

# DANBURY AND NEW FAIRFIELD

## CORRIDOR STUDY



### TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #1

#### **TAC Meeting #1 Summary**

August 18, 2020

1:00 – 2:15 PM

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

**Khrist Hall, Shane Cosentino (Town of New Fairfield)**

**Tom Altermatt, Abdul Mohamed, Jennifer Emminger (City of Danbury)**

**Alex Dashev, HARTransit**

**Marlon Pena, Anna Bergeron (Connecticut Department of Transportation)**

**Marcy Miller, Parker Sorenson (FHI)**

#### **1. Team Introductions**

Marcy Miller (FHI) opened the meeting by introducing the Project Team, explaining that WestCOG is guiding the Study in partnership with the City of Danbury and Town of New Fairfield. FHI is conducting the technical analysis, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) is sponsoring the Study.

#### **2. Overview of the Study's Purpose and Goals**

M. Miller provided a general overview of the Study, reviewing project objectives which include reducing congestion during peak hours, improving safety at problem intersections, improving pedestrian amenities and connections, considering bicycle amenities and connections, and assessing the feasibility of a trail in proximity to the Margerie Lake Reservoir. M. Miller discussed project deliverables such as the Existing Conditions Report, virtual public workshops, Transportation Improvement Alternatives Report, and Concept Plan. She reviewed the project schedule, explaining that the project is scheduled to be completed in March, but could be completed more rapidly if all parties are in favor of a compressed timeframe.

#### **3. Overview of Existing Conditions Findings and Public Involvement**

M. Miller highlighted findings from the Existing Conditions Report. These included Route 37's role as both a regional and local travel route that serves a variety of purposes for residents and commuters. She also described the two public workshops that were conducted in June. These

meetings were held virtually and included an overview presentation about the study and a questions and answer segment. Attendees were encouraged to voice their opinions about the Route 37 corridor, describing what concerns they may have and any thoughts or ideas to improve it.

#### **4. Discussion of Potential Recommendations**

Parker Sorenson (FHI) provided an overview of sample recommendations that the Project Team has been working on since the Public Workshops. P. Sorenson explained that the Project Team heard that users of the corridor have been experiencing construction fatigue due to the ongoing construction. He said that the Project Team was aiming to be sensitive to these sentiments. Recommendations presented include potential opportunities such as reviewing signal timing at signalized intersections to ensure coordination of lights, reviewing locations for potential dedicated left turn lanes, and access management at Saw Mill Road and other locations along the corridor. Pedestrian amenities will also be recommended at key locations.

#### **5. Discussion of Potential Multi-Use Path Along Margerie Lake Reservoir**

M. Miller explained that a component of the Study is to address the feasibility of a multi-use path located in proximity to the Margerie Lake Reservoir. She explained that there is a strong desire and interest from many stakeholders to pursue creation of the path. Most stakeholders stated that the trail should be located as close to the Reservoir as possible, but acknowledge there could be challenges related to access, safety, and slopes.

#### **6. Discussion with TAC Members on Recommendations**

M. Miller opened the meeting up for discussion, asking TAC members to discuss their thoughts about the potential recommendations. Highlights from this discussion include:

- Marlon Pena (CTDOT) voiced the need for pedestrian amenities. He stated that there are gaps between destinations and this needs to be a focus of the recommendations. P. Sorenson asked how far north of the ShopRite Plaza sidewalks should be included. He explained that maintenance is a concern, but he feels that sidewalks should be included at least up to Jeanette Street. Most attendees agreed that this was a logical location for sidewalks.
- M. Miller asked about vehicular and pedestrian traffic volumes since COVID-19. Tom Altermatt (City of Danbury) said that volumes seem to still be lower than pre-COVID levels.
- M. Miller asked about locations for access management, questioning which locations need to be addressed. Abdul Mohamed (City of Danbury) said that there is a condominium driveway that is a huge residential complex that could use a signalized intersection. P. Sorenson said that he would investigate it, but he is not sure that the intersection has enough volumes to warrant signalization.
- A. Mohamed said that he would like to see the efforts focused north of the ShopRite plaza due to recent construction south of the shopping plaza. P. Sorenson explained that recommendations would be focused north of that location, and that they would be consistent with the recent construction improvements that have been completed.
- Khris Hall (Town of New Fairfield) discussed the Saw Mill Road intersection. She stated that the issues there are not as serious as those around Jeanette Street and further

south. The New Fairfield Zoning Commission is looking at a rezoning of the vacant lots around that intersection as a potential location for senior housing. She added that she does not believe that efforts there are warranted at this time. It should be noted as an issue, but the area may change in the next three or four years.

- Jennifer Emminger (Danbury Planning and Zoning) stated that access management between ShopRite and Jeanette Street is an issue. Danbury supports reducing wide curb cuts, adding pedestrian amenities, and improving sight lines. She suggested that the Study include guidelines for these types of improvements when redevelopment occurs.
- M. Pena stated that CTDOT would like to see consolidation of driveways where possible, as it would improve pedestrian safety.

## **7. Discussion with TAC Members Regarding the Trail**

M. Miller asked TAC to share their thoughts regarding the multi-use trail. For example, does each person or group support the construction in a particular location? Highlights from this discussion include:

- A. Mohamed stated that Danbury is interested in a practical trail that would be feasible for environmental and health issues. He suggested that he thinks that the City of Danbury would prefer that the trail be closer to the street and away from the drinking water supply.
- K. Hall cited aesthetics and safety as important factor. She added that the further from the road the trail is located, the better. She acknowledged that they do not want to damage the drinking water supply. The three issues need to be balanced. She asked if the Study team will look at suggestions for stormwater runoff. M. Miller said that there could be benefits to runoff if grade changes are made, but the trail would not be necessarily focused on that issue.
- M. Miller asked the group who they envision using the trail. Shane Cosentino (Land Trust) said that recreational users will be using the trail, and the trail should be as far from Route 37 as possible. From a maintenance standpoint, the trail should be at least eight feet wide. M. Pena said that if the trail could connect people to jobs and other parts of the network, and is not just recreational trail, it might be easier to obtain funding.
- K. Hall stated that there are many areas of Route 37 in New Fairfield where traffic needs to be slowed down such as near the Senior Center, Saw Mill Road, and between Jeanette Street and Golden Hill Road.
- P. Sorenson said that, based on what he is hearing, the locations for potential recommendations include between Saw Mill Road and the Senior Center, between Jeanette Street and Golden Hill Road, and near the ShopRite Plaza.
- M. Miller said she will talk with FHI's environmental permitting expert about permits required for the trail.
- A. Mohamed asked K. Hall whether New Fairfield is interested in having the trail connect to Bear Mountain. K. Hall said yes.

## **8. Next Steps**

M. Miller said that the Existing Conditions Report is available on the project website and that WestCOG can provide the link to the group, if needed. The Project Team will come back to the TAC in two months to present recommendations in further detail.