Meeting Notes

Public Informational Meeting

Project/File:	Portsmouth - US Route 1 Improvements
Date/Time:	July 24, 2024 / 6:00 PM
Location:	Community Campus
Next Meeting:	To be determined
Attendees:	David Smith, PE – NHDOT
	Curtis Morrill, PE – NHDOT
	Meli Dube – NHDOT
	David McNamara, PE – Stantec
	Tracey Tufts, PE – Stantec
	Tyler Gagnon, PE – Stantec
	(See Attached Sign-in Sheet)
Absentees:	N/A
Distribution:	Posted on project website

A Public Informational Meeting was held at Community Campus off Campus Drive in Portsmouth, NH on July 24, 2024, to discuss the Portsmouth US Route 1 project. The project intends to improve an approximately 1.8 mile stretch of US Route 1 in Portsmouth from Ocean Road to Wilson Road. The purpose of the meeting was to present the status of the project, inform the public of the history and ongoing design process, provide a recommended layout, and solicit public input on all major design features. The goal was to gain a consensus on which alternatives the design team should progress further.

General discussion, concerns, and questions are summarized below:

Presentation:

- David Smith began the meeting with a brief introduction and a summary of what the expectations of the meeting were. He discussed the project's design status and ongoing public engagement with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC). He then explained the project's purpose and need and that the design team would be presenting a 'Recommended Alternative' in hopes to gain public input and consensus.

- David McNamara continued the presentation with a quick discussion on the project's history and some insight on the existing corridor data, including the roadway layout, location, daily traffic, and accident history.

- D. McNamara moved on to the design portion of the presentation, starting with the roadway design concepts.

- Alternative 1 is based on 1984 & 1989 corridor studies and includes 2-lanes of traffic in each direction along with a raised center median and left-turn pockets.

- Alternative 2 includes 2-lanes of traffic in each direction along with a two-way left-turn lane along the center of the roadway

- Alternative 3 is considered a 'minimal build' with targeted improvements corridor wide. This would also include hybrid roundabouts at the White Cedar Boulevard and Springbrook Circle intersections.

- Alternative 3A is very similar to Alternative 3 but removes the roundabouts and includes signalized intersections for the White Cedar Boulevard and Springbrook Circle intersections.

- D. McNamara presented Alternative 3 as the recommended roadway layout keying in on minimizing right-of-way impacts, context sensitive improvements, and the positive impacts of roundabouts.

Discussion:

- An attendee asked for clarification on the where the second southbound lane is added in the existing condition and if the recommended alternative would impact this location.

  - D. McNamara stated that the second southbound lane is added adjacent the Water Country access point to US Route 1. He stated that the recommended alternative currently shows the second southbound lane being added in approximately the same location.

- An attendee asked if the recommended alternative shows a second southbound lane continuing through the Walmart intersection to the southern project limit at Ocean Road.

  - D. McNamara confirmed that is how it is currently shown and weighed the pros/cons to adding a consistent 2-lane section through this portion of the roadway versus dropping the second lane between the Heritage Avenue and Ocean Road intersections. A second through lane would be in place at each intersection. Dropping the second lane between them would create a merge and diverge situation for drivers traveling south through that section. As an improvement goal, the proposed project design has been developed to eliminate these lane add/drops, thereby eliminating conflict points while enhancing safety.

- D. McNamara discussed the safety concerns with left-turn movements at the intersection of Constitution Ave and US Route 1 and how the raised center median in the recommended alternative along this portion of the roadway would alleviate the issues. The roundabout at the White Cedar Blvd. intersection would allow for vehicles to readily reverse direction and travel north with a right-in/right-out only at Constitution Ave with the recommended layout. This led to a question about how the design team would propose improving the safety of that intersection in Alternative 3A, where there is currently no proposed raised center median. The attendee also asked if a median would be constructed between the intersections if signalized and allow for U-Turns.

  - D. McNamara stated that Constitution could be reconfigured to direct traffic to turn right only and constructing a 'pork-chop' island to prevent the left-turn movement. There is a similar configuration at Campus Drive, which has limited effectiveness, as many drivers choose to turn left, despite the signage and directional island. He also stated that a raised median could be added to prevent the left turn out with allowed U-turns at the two signals, but this

would also eliminate the left-turn in from US Route 1. Limiting that access to Constitution Ave. will likely lead to vehicles bypassing US Route 1 in favor of local roads, such as Banfield as a work around.

- An attendee asked if the roundabouts in the recommended alternative are shown as single-lane or multi-lane.
    - D. McNamara stated that the current proposed roundabouts are shown as 'hybrid', meaning the US 1 (north and south) movements through the roundabouts are multi-lane and the sideroad movements are single-lane.
- A resident of Portsmouth asked if there had been any consideration to adding a signal to either the Hoover Drive or Campus Drive intersections with US Route 1. He also stated that the existing island that is supposed to limit drivers from turning left off Campus Drive does not work and that he sees vehicles make the movement effortlessly.
    - D. McNamara noted that the intersections were reviewed for potential signals, but they do not meet signal warrants, which are required for the installation of a new traffic signal. These warrants are based on a series of factors related to traffic volumes and movements in the intersection.
- A resident along Lafayette Road questioned why the design team went into detail on the roadway alternatives even though they all have similar impacts to private properties. He then stated that the majority of property impacts will be caused by the bicycle and pedestrian options. He asked if there was a need for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on both sides of the roadway in the residential areas and stated that he believes no one will use it along that segment of roadway.
    - D. McNamara stated that there is a significant difference in roadway width between Alternatives 1 & 2 when compared to Alternative 3. Specifically, in the residential portion of the corridor, where the recommended roadway layout will mostly match the existing layout. Alternates 1 and 2 are over 20' wider than Alternative 3 in this location. He then stated that the bicycle and pedestrian options would be discussed later in the presentation.
- A member of the PAC questioned the right-turn lane along the south bound side of US Route 1 entering "Atlantic Orthopedics & Sports Medicine" and the right-turn lane along the north bound side of US Route 1 onto McKinley Road. He stated that he believes they are unneeded and do not currently exist. He also stated that taking turning vehicles out of the through lane of traffic allows for traffic to speed up along the corridor.
    - D. McNamara stated that a right-turn accommodation along US Route 1 entering "Atlantic Orthopedics & Sports Medicine" does exist and the recommended alternative formalizes the existing permitted layout, with updated pavement markings. He also stated that the traffic data for McKinley Road supports the addition of a right-turn pocket.
- An attendee asked the design team how a pedestrian would cross the roundabouts in the recommended alternative. She stated that many residents along the communities to the southeast cross the intersections to shop.
    - There are a number of treatments than can be used to assist pedestrians when crossing roundabouts. One of the features of a roundabout is that pedestrians only need to cross one

direction of travel at a time. Vehicles are required to yield for pedestrians in crosswalks. Vehicles entering the roundabout will have space downstream of the crosswalk to enter the roundabout, so they do not have to be looking for pedestrians while merging into roundabout traffic. Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons is a treatment that is used, often if crosswalks must cross more than one lane of traffic. For these, they will turn red, requiring vehicles to stop, as if at a traditional traffic signal. These are in place the roundabout at Route 4 and Dover Point Road. Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) can also be used. These alert drivers to the presence of a pedestrian and enhance the visibility of the crosswalk.

- A resident of the corridor asked about the existing roadway width and stated that it seems like each of the roadway alternatives would cause widening along the length of the project.
    - D. McNamara stated that the existing roadway varies anywhere from 35-FT to around 70-FT. He stated that the recommended corridor shows the roadway layout matching the existing conditions with the exception of a second southbound lane along the southern portion of the corridor and at select intersections where additional lanes are recommended.

Presentation:

- D. McNamara continued the presentation with the bicycle and pedestrian design options
    - Option 1 is based on the 1984 & 1989 corridor studies and consists of a 5-FT shoulder/bike lane, a 5.5-FT sidewalk, and a 6-FT utility/signage panel.
    - Option 2 consists of a 5-FT shoulder, 6-FT utility/signage panel, a 5-FT side path (one-way), a 0.5-FT buffer, and a 5-FT sidewalk.
    - Option 3 consists of a 3-FT buffer, 6-FT bike lane, 6-FT utility/signage panel, and 5-FT sidewalk.
- D. McNamara presented Option 2 as the recommended option based on discussions with City staff and PAC, safety advantages, and broad range of users. He also introduced the Two-Stage Turn Queue Box for bicycle crossings at signalized intersections and a new pedestrian crossing at Campus Drive utilizing a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon.
- D. McNamara concluded the presentation with discussions on stormwater management, the existing transit route, the NEPA process, including cultural & natural resources, survey re-establishment efforts, the anticipated project schedule, and projects costs and funding.
- D. Smith made a few closing comments and opened the meeting to discussion.

Discussion:

- A City councilor stated that they do not often receive input from residents and abutters on projects but are available and eager to assist. They will be encouraging stakeholders to participate in the survey.
- The Head of the Rockingham Planning Commission stated that it would be useful to get a group of volunteer residents to attend the upcoming 10-year plan hearing. Having input from direct abutters can help with securing the necessary funding.

- A member of the PAC stated that they are against any in-road bicycle accommodations and appreciated the design team showing the bike path behind curb and set back from the roadway as part of the recommended alternative.

- An attendee asked Dave S. to describe in more detail the 10-year plan funding process for those who may not be as familiar with it.

    - Dave described the 2-year process that starts with local agencies and groups working with their regional planning commissions to get projects proposed for the 10-year plan. There are series of hearings and public meetings around the state that further prioritize and refine the listing of projects and their budgets. Ultimately, a draft plan is voted on by the legislature and signed by the Governor. The next two-year cycle begins shortly after the plan is adopted. The current draft plan, which is expected to be signed in the near future covers the years 2025-2034. The next plan process will begin this fall.

    - B. Lyons made an additional comment stating that this project supports the City's "Climate Action Plan" for reduced idling, another benefit resulting from the roundabout alternatives. He also stated that creating connectivity along the corridor for pedestrians and bicycle users also supports the City's 'Affordable Housing Initiative".

- D. Smith stated that the project is 80% federally funded and 20% state funded.

- An attendee stated that she had lived in four states and when she lived in New Jersey, new roundabout designs were banned. She questioned where the design team came up with the safety information and traffic data used when presenting the roundabout alternatives. She reiterated her previous point that many residents along Springbrook Circle using the existing crossing and the roundabout alternatives would take away their ability to safely do so. She stated she has never seen traffic lights at a roundabout and doubts drivers would follow their instruction, or would cause traffic queueing worse than a traditional traffic signal.

    - D. McNamara noted it is likely that the state of New Jersey stopped installing traffic circles, not roundabouts. Those are more like the Portsmouth traffic circle. Roundabouts encourage slower speeds and are safer and more efficient than traffic circles. The safety data on roundabouts is well established. There are references in the presentation as well as on NHDOT's website with references to the data.

- An attendee asked if the design team had considered pedestrian bridges for users crossing US Route 1 at Springbrook Circle.

    - D. Smith stated that pedestrian bridges have not been considered based on restrictive costs.

- A resident along Lafayette Road reiterated his previous point that the roadway alternatives have no impact on private properties. He believes that the design team did not consider the property owners when laying out the bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. He asked why the sidewalk/sidepath could not narrow along the residential properties or if the sidewalk accommodations are required along both sides of the roadway.

    - D. McNamara pointed out that the recommended alternative complies with the City's Complete Street Guidelines. He also reiterated that although there would be more right-of-way impacts, the recommended alternative is the safest option and allows for the broadest

range of users. He also stated that the PAC expressed the desire to have one-way sidepath for bicycle traffic; removing the accommodations along one side of the roadway would remove the ability to have one-way traffic along the remaining side path.

- D. Smith reiterated that the recommended alternative was fully supported by the PAC.

- A resident of Coolidge Drive stated that he is in support of the recommended bike/ped option. He noted that resident in the neighborhoods along the east side of US Route 1 often feel trapped there because bike/ped. accommodations do not currently exist along the corridor. He also stated that he has an open mind when considering roundabouts based on the success of the roundabout at Foye's Corner in Rye, NH.

- An attendee asked if the design team could provide an example of a roundabout along a similar corridor with similar traffic flows. She also asked what the next steps are for the design process; what does the design team do with the input they receive at the meeting and from the survey.

    - D. Smith used a roundabout in North Concord (Route 4 & Hoit Road) as an example and stated he could post videos of the roundabout on the project's website. He also stated that the goal of this meeting is to solicit input and hopefully begin to come to a consensus on which alternative to progress forward. He suspects that there will be a second Public Informational Meeting for this project.

- A resident of Elwyn Park asked why a 2-lane section southbound has not been considered between Water Country and the northern project limit. He stated that the recommended alternative shows a 2-lane section along the southern portion of the project to minimize merging; he asks why that was not a priority along the northern portion of the project. He also stated that sometimes the southbound traffic backs up from Water Country all the way to the Wilson Road intersection.

    - D. McNamara stated that the design team has discussed extending the limits of the 2-lane southbound section north of the Water Country drive. He also stated that the traffic data does not warrant a 2-lane section all the way to the northern limit of the project. He also stated that an additional lane would significantly impact properties along the southbound side of the roadway, specifically the commercial properties just south of Campus Drive.

    - The same resident also stated that he is against roundabouts anywhere along US Route 1 because it would cause significant delays for traffic entering from side roads.

    - D. McNamara stated that roundabouts will process traffic more efficiently when compared to signals and the delays for the side roads would be significantly less than left-turn movements at a signalized intersection.

- A resident along Lafayette Road stated that she is in favor of the roundabouts as it provides more opportunities for 'green space'.

- An attendee stated that Water Country causes severe traffic issues to all surrounding areas during the summer months. She stated that they are 'bad neighbors' and do not respect the local residents. She hopes that the design team will have the ability to enforce the exiting traffic to use Constitution Ave leading them to Banfield Road and then to Peverly Hill Road and utilize the signalized intersection. She stated that many vehicles that leave the property attempt the make left-turns from

Constitution Ave onto US Route 1. She also noted that Water Country does not have a permitted access point to US Route 1.

  - D. Smith noted that he can check on the drive permit for Water Country. The State controls access to US Route 1, and the City access to the side roads such as Constitution Ave. The State will continue to work with both the City and Water Country on any potential improvements to the traffic flow into and out of Water Country.

  - Eric Eby (City of Portsmouth) stated that he best alternative would be to push all exiting traffic to Constitution Avenue and not allow traffic to turn left onto US Route 1.

- A resident stated that people often blow through red lights along this corridor and that he believes any local user would agree that they see this occur daily. He believes that roundabouts would remove driver's frustrations of hitting many consecutive red lights, leading to a safer, more constant flow of traffic. He also stated the preference would be single lane roundabouts with a single lane in each direction between them.

- A PAC member stated that he is against the addition of a second southbound lane along the southern portion of the project. He believes it will make left-turns along this portion of the corridor more dangerous. He also asked the design team to specify the safety improvement this project will bring to the corridor.

  - D. McNamara stated the main safety improvements as part of the recommended alternative are the additions of the roundabouts and the separated bike and pedestrian accommodations. A raised median would enhance safety, minimizing left turns, but the feedback is that is too large an impact for property access along the corridor. Minimizing the merge and diverge lane drops and adds through the intersections will also improve safety by removing the situations of vehicles jockeying for position. The second southbound lane has trade-offs. A single lane is safer than the two lanes, but dropping the lane and adding it again at Ocean will create another merge/diverge situation. The design team will consider both aspects in moving the design forward.

- A resident along Springbrook Circle asked if the design team could update the simulation to include the hybrid layout shown in the presentation along with pedestrians using the crossings. She also asked if the design team could post examples or videoing of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) being using at a crossing within a roundabout.

  - D. Smith stated that the video examples from the Concord, NH roundabout he previously mentioned does not include pedestrians utilizing the crosswalks.

  - D. McNamara stated that there a is a recently constructed roundabout in Rochester, NH that includes RRFBs and could be posted on the project website.

- A resident of Lafayette Road stated that she is 'super hopeful and optimistic' about this project and the effects it will have on the community. She stated she was very thankful for the possibility of sidewalks and side paths along both sides of the roadway.

- An attendee told a story about how he previously was not a fan of roundabouts until he visited a town in another state that included a series of five consecutive roundabout intersections. He stated that he

used the roundabouts daily for a week as both a driver and pedestrian and was sold on how well they can work once a community becomes comfortable with using them.

- Another resident asked if there was any plan to change the posted speed limit along US Route 1. Stating that scooters have a maximum speed of 35 MPH and would not be able to use the road if the posted limit were to increase.
    - D. Smith stated that the speed limit will not change as a result of this project.
- An attendee asked who would be required to maintain the proposed roundabouts and sidewalks along the length of the corridor. She also asked if the design team has considered landscaping opportunities, specifically tree plantings along the bike/ped accommodations that would provide shade.
    - D. Smtih confirmed with E. Eby that the city would maintain the sidewalks and the state would maintain the roadway, including the roundabouts. He also stated that the design team has not considered landscaping yet but also stated that the utility and signage panel would be used as described and would not want to plant conflicting trees in those areas.
- An attendee asked if roundabouts are being considered at any other intersections along US Route 1. He also asked if the NHDOT has made roundabouts their primary choice when reconstructing intersections, statewide.
    - D. Smith noted that he is not aware of any other currently planned improvements along US Route 1 to the south of the project area. Statewide, roundabouts are always considered as part of intersection reconstruction projects. However, they are not always advanced, as there are situations where they are not the best fit. He had a recent project along US Route 3 with roundabouts considered at two intersections, however one intersection was a poor fit, and it was decided to maintain signals at both locations.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30.

The foregoing is considered to be a true and accurate record of all items discussed. If any discrepancies or inconsistencies are noted, please contact the writer immediately.

Thank you,

STANTEC CONSULTING SERVICES INC.

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Attachment: [Attachment]