­­Virtual public workshop

# Virtual Public Workshop Summary

# June 10, 2020

# 4:00 – 5:00 PM

## Project Team Attendees: Kristin Hadjstylianos and Todd Fontanella (Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG))

## Marcy Miller, Parker Sorenson, Nick Campbell, and Rory Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.)

## Attendees: 17

# Team Introductions and Workshop Format

Marcy Miller introduced the virtual workshop and gave a brief overview of the meeting format, describing the ways in which participants could provide feedback during the workshop. She said that the virtual workshop recording will be posted on WestCOG’s website and will be translated into Spanish and Portuguese. M. Miller introduced the Project Team, explaining that WestCOG is guiding the Study in partnership with the City of Danbury and Town of New Fairfield. Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc. (FHI) is conducting the technical analysis, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) is sponsoring the Study.

# Overview of the Study

M. Miller provided a general overview of the Study, reviewing project objectives, community engagement process, and deliverables. She explained that two virtual public workshops are planned for this week, the Existing Conditions Technical memorandum has been submitted, and three Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings will occur during the Study process. The goal of the virtual workshops is to gather feedback from the public to provide recommendations for the Study. Marcy explained that the main goal of the Study is to assess multi-modal transportation options. She emphasized that this is not simply a traffic study.

M. Miller and Parker Sorenson presented an overview of existing conditions findings. They discussed traffic counts, crash data, commuting patterns, and pedestrian and bicycle amenities. Additionally, P. Sorenson described the three distinct segments of the corridor in more detail, including the roadway geometry and pedestrian amenities on each segment. Throughout the discussion of existing conditions, questions were presented to attendees. A summary of the questions and answer discussion is presented on the following pages.

# Questions and Answers

Questions discussed during the workshop included:

1. **Are you surprised that traffic has been stagnant in the corridor?**

Most attendees were surprised and felt light traffic had been increasing and wondered if people have been finding other routes to avoid corridor construction. Additional comments included:

* + The last data point on the traffic volume slide was from 2015. Is there not more recent data to see how volume has changes in the past five years? ***Answer: Yes, CTDOT usually updates traffic counts every three years, but due to ongoing construction in the corridor, these numbers are dated.***
	+ Surprised considering many other regional planning agencies are predicting increased vehicle miles of travel (VMT) throughout the state in the next decades. Hopefully, more drivers switch to more sustainable modes of transportation.
1. **Do you agree that the LOS (or traffic delay) in the corridor is acceptable?**

In general, attendees had mixed feelings. Most attendees agreed that some level of delay was acceptable, but many commenters described long queues at unsignalized intersections and stressed that these were an issue, particularly the intersection of Barnum Road and Route 37 and the Saw Mill Road intersection. Additional comments included:

* The intersections with Golden Hill and Saw Mill Road are a concern.
* Not at Saw Mill Road. That is a problem.
* No. What about intersections without traffic signals, such as Barnum Road intersection? Very often northbound traffic is backed up due to no left turn lane.
* Some delay is acceptable. Stacy Road became a cut thru to get to North Street and I am sure impacted your numbers.
* The only ways from New Fairfield into Danbury are to take either Route 39 or 37 at some point. I try to avoid the Golden Hill area. It can back up all the way past Jeanette Street. I take Stacey Road and the back roads from there.
* Traffic along the corridor around 5 PM on most days is atrocious. I've taken a lot of variations through residential areas to bypass a lot of this. Saw Mill Road also gets very backed up at the stop sign.
1. **Do you have ideas on how to improve pedestrian safety in the corridor? Where should these be?**Attendees felt that continuous sidewalks and wider shoulders would improve the safety of the corridor for pedestrians.Specific comments included:
* Continuous sidewalks on both sides where possible, and dedicated walk cycles at traffic lights.
* Widen the shoulders.
* Make is safer for the High School students who walk to Subway, Bagel Man, and Thayer Driving School near Golden Hill Road.
* Dedicated bike lanes, particularly along the northern corridor where the road abuts the Reservoir. Also fully support a trail system.
1. **Do you support a trail around the Margerie Lake Reservoir?**

Attendees showed an overwhelming support for a trail network around the Margerie Lake Reservoir. Comments included:

* + Providing a path around the Reservoir would be great. People get very upset when you're running / riding on 37.
	+ A pathway by the Reservoir that would accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists.
	+ Continuous sidewalks on both sides where possible, and dedicated walk cycles at traffic lights.
	+ The Reservoir is bounded by sidewalks to the north and south. It makes no sense for the gap to exist. If it existed pedestrian and bike access would bloom.
	+ Yes please, a dedicated trail separate from the road is safest. Just road paint is not protective enough, need physical separation.
	+ There would be huge support for a trail system and/or a dedicated bike lane along Route 37 from the residents in New Fairfield, Danbury, and Sherman.
	+ Multi use at least on the North, East, and West.
	+ Multiuse trail would absolutely get utilized. We have a lot of amateur/recreational athletes in New Fairfield who now travel to the Brewster rail trail to train for triathlons, Ironman competitions, marathons, etc...
	+ I would love to see a walking/biking trail along the Reservoir. Right now, I drive out to Brewster to use theirs. It would need adequate parking and ways for pedestrians to safely get from the parking to the trail. I think a cross walk to across 37 at Bear Mountain would help to get people from the trail to Bear Mountain park.
	+ In informal inquiries about the trail, Department of Public Health has not expressed any objections.
	+ I would be supportive of the trail and I have heard others want it as well.
1. **Where should the trail go? Should this trail be located closer to the Reservoir or closer to Route 37?**Attendees had mixed feelings about where the trail should be located. Many believed as close to the Reservoir as possible, others stated simply whatever would be easiest to accomplish and be the safest for users. Other participants acknowledged that due to grade changes, it may be difficult to locate the trail far from Route 37. Creating linkages and loop trails around the Reservoir was also stressed as important. Comments included:
	* A trail closer to the Reservoir for recreational use would get more use than bike lanes for transportation along the corridor.
	* Honestly...whatever is easier and will get done faster. There has been talk of this trail for years and nothing has happened.
	* It should be recreational, by the Reservoir.
	* Safest location possible.
	* In some places, it would be difficult to be far from the road.
	* Closer to the Reservoir. It still will not be that far from Route 37.
	* The trail would improve the public health; Don’t ignore the other side of the Reservoir either and linkages north and south.
	* I don’t feel strongly regarding where it's located. It would be nice to see it materialize.
	* A protected trail system would be the goal. Closer to the Reservoir would be prettier, but if it is more feasible by the road, it just needs to be safe.
	* Again North, East, and South of Reservoir.
	* I am sure if the Route 7 freeway extension can get rammed through forest and water bodies in Brookfield, you can get environmental approval for one trail.
	* The trail could go roadside or on the opposite side of the Reservoir. We need linkages too!
2. **Does parking need to be included if a trail is constructed? If yes, where should it be located?**Most attendees were in favor of providing parking as park of the trail construction. There were a variety of options presented as to where parking could be accommodated. These included:
	* There is parking in the center of New Fairfield and there appears to be space at the south end of the Reservoir.
	* Room for 5-10 cars at a time would be sufficient.
	* There are several options at the northern end for parking - just need to work through them.
	* Any parking lots should be made with green materials in the least environmental impactful location.
	* In New Fairfield, parking can be in existing parking lots. Also, there is a vacant building (old hardware store space) that could be used.
	* Ideally it would include parking, otherwise people will park at Johnny's or other businesses in New Fairfield. At this time, many of those businesses are vacant. This trail/path could possibly bring back business to New Fairfield.
	* The key is to stay open minded: getting this trail built supersedes concerns!
	* Danbury side (South end of Reservoir) - I think Danbury has land there that could be used for parking.
	* The Route 37 side of the Reservoir makes more sense than the Barnum Road side. It has easier access.
	* Yes. Right now, the old Dunkin Donuts plaza is pretty empty. Could we use that lot for the New Fairfield end and then Bear Mountain for the Danbury end?
	* If done right, a parking lot could also intercept stormwater runoff going into the Reservoir.

# Other Comments and Discussion

The following comments were submitted in the Question + Answer pane:

* Narrow shoulders in the corridor are dangerous.
* Traffic seems like it has gotten so much worse.
* Concerns in general about Saw Mill Road, traffic seems to get backed up there.
* Barnum Road was not looked at because of the new signal going in there.
* Golden Hill gets backed up.
* Traffic in the corridor around 5 PM is terrible.
* How was this employment/residence data collected?***Answer: It was taken from data collected by the U.S. Census.***
* Thank you for taking the time to do this. It was very informative. I hope people keep open minds as it is clear this has nothing to do with past or present construction, which is understandably a sensitive item for those in the area. It was clear that this study was very much separate and encompassing from I-84 into New Fairfield. Thanks again.
* Concerned by lack of sidewalks in Danbury near the Condos as your photo depicts.
* The Saugatuck Trail along the reservoirs in Redding could be a reference.
* The trail can be used as a way for people to walk to downtown New Fairfield businesses.
* Please look into the storm drains that dump into the Reservoir as the trail could house pollution separators to protect the drinking water. Construction of the trail could leverage this improvement.
* Would love to see changes be more around timing of lights, trail going in, not a road widening construction project.
* What is the width of land between the Reservoir and the road? How close to the facility can you be? ***Answer: The width between the road right-of-way and the Reservoir varies throughout the length of the corridor. Typically, a multi-use path would require around 10 feet to comfortably accommodate users. These are all things that would have to be looked at in further detail.***
* Thank you - this was great and informative.

# Discussion of Stakeholder Input to Date and Next Steps

M. Miller summarized several items that the Project Team has heard to date from stakeholders in the Study Area. She said that business owners and residents are fatigued by the ongoing construction, so future recommendations should be mindful of this and should truly be needed. Additionally, congestion at peak times of the day is problematic in the corridor and has been exacerbated by the ongoing construction. Beautification of the corridor, especially around New Fairfield Center is desired. A multi-use path around the Margerie Lake Reservoir would benefit the Candlewood Valley Land Trust and residents in the area.

She closed the meeting by presenting the project’s next steps. These include drafting transportation improvement alternatives, a preliminary report and concept plan, a final report, and public presentation.