

**CITY OF CONCORD
TRANSPORTATION POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2022**

The Transportation Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC) met at 6:00 pm on September 15, 2022, in City Council Chambers, 37 Green Street.

Members Present: Mayor Bouley (Chair), Councilor Todd, Councilor Brown, Councilor Rice-Hawkins, Gregory Bakos, Dick Lemieux, Terri Paige, Craig Tufts

Members Absent: Ian McGregor

Guests: Members of the public (see attached sign-in sheet)

City Staff: David Cedarholm (City Engineer), Karen Hill (Transportation Engineer), Heather Shank (City Planner)

NHDOT/McFarland Johnson Staff: Jason Ayotte (NHDOT - Project Manager), John Butler (NHDOT), Gene McCarthy (McFarland Johnson - Project Manager)

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

2. Discuss NHDOT's I-93 Bow-Concord Project

The Chair mentioned that Hill compiled a summary of public comment which was distributed to members prior to the meeting. He then led a discussion around the public comment received as well as allowing TPAC members to discuss each area of the project.

Exit 12

Members were accepting of the proposed conceptual improvements at this time, noting that maintenance and final design details are forthcoming as well as future opportunity for discussion and refinement. The Committee felt it was important to consider safety and access for bicycle and pedestrians through the proposed roundabouts.

Exit 13

Members discussed the importance of connecting safe bicycle and pedestrian accommodations from Manchester Street to downtown. Careful consideration will have to be taken at two-lane exits and intersection approaches. The Committee also expressed interest in multi-use street level connections, with curb ramps, to the pedestrian underpasses under the bridge, as well as connections from the proposed MRGT through the new Black Hill Development

under the bridge and to Terrill Park. It was discussed that the existing Manchester Street bridge over the Merrimack is to remain with existing 4-foot shoulders and 6-foot sidewalks on both sides.

The intersection with Manchester Street and Old Turnpike Road will be further evaluated by NHDOT and McFarland-Johnson (MJ).

It was discussed that the existing ramp from Basin Street puts bicyclists into high-volume off ramp traffic. MJ confirmed that the proposed concept impacts this ramp and it will be further designed, with safety considered, in the future.

Exit 14

MRGT

The Committee suggested that the Loudon Road typical section be reconsidered to mimic the proposed improvements across the Loudon Road Bridge. There was also a request for beautifying the interstate bridge over Loudon Road as well as construction sloped abutments versus vertical to make it look less like a tunnel. McCarthy mentioned this would require a longer span and deeper beams, meaning the bridge would need to be higher. The Committee asked for a visual of the bridge and potential improvements to make it look more like a gateway versus a tunnel under the interstate.

Craig Tufts, the Chair of the TPAC Bicycle-Pedestrian Subcommittee, summarized the discussions from the meeting held on August 23, 2022. He mentioned that overall, the Subcommittee was interested in the design details of trail crossings of all intersections, wanting to ensure they are safe and accommodating for all users. He then led a discussion around each concept.

Concept A

The Committee discussed that the proposed Storrs Street Extension Roundabout will act as a bicycle pedestrian distribution area. They also agreed that bringing the trail directly into downtown poses economic benefits, but had concerns about ROW impacts to the hotel on the corner. It was noted that if the trail ties into Storrs Street that it would be important to maintain the existing downtown Storrs Street and Main Street connections. Hill mentioned the increase in pedestrian crossings at the Loudon Road/Centre Street intersection and that the signal timing would need to be considered with this option.

Concept F

This option is TPAC-BP and FMRGT's favorite, but they would also like to see the Main Street connection as well. It was discussed that the benefit is that it gets the trail over the railroad. Questions remain as to the aesthetics of the ramp from Loudon Road to Storrs Street and whether it would be a fill or preferably a structure. Concerns were raised that it does not work with the proposed Storrs Street roundabout. The Committee would like verification. McCarthy confirmed

that the area is tight especially with the proposed ROW needed for the railroad, they have moved the railroad as far to the east as possible with the existing bridge abutment.

Concept C

The Committee has concerns about the at-grade railroad crossing and questioned the logistics and design/feasibility and future of rail. A benefit that was discussed is that it would provide a new access point to the Brady-Sullivan property and possibly other properties in the vicinity (bus station) from Storrs St. Cedarholm suggested that it is a cheaper alternative and shouldn't be off the table since the City has rights to a railroad crossing in this area.

Concept B

The Committee feels this route is too circuitous and does not connect users to downtown.

Concept D

The Committee discussed that an approximate 300' tunnel would be dark and unpleasant, especially with 90 degree turns at the ends. It was also mentioned that the economic benefit is not provided without a connection close enough to downtown.

Concept E

The Committee feels this route is uninspiring to route a trail through parking lots and along Stickney Ave.

The Committee ultimately recommended that Concepts A, C and F should be considered further, or a combination of the three. MJ will vet the preferred alternatives moving forward as the right-of-way impacts are the biggest concern to get through the NEPA process and to a public hearing.

Stickney Ave (Right-in, Right-Out)

The Committee discussed that Concord Coach and CAT has concerns with the access restrictions. There was also concerns with isolating the Ralph Pill Area, creating the need for unsafe U-turns at busy intersections. It was discussed that eliminating this signal could marginally improve traffic operation on Loudon Road, but the Committee agreed that unless it was an astronomical improvement then it wouldn't offset the concerns. The committee recommends leaving this intersection as a full access, signalized intersection.

NB On Ramp

The Committee discussed eliminating the left turns and signal at this ramp, recognizing its closeness to the Fort Eddy intersection and the traffic implications. There were concerns raised with left turning traffic diverting onto N Main Street.

McCarthy mentioned that the traffic on this ramp is much lower than other ramps, which is why it was originally proposed to be removed. The future peak hour traffic is projected to be 280 vehicles per hour (vph), split 50/50 between right and left turns, meaning 140 vehicles during the peak hour will need to seek an alternate route. The Committee also discussed the need for a safe way for the multi-use path to cross the free-flowing right turning traffic on the ramp.

Exit 15

There was overall positive feedback from the Committee for the Clover Stack interchange due to the elimination of unsafe weaving. Tufts mentioned his concerns with expensive new infrastructure and bridges, and asked if something simpler or upgrade of existing could allow the funds to be put towards other improvements. Tufts also mentioned concerns with the maintenance and safety of the existing sidewalk from the N Main intersection to Commercial Street. He asked if the design team could consider a gateway/transition from the interstate to the City intersection, to help mitigate speed approaching the intersection and notify drivers that they are leaving the interstate and approaching a more local street network. Introducing streetscape elements and other traffic calming elements would be beneficial.

McCarthy discussed that the existing configuration cannot remain as it does not meet the purpose and need of the project and maintains unsafe weaving as well as a few red listed bridges. They have considered about 12 different alternatives for this interchange; this preferred alternative addresses the need within the existing footprint.

Interstate Widening

Councilor Stacey Brown asked the design team to discuss the need for widening the interstate from four lanes to eight. McCarthy presented some PowerPoint slides with existing and proposed traffic conditions. He mentioned that the project purpose and need was not just about increasing capacity but also addressing the safety and capacity of interchanges. He mentioned that the traffic study was initially completed in 2014 and will need to be modified and brought up to today's numbers. McCarthy analyzed traffic counts from the permanent traffic recorder stationed between Exits 12 and 13, that was also referenced in the recent news article that Councilor Brown referred to. He discussed that today's average daily traffic (ADT) is approximately 74,000 which is at capacity. Where as a weekend day in July, the ADT is about 100,000, over capacity, causing drivers to seek alternate routes and divert to various local roadway networks. With any future growth, the highway will be operating over capacity at most days/times.

In response to the question on whether the project will just be pushing bottleneck further north, McCarthy shared a figure that showed traffic counts at

79,000 south of 89 and dropping to 49,000 north of 393. Describing Concord as a hub and explaining that traffic disperses onto various routes in Concord.

Hill mentioned that the project is not just to get drivers from the south through the City and to the Lakes Region and mountains, that is affects concord residents trying to get home from working south of Concord, or just living in the north end of the City. She also receives many concerns from residents on Mountain Road and other roadways that are being affected by the amount of traffic diverting off the interstate to avoid the congestion.

Tufts summarized some public input that he had been hearing by asking how much highway/traffic is enough? Are we making projects like the highway cap and bicycle pedestrian improvements more feasible? In turn, can we prioritize bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and local trips and find a balance.

Shank asked if the design team had considered just improving the interchanges and adding the auxiliary lanes between exits, without widening the extra lanes, and looked at how that addresses the traffic flow.

Paige asked if other options were considered for moving traffic through, for example, a commuter lane or time of day lane shift. McCarthy responded that other options were considered and that we do not have the luxury of a traffic imbalance like in Boston, that could benefit from a solution as such.

Deck Park/Pedestrian Bridge/River Connection

This discussion was tabled for the September 29th meeting to allow time public comment.

3. Public Comment

The Chair opened the meeting for public comment.

Donna Lannan, a 40-year Concord resident spoke about traffic in other Cities such as Boston, and her opinion is that Concord traffic is not a problem. She does not agree with the highway expansion. She expressed that the traffic did not stop her from living in Concord and working in Manchester for many years. A large highway expansion in this small City is unnecessary.

Sandra Bunch, a resident on Ridge Road, suggested that widening will bring more traffic. She would like to see the money put into public transportation and highway access, Loudon Road, and connecting the City. She mentioned that the Single Point interchange at Exit 13 is challenging to navigate. She would like to see beauty in all aspects of project. She is in support of a pedestrian park over the highway and with walkways throughout. Imagination vs pavement. Quality not quantity. She also sent in a public comment letter.

Meredith Cooley, a Concord resident representing the Concord Greenspace Coalition, trusts that the engineers and planners will make the best decision for

our City. She expressed concerns that the highway already divides the city and an expansion will deepen the divide. She advocated for a deck park and symbolic ped bridge to connect both sides of the river, highlighting the potential economic benefits. The Greenspace website shows the vision of the group. She asked that NHDOT and the City work together to allow a deck park to be feasible in the future.

Anna Krasinski, a Concord resident but has lived in other cities, has experienced traffic elsewhere. She believes that the amount of traffic does not warrant expansion or does it benefit Concord. She would like to see a project with the biggest benefit to City, that includes recreation opportunities. Her question is how can we bring back river access that was lost many years ago when the interstate was constructed?

Pat Peick, resides in Penacook, requested that charettes be held. He expressed concerns of the expense of the widening and does not want Concord to repeat Boston and Seattle history by building a massive open freeway just to bury it in the future.

Ron Rayner, a resident of Concord since 1989, stated that he submitted comments prior to the meeting. He suggested a balance between highway necessity and quality of life within Concord. He acknowledged that growth will continue to the south and tourists will come, he encouraged folks to support the expansion. He expressed that this is likely the last time we will see an expansion so we should be careful and not have blinders on. He suggested that the park over the highway may not be practical and that if we want greenspace then we should focus on the improvements at the Everett Arena park and safely getting the MRGT to it as an appealing multi-purpose area.

Holly, not currently a Concord resident, recently moved to Manchester, expressed her concerns as a social worker. She mentioned that some people need to ride a bike everywhere and do not have access to transportation. She asked who is this highway for? Outside folks to get into or through Concord? She suggested more consideration for residents in Concord who do not have access to transportation. She also asked whether the project was addressing equity issues?

Susan Woods, a Concord resident for 3-4 years, was unsure if the project will provide acceptable accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians. She asked how we can pursue opportunities for a deck park and bridges within project timeline? Mayor Bouley suggested folks talk to their City Councilors to encourage them to look at alternatives. The City will need to appropriate dollars to perform a study.

Jason Ayotte mentioned the Reconnecting communities discretionary grant that is available now and is open to fund planning level efforts.

Meredith Cooley spoke again and mentioned that Manchester just secured a bio-innovation grant and earmarked money to make Manchester a welcoming community for race equality. She suggested everyone look at the NY times news article about addressing the divide highways create in cities.

4. Adjourn

Mayor Bouley thanked everyone for coming and providing feedback. He suggested that TPAC would focus on formatting its input to Council at the September 29th meeting. He also would like to discuss the deck park and river connection ideas.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm by unanimous consent.

5. Upcoming Meeting Dates

September 29, 2022



Transportation Policy Advisory Committee
 City of Concord
 September 15th, 2022 @ 6:00 pm
 City Council Chambers
SIGN IN SHEET

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