

NORWALK RT 1 CORRIDOR MASTER PLAN STUDY

Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting 1

April 4, 2024

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Yankee Doodle Garage

Attendees

- City of Norwalk Transportation, Mobility, and Parking: Jim Travers, Garrett Bolella, Kyle Benjamin
- City of Norwalk Planning & Zoning: Bryan Baker
- City of Norwalk Parking: Bryan Lutz
- Norwalk Transit District (NTD): Matt Pentz
- CTDOT Planning: Josh Lecar, Matt Tyksinski
- CTDOT Project Development Unit: Shraddha Joshi, Andrew Correia
- CTDOT Strategic Planning: Heba Naqvi
- CTDOT Traffic Operations: Fred Kulakowski, Ethan Donecker
- WestCOG: Nicole Sullivan, Kristin Floberg
- FHI Studio: Mike Morehouse, Michael Ahillen, Hannah Brockhaus

Meeting Summary

Nicole Sullivan and Kristin Floberg from the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) opened the meeting, thanking the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) for their attendance. Michael Ahillen (FHI Studio) introduced the members of the consultant team and began the presentation. The agenda included the following topics.

- Study Area Overview
- Planning Context
- Approach
- Goals and Vision

For further detail on the material shared, refer to the presentation. This document summarizes the discussion.

Study Area Understanding Discussion

- Jim Travers (Norwalk) provided additional context on crashes in the study area, highlighting that the on-ramp at Scribner Ave, as well as the off-ramp of Exit 14 is a high crash location. He and Garrett Bolella (Norwalk) noted that the on-ramp/Scribner Ave area is the highest crash area in the city.
 - They highlighted the City's efforts to gather a comprehensive crash repository, which incorporates data from Streetlight and normalizes for vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

The City uses the UConn crash data repository and is filtered against the police data.

The team will follow up with Kyle Benjamin (Norwalk) to incorporate this data source.

- G. Bolella described the corridor as auto-centric, defined over time through sporadic site improvements and lacking a cohesive plan. J. Travers agreed with this characterization, citing the turning lanes throughout the corridor as a key example of this. He highlighted issues of accessibility and aesthetics, and the need for consistent development standards.
- Bryan Baker (Norwalk) described the thinking behind the zoning changes for the study area, notably bringing buildings closer to the street to create a more pedestrian- (and transit-) friendly environments. Additionally, he noted that the eastern portion of the study area near Norwalk Hospital now has a commercial allowance to enhance its vibrancy similar to the Yale Hospital/New Haven area; minimum parking requirements have been significantly reduced.
- Matt Pentz (NTD) noted a big need for transit amenities, specifically positioning of existing shelters, improved signage including schedule displays, and the need for more shelters. He was not sure of transit reliability metrics for the corridor.
- PAC members were asked to suggest adjectives which could be applied to the corridor today. Responses included: “Welcoming” (lack thereof) and “Stimulating” to the point of distracting. It was noted that wayfinding is a challenge for those less familiar with the area, which is backed up in a higher speed differential between slow drivers looking for a specific business, versus regional commuters traveling the corridor. It was noted that there is not a standard system for signage.
- M. Pentz noted that the NTD is considering options for coordinating vehicle staging at commercial locations along the corridor.
- Josh Lecar (CTDOT) noted that the corridor is a barrier between neighborhoods and a long-term goal for the study should be the replacement of some vehicle trips with walking trips.
- The PAC was asked about the corridor's current users. Responses included:
 - The corridor is how non-residents perceive Norwalk, which is generally negative and not a representation of the city as a whole.
 - The corridor does not serve non-vehicular users well. However, there are three subgroups of car users on the corridor: those accessing the highway for jobs; those traveling along Route 1 for businesses; and local traffic using Route 1 as a cut-through.
 - The corridor is a diversion route.
 - The corridor is known as an area of significant congestion, and people discuss avoiding it for this reason.
- PAC members were asked about their vision for the future of the corridor. Ideas included:
 - Implementation of better access management strategies to discourage short trips and improve traffic flow
 - Long-term planning to transform the corridor into a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use area, emphasizing diversity in development and retail offerings. In the interim, creating centers of pedestrian activity
- The project team asked about stages of review for CTDOT. It was noted that traffic-related designs (e.g., roundabouts) require a higher level of scrutiny than something like curb extensions. Mike Morehouse (FHI Studio) noted that the team will need to balance idea generation and vetting with the public, against a higher level of scrutiny by the time the team

suggests that this is viable. It was noted that the full corridor concept will only be done at the conclusion of the study, but iterations of key features may be considered. This will come at the third PAC meeting.

Vision and Goals

- How should we define success for the corridor master plan study?
 - N. Sullivan stressed the importance of practical, recommendations which can be implemented through grants.
 - J. Travers emphasized an inclusive process, which should excite people. He emphasized meaningful improvements and not just delivering low hanging fruit that won't make a difference.
 - J. Lecar advocated for increased investment in alternative transportation and infrastructure to promote pedestrian and bike use. He noted that infrastructure and economic development efforts will need to work in tandem toward these goals. He also suggested incorporation of the diversity of Norwalk into the recommendations.
 - M. Morehouse suggested application of the new CTDOT complete streets directive.
- The PAC members suggested edits to the draft vision statement. Highlights of potential edits included:
 - Partnership between residents and businesses
 - Creation of a place, not just a transportation corridor
 - Identification of improvements that will benefit all users
 - Reducing the psychological and physical barrier that the corridor creates
- The PAC members discussed the draft goals. Highlights of potential edits included cautioning the emphasis cost-effectiveness of solutions, and instead focusing on impactful solutions whether they are short or long-term.