



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Transportation Policy Advisory Committee

DATE: March 22, 2018

SUBJECT: Report from the Transportation Policy Advisory Committee regarding NHDOT's Preferred Alternative for the I-93 Bow-Concord (I-93 widening) Project.

Recommendation

Accept this report and take appropriate action as determined by Council.

Background

The City of Concord has, over the past two decades, envisioned goals and objectives for the I-93 corridor through the downtown area. The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) presented its Preferred Alternative for the I-93 Bow-Concord Project at public information meetings in February 2018. At its February 22 and March 22, 2018 meetings, the Transportation Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC) reviewed NHDOT's Preferred Alternative for the I-93 Bow-Concord project, which entails widening Interstate 93 and reconfiguring several interchanges through Concord.

Discussion

TPAC believes the point of no return for incorporating Concord's goals and objectives is fast approaching. TPAC understands that NHDOT will be closing its comment period at the end of this spring. In light of the fast-approaching deadline, TPAC compared the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative with the goals, objectives and aspirations from these former documents:

- [20/20 Vision for Concord, NH \(2001\)](#)
- [Concord Opportunity Corridor Master Plan \(2005\)](#)
- [Master Plan 2030 \(2008\)](#)
- [Bicycle Master Plan \(2010\)](#)
- [Merrimack River Greenway Trail Feasibility Study \(2010\)](#)
- [Concord's New Front Door \(2013\)](#)
- [Comprehensive Transportation Policy \(2015\)](#)
- [Pedestrian Master Plan \(2017\)](#)

All of these plans, reports and studies were developed transparently with extensive public input. They express certain strategic goals, dreams and aspirations of the Concord community for the Opportunity Corridor. Each of these reports identifies the I-93 Bow-Concord project as a critical opportunity for the City to achieve its long term goals and objectives.

The chart below contrasts the common elements from the previously-issued reports with NHDOT’s Preferred Alternative.

Common Elements	NHDOT’s Preferred Alternative
Moving the highway to the west	Not included; permanently maintains a barrier to river access
Lowering I-93 between Exits 14 and 15	Not included; permanently maintains a barrier to the river
Enhancing river access	Not provided; it is unclear how or if enhanced river access could be added
Opening up opportunities for recreation trails and paths both to and along the river’s edge	Not provided; it is unclear how or if such opportunities could be added
Realigning railroad tracks	Not included; limited options for re-aligning railroad tracks to expand developable land
Incorporating inviting gateways and new places of public focus—riverfront plazas and parks	Not included; insufficient public discussion on options
Placing Loudon Road over I-93 and the rail corridor	Not included; limits railroad realignment options
Building a new local street over I-93, connecting the Opportunity Corridor with the Fort Eddy Plaza	Not included; it is unclear if a new connection could be added
Building pedestrian scaled/livable development that is well integrated into downtown	Not included; draft alternative limits options
Improving the appearance of Concord from the highway	Not included
Improved east-west bicycle and pedestrian access	Insufficient improvement; limited future options
Pedestrian bridge over I-93 and the Merrimack River	Not included

TPAC also compared the Preferred Alternative with the “Summary/Classification Report, Bow-Concord Interstate 93 Transportation Planning Study.” The two options in the table below were extracted from the Opportunity Corridor Master Plan and evaluated by the NHDOT in 2008. The last column shows the NHDOT Preferred Alternative. The chart shows that the Preferred Alternative more-closely resembles ‘Option 1 Lite’ which was determined to be unreasonable in the 2008 screening process.

Project Elements	Opportunity Corridor concept, Option 1	Opportunity Corridor concept, Option 5 (Option 1 Lite)	Preferred Alternative
Six Lanes on I-93	✓	✓	✓
Westerly Shift of I-93	✓	X	X
Lower I-93 b/w Exits 13 & 15	✓	X	X
Reconfigure Exits 14 & 15	✓	✓	✓
Upgrade Exit 12	✓	✓	✓
Upgrade I-93/I-89 Interchange and Exit 1 on I-89	✓	✓	✓
Maintain Rail Corridor	✓	✓	✓
Extend Storrs Street	✓	✓	✓
Local connection over I-93	✓	✓	X
Multi-modal center	✓	X	X
Enhanced pedestrian & bicycle connections	✓	✓	TBD
Enhanced river access	✓	X	X
Finding	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Preferred Alternative similar to option previously found to be unreasonable

While it will be several years before construction begins, the NHDOT will be concluding the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process soon. When the NEPA phase is completed and a final alternative has been selected, it will be difficult to impossible to make significant changes to the design.

The I-93 Bow-Concord Project will be transformational, possibly more so than even the Main Street Complete Streets Project. The Main Street project was advanced thoughtfully and transparently, with extensive opportunities for public input. The community conversation around the Main Street project was a critical component to its success.

There have been only two public information meetings regarding the I-93 Bow-Concord Project. TPAC believes this has not enabled the level of discussion and scrutiny required for such a complex and potentially transformative project, particularly in light of how the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative inexplicably differs so drastically from options discussed in 2008.

TPAC believes the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative falls short in critical areas and that it would be a disservice to Concord residents to not take full advantage of the I-93 Bow-Concord project in achieving the expressed aspirations of the Concord community.

The NHDOT could have done—and could still do—a much better job of meeting Concord's aspirations, while at the same time making needed structural, capacity and safety improvements to I-93.

TPAC believes the City Council should be mindful of the NHDOT's schedule and suggests that Council could direct staff to complete TPAC's preliminary review of the Preferred Alternative in light of Council's previously-adopted reports. TPAC believes the City's interests should be brought back to the table before environmental review and final design preclude them.

TPAC stands ready to assist and advise Council and awaits Council's instructions.