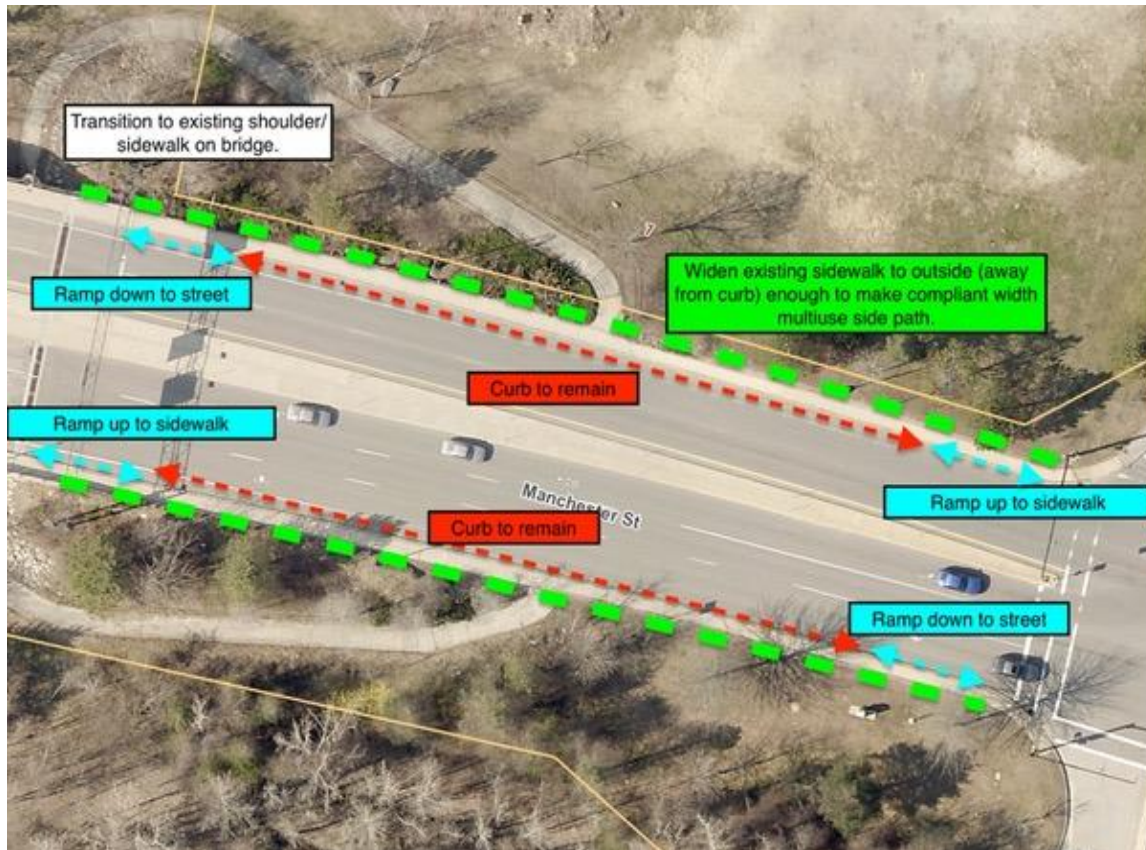
The Committee also recommends that the City request that the NHDOT to consider the impacts of the highway noise to the abutting neighborhoods in the area of Exit 12.

2. Exit 13

The Committee supports the NHDOT's proposal to provide additional turn lanes at the north bound off ramp, as well as at the intersection of Manchester Street and Old Turnpike Road. The Committee believes that these improvements are valuable to the City within the context

of transportation and economic development. The Committee recommends that the City request that the NHDOT carefully consider safe crossings for bicycles and pedestrians at all two-lane approaches and exits at this location.

The Committee also recommends that the City Council advocate for safe bicycle transitions between the trail system and street system, connecting Manchester Street users to the Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT). This could be accomplished by the addition of bicycle curb ramps and 10-foot wide multi-use paths extending from the existing paths beneath the Manchester Street Bridge to the intersection with Old Turnpike Road, as shown on the figure below.



The Committee also recommends that the City encourage the NHDOT, as well as the developer of the Black Hill property, to incorporate connections to the MRGT through their respective properties at this location. Doing so will facilitate a continuous route for the MRGT from the Concord / Pembroke municipal boundary to Terrill Park and beyond.

In addition, the Committee recommends that the existing pedestrian ramp from Basin Street be reconfigured to tie into Manchester Street in a safer location.

The Committee notes that this area is a great candidate for additional tree plantings.

3. Exit 14

a. Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT) / Loudon Road

The Committee suggests that NHDOT's proposed typical section for Loudon Road, through the limits of the Project, be revised so as to be consistent with the proposed improvements across the Loudon Road Bridge with a 14-foot wide shared-use path on the north side and 6-foot wide sidewalk on the south side. Additionally, consideration should be given to beautifying the Interstate bridge over Loudon Road, as well as constructing sloped abutments versus vertical retaining walls to open up this area, thus making it more inviting for pedestrians. The committee feels this bridge is a gateway connecting the Heights to Downtown and should be appropriately designed. See examples below:



The Committee is highly interested in the design details of all intersection trail crossings and recommends that they be designed using industry standard design principles to incorporate safe access for all users.

Regarding the proposed configuration of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT), the Committee recommends that the City ask the NHDOT to further analyze MRGT Concepts A, C and F, and/or a combination of the three.

TPAC also notes that the NHDOT should also account for the following as part of the project:

- Signal timing of the Loudon Road/Centre Street intersection with increased pedestrian activity;
- Rights-of-Way impacts to the Holiday Inn on the corner;
- Aesthetics of the ramp in Concept F (specifically TPAC recommends a structure as opposed to large retaining walls); and,
- That all alternatives be configured to work with the proposed roundabout to be constructed as part of the Storrs Street Extension near the Holiday Inn.

TPAC does not recommend moving forward with NHDOT's MRGT Concept B as it is too circuitous and does not connect users to downtown. The Committee also does not suggest supporting MRGT Concept D, as it includes an approximate 300' tunnel that would be dark and unpleasant, especially with 90 degree turns at the ends. Due to the uninspiring route along Stickney Ave and through parking lots, TPAC also does not recommend MRGT Concept E. The Committee notes that a meaningful connection is not provided to the Downtown Central Business District with these alternatives.

During TPAC's September 29th meeting, a member of the public suggested an alternative route for the MRGT running from the Loudon Road Bridge to Downtown, as well as future MRGT extension at Horseshoe Pond Lane. Upon review, the majority of TPAC members were concerned about the circuitry of these routes, as well as the anticipated challenges with constructing a large amount of the trail through private property.

b. Stickney Ave (Right-in, Right-Out)

During its review, the Committee noted that Concord Coach and Concord Area Transit (CAT) have concerns with the access restrictions which would result from the proposed right-in, right-out configuration at this location. The Committee also noted associated impacts to the Ralph Pill plaza, and that the proposed reconfiguration of this intersection would necessitate the need for U-turns at other busy intersections in the area. TPAC acknowledged that eliminating this signalized intersection may improve traffic operations on this section of Loudon Road. However, due to perceived negative impacts on adjacent properties, the Committee suggests that this improvement be implemented only if the anticipated transportation benefits significantly outweigh the impacts to adjacent private properties. Therefore, the Committee recommends that this location remain as a full access, signalized intersection.

c. North Bound On-Ramp

The Committee did not reach a consensus on a recommended ramp configuration. Some members questioned the feasibility of maintaining a full-access ramp, while others had concerns that only allowing access from the east would increase traffic on North Main Street. The Committee offers the following list of pros and cons to the proposed partial access ramp, only allowing traffic to enter from the east:

Pros

- Eliminates a closely spaced signal on Loudon Road.
- Improves traffic flow on Loudon Road.
- Reduces lane confusion under bridge that exists today.
- Eliminates a path of travel that could conflict with pedestrians.

Cons

- Some traffic would divert to North Main Street.
- Potential free-flowing traffic conflict with pedestrian crossing.
- Maintains the traffic weave between Exit 15.

4. Exit 15

TPAC recommends that City Council support the proposed Clover Stack interchange at Exit 15, as it will eliminate many existing unsafe weaving conditions and red listed bridges.

TPAC also recommends that City Council request that the NHDOT include streetscape and design features on I-393/US Route 202 between Commercial Street and North Main Street. Said improvements would beautify this important gateway into the City, as well as provide a visual cue to motorists that they are leaving the Interstate and approaching the local street network. Said improvements would also encourage the reduction of speeds as vehicles approach the intersections with Commercial Street and North Main Street.

5. Interstate Widening

Following lengthy discussions, the Committee did not reach a consensus on support for the Interstate widening. However, the Committee did recommend that the City request that the State minimize the Interstate's footprint and number of lanes associated therewith, while still meeting purpose and need of the project.

TPAC also recommends that City Council request that the NHDOT provide more detailed traffic data regarding the projected Level of Service (LOS) for the highway improvements, traffic growth rate, anticipated useful life of proposed improvements within the context of traffic capacity and projected growth. The Committee also suggested that the NHDOT provide current ramp volumes between Exit 12 and Exit 17 (current summer peak and non-summer), as well as projected volumes once the project is completed, to estimate the number of tourists getting off in Concord.

6. Deck Park/Pedestrian Bridge/River Connection

TPAC noted that the City's 2006 Opportunity Corridor Master Plan, which was prepared in part to articulate the City's suggestions to the NHDOT relative to the Interstate 93 project as envisioned at that time, included a large deck park and various improvements to the

Merrimack River corridor to promote pedestrian access and recreation associated. TPAC also noted that these improvements were specifically predicated on the acquisition and redevelopment of the Brixmor Shopping Plaza, and other adjacent properties, by the NHDOT so that the highway could be relocated westerly away from the river. The Committee noted that said real estate acquisitions are not part of the NHDOT's Project at this time. In addition, the improvements suggested by the 2006 Opportunity Corridor Master Plan also contemplated depressing the elevation of the highway, as well as significant modifications of the CSX railroad at this location, to facilitate development of the "deck park".

During TPAC's September meetings, a significant amount of public testimony was presented which discussed the concept of the deck park and related river connections as articulated in the 2006 Opportunity Corridor Master Plan. Therefore, TPAC recommends that the City Council appropriate funds to engage a consultant for the purposes of completing a feasibility study and associated conceptual designs of a potential "deck park" over portions of the Interstate (likely between Exits 12 and 13), as well as a potential pedestrian bridge associated therewith across the Merrimack River, including pedestrian connections to the river related thereto.