

BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE REPORT

SUBJECT: Monthly SHPO-FHWA-ACOE-NHDOT Cultural Resources Meeting

DATE OF CONFERENCES: January 12, 2023

LOCATION OF CONFERENCE: Zoom Meeting

ATTENDED BY:

NHDOT

Margarete Baldwin

Sheila Charles

Meli Dube

Jill Edelmann

Jon Evans

Jon Hebert

Marc Laurin

Michael Mozer

Corey Spetelunas

Think Tran

NHDHR/NHDNCR

Laura Black

David Trubey

FHWA

Jamie Sikora

Consulting

Party/Abutter

Peter Carter

NH Rail Trail

Coalition

David Topham

PROJECTS/PRESENTATIONS REVIEWED THIS MONTH:

(minutes on subsequent pages)

Jefferson-Randolph 13602C, X-A004(489), RPR# 112571

January 12, 2023

Jefferson-Randolph 13602C, X-A004(489), RPR# 11257

Participants: Margarete Baldwin, Jon Hebert, Marc Laurin, Michael Mozer, Think Tran, Corey Spetelunas, NHDOT; Christine Perron, MJ; Peter Carter, Consulting Party

Jon Hebert provided an overview of the project, which is located on US Route 2, beginning just east of Black Velvet Road and ending just west of Valley Road, a distance of approximately 2.5 miles. About a mile of the project area bisects the Jefferson Highlands Historic District. The purpose of the project is to improve safety and connectivity for the section of US Route 2 between NH Route 115 and Gorham, which is a National Highway System route and designated as both a critical freight route and bicycle route. The project is needed because of the narrow roadway with narrow shoulders, deficient geometry, and poor roadway condition. Improvements to the corridor would benefit all users. A corridor study was completed in 2001, which identified the need to improve the roadway alignment and access management and provide consistent shoulder widths and bicycle accommodations.

This project is the second phase of the 5.1-mile 13602 corridor project that was developed following the Corridor Study. Phase 1 of the project (13602A) has been constructed. An Individual Categorical Exclusion (CE) and Section 4(f) Evaluation was completed for the entire project in 2007.

Existing conditions were reviewed. The posted speed limit is 50 mph. Traffic volumes are at 4,700 average annual daily traffic (AADT) with 11% trucks. The existing shoulders are narrow and

inconsistent in width. The existing horizontal and vertical roadway geometry is inadequate, leading to poor sight distance and vehicular crashes.

The existing roadway typical consists of two 12' travel lanes and two 1' shoulders. The proposed roadway typically would consist of two 11' travel lanes with two 5' shoulders and a standard 7-foot offset for ditch lines in cut sections along the project corridor, outside the historic district limits. To mitigate impacts within the Historic District, the typical roadway will remain at 11' with 5' shoulders, as noted above, but will incorporate curbing and grass panels. This will allow us to significantly reduce impacts, as the drainage is moved to the curb line and out of the ditch line and we can vary the width of the panel, as necessary.

The Department's new bike/ped policy recommends a minimum shoulder width of 5' along curb or guardrail. The proposed 5' shoulder width through the project area is especially important with high truck traffic and is not as wide as what would typically be recommended for this roadway type and traffic volumes.

The project will require the acquisition of additional controlled access right-of-way (CAROW), resulting in strip takes of approximately 5 to 7 feet along property frontages.

Peter Carter asked for clarification on the strip takes and how the stone walls along the roadway would be addressed. J. Hebert explained that stone walls would be relocated/reconstructed as needed to accommodate the wider roadway and wider ROW. P. Carter expressed concern, noting that moving the road closer to his property would result in too much noise, destroy trees, take out the tennis court, and give less protection from the road. His preference was to expand the roadway footprint to the south, away from his property. He also expressed concern with the proposed 5' shoulder width and didn't agree that a shoulder that wide was necessary. J. Hebert reiterated that the proposed shoulders are needed for safety. The stonewalls are currently in the roadway clear zone and would just be relocated back 5 or 10 feet. The tennis court would not be impacted.

P. Carter stated that the speed limit through the district should be reduced, and that more effort should be made to introduce calming measures to slow people down. J. Hebert replied that the reduced lane width and curbing are considered calming measures. Corey Spetelunas noted that lowering the posted speed limit was considered and a decision was made to keep the existing speed limit and revisit the need for lowering it after construction to see if a change was warranted. P. Carter reiterated that he would like to see the speed limit lowered now, especially to slow trucks down. He asked if there are restrictions within the district that need to be taken into account to minimize impacts from traffic.

J. Hebert noted that the Department is striving to minimize impacts and that was why the narrower typical roadway was proposed through the district.

Jamie Sikora noted that the recommended shoulder width for this roadway would typically be 10' wide, so the proposed 5' shoulders are minimizing impacts to the district.

Laura Black noted that a wider, more open roadway could lead to faster speeds, and she asked if other types of traffic calming measures have been looked at, such as bump outs, tree canopy, or

speed tables. J. Hebert replied that traffic calming measures are generally more effective in an urban setting. In a rural setting such as this project, these measures are more difficult to implement. Most calming tools are meant for slower speeds, like 30 mph, to allow for adequate reaction time. That is not realistic in this rural setting on a major roadway. The Department is always looking at ways to minimize speeds so that drivers don't go over posted speed limits. Jon Evans also noted that a lot of traffic calming measures would require additional ROW and there are also winter maintenance considerations. J. Sikora noted that bump outs are usually used in combination with sidewalks, which don't exist in the project area. L. Black agreed that bump outs wouldn't be appropriate for this project but wondered if other measures could be implemented such as plantings.

J. Hebert noted that the MOA from the 2007 consultation included an 11-4 typical. Christine Perron added that during the original Section 106 consultation, there was agreement that the narrower typical, the use of curbing, and retaining the stonewalls were all considered traffic calming measures through the historic district.

Dave Topham commented that traffic calming is a major concern, and the lines on the road do tend to slow speeds even with wider shoulders. He also noted that variable shoulder width is undesirable. He asked if a 4' shoulder would be acceptable since it would be open at the other side. J. Hebert responded that an 11-4 typical could be acceptable without curbing or guardrail. However, removing the curbing from this segment of the project would require additional impacts. C. Spetelunas clarified that the curbing helps with drainage, eliminating the need for a ditchline. Without curbing, slope work would need to be extended to create a ditchline and property owners would then have a ditch along their frontage. J. Hebert commented that the design team would continue to look at ways to minimize impacts in this area.

P. Carter asked why the roadway could not be expanded to the south instead of toward his property where large trees and stone walls would be impacted. Jill Edelmann noted that the property to the south contributes to the district but is not individually eligible.

P. Carter noted that Carter Spring has people stopping all the time, which is a safety issue. The speed limits should be dropped to 35 mph through the whole district. C. Spetelunas said that speed limit reduction would be challenging with traffic coming down the hill and would not be realistically met without constant enforcement. After discussions with the NHDOT Bureau of Traffic, the decision was made to do a speed limits study after construction once the proposed roadway geometry is in place.

Additional improvements to the corridor were reviewed. Stormwater treatment BMPs are proposed along the project to meet Alteration of Terrain requirements. The Carter Spring pull-out, which has a crash history, would be widened slightly and the roadway at this located would also be slightly wider to improve sight distance. Two culvert replacements would require temporary traffic detours to one side to maintain traffic during construction. Drainage easements would be secured at all culverts. Overall, the impacts currently shown through the historic district represent the worst case scenario.

P. Carter commented that at one time his cousin proposed moving US Route 2 down to Valley Road, and offered to give some land for this purpose. Is this still a possible alternative? J. Hebert noted that it was considered during the alternatives analysis but not chosen as the preferred alternative.

Five public meetings have been held for this project between 2005 and 2022, with the most recent one being the October 6, 2022, Public Informational Meeting to discuss the updated design and improvements.

The National Eligible properties along the project were summarized, consisting of the Jefferson Highlands Historic District and four individually eligible properties. Archaeological surveys have been completed for the project, including a Phase IB survey completed at the garden area in December 2022. No further investigations are recommended. Twelve stonewalls in the project area are eligible for reconstruction. There will be no impacts to the stone retaining walls at Carter Spring and the Golden Terrace. One stone wall located at a proposed maintenance turnaround on Town of Jefferson property will not be rebuilt. J. Hebert noted that other stone walls that are impacted could be reconstructed if property owners are agreeable.

P. Carter asked if the Department would be willing to provide vegetation as a buffer. J. Hebert responded that this would be possible. J. Evans noted that plantings would provide a visual buffer but wouldn't provide any noise reduction. P. Carter asked how much of his front lawn would be destroyed. J. Hebert replied that a width of approximately 10' would be impacted; trees would need to be cut in this area, but the area would remain grassed following construction. P. Carter noted that the trees to be cut are 70 to 80 feet in height. Removing them would change the whole look of the property. He expressed again that his preference was for the roadway to be expanded to the south to avoid his trees. The trees to the south are not as important to retain. J. Hebert responded that the design team would continue to look at ways to minimize impacts, but he wasn't sure if the trees could be avoided.

The next steps for the project were reviewed. The NEPA Reevaluation would be completed this summer. Another ROW public hearing would be held, likely in the fall. Following the public hearing, final design, permitting, and the ROW process would progress through 2025. The project would be advertised for bids in 2025, with construction taking place 2025-2027.