

Date Finalized: April 22, 2024

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BUREAU OF HIGHWAY DESIGN**

CONFERENCE REPORT

PROJECT: WINDHAM 40663
NH Route 111 Corridor Study

DATE OF CONFERENCE: March 14, 2024

LOCATION OF CONFERENCE: AJ Letizio Enterprise Center, Windham, NH

ATTENDED BY:

NHDOT

Wendy Johnson
Curtis Morrill
Jon Hebert

TYLin

Tom Errico
David Burhans

Town of Windham

Gary Garfield
Alex Mello
Mark Samsel
Dale Valvo
Chief Thomas McPherson
Brad Dinsmore
Jacob Cross
Wayne Morris
Dave Curto
Al Letizio, Jr.
Matthew Swoboda (remote)

Morris Communications

Carol Morris

SNHPC

David Tilton
Sylvia von Aulock

SUBJECT: Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting #2

NOTES ON CONFERENCE:

Note: This conference report is best viewed together with the meeting's PowerPoint presentation, attached.

The meeting agenda was distributed prior to the meeting. The following items were discussed during the meeting.

- Community Survey Summary
- Purpose and Need Review
- Existing Conditions Summary
- Potential Alternatives: General Discussion
- Public Meeting
- Next Steps

The meeting began at 4:05 pm with introductions. W. Johnson thanked those who worked to disseminate the surveys at the voter pole in January.

Community Survey Summary

C. Morris presented an overview of the Community Survey, noting that the survey was available to the public from January 22, 2024 through February 19, 2024, in both an online and a paper version. In general, the survey garnered a very high response rate, with 859 online respondents and 21 paper copies submitted. Most respondents - 97% - live in Windham, providing a detailed set of viewpoints directly from residents. Over three-quarters of respondents use NH Route 111 one or more times a day.

C. Morris noted that this gives the study team a good perspective on what residents want to achieve in the corridor improvements.

- Traffic congestion, lack of traffic light synchronization, and lack of sufficient lanes were at the top of the concerns.
- Difficulty getting to businesses and lack of bike lanes and paths were seen as a problem as well, but by a smaller group of individuals.
- Widening the road and adding easier and safer connections for business access were the top two types of improvements people would like to see.
- Traffic was widely perceived to be the worst on weekday evenings.

Two questions gauging the importance of rural character in the corridor showed that almost half of respondents felt rural character is important, but it needed to be balanced with traffic congestion management. Of the remainder, equal numbers felt that 1) there is no rural character or 2) improving congestion is more important. A smaller remaining number of respondents wanted to preserve rural character at all costs.

In a related question, slightly over one-third reiterated that there is no rural character; others wanted to enhance rural character by adding village-style lighting, sidewalks, or a tree-lined median.

- The PAC discussed the need to balance New England character with easing congestion, and the role that trees could potentially play, both visually and in terms of traffic-calming.
- It was noted that the Town has had past problems with ongoing tree maintenance.

- J. Cross noted that the zoning rules for Windham on NH Route 28 requires trees, although these have had limited success based on size and tree health.
- It was noted by A. Letizio that things similar to those used in Tuscan village could be considered, like no bark mulch, trees that don't require trimming and low voltage up lighting.

The questions on other modes of travel (biking, walking, transit) indicated that biking along this corridor is perceived to be not desirable. About a third would be willing to bike with bike lanes or separated bike paths. The response to walking indicated this is also not seen as a desirable place to walk, but a large minority would be somewhat or a lot more likely to walk with sidewalk and crosswalks. Open-ended responses indicated an interest in being able to walk between businesses. In terms of transit, almost three-quarters of respondents would not take transit even if it were available.

- It was noted by PAC members that most people in Windham bike off-road on trails, as biking anywhere in town – not just the corridor - is hard due to drivers' lack of attention, narrow shoulders, and vehicle speeds.
- It was noted that rumble strips adjacent to shoulder markings make it problematic for cyclists using the roadway.
- A. Letizio noted that the Enterprise Drive area was also working on a trail connection in their neighborhood.

C. Morris asked if the PAC had anything to add to the survey feedback and if there were any topics that should be explored more deeply at the upcoming public meeting. PAC members noted a range of topics that they had concerns about or that they believe will come up at the meeting:

- Why this study was needed when a similar one was completed in 2011?
 - T. Mcpherson noted that the environmental impacts and high cost estimates were prohibitive in 2011, and there was some fears associated with roundabouts at that time.
- Whether a bypass is a better solution. There were discussions that there may have been previous conversations of added exits off of I-93 (between Exit 2 and 3 and between 3 and 4). *Subsequent to the meeting this was researched and there have been no recent proposals for added exits at these locations in the State's 10 year plan process.*
- The need to define and propose short-term as well as long-term fixes.
- Public perception of the viability of roundabouts
- Discussion to execute signal improvements earlier and the complexity of today's smart signals.
- The need to reach out to business owners specifically.
 - C. Morris noted that sometimes special meetings convened for businesses can be useful in understanding their unique concerns.

Purpose and Need Review

C. Morris wound up the survey discussion by asking if the draft Purpose and Need Statement needed tweaking based on the survey results. There was discussion about including the word "balance" versus

“protecting” in the rural character reference in the purpose statement. J. Cross indicated the term “balance” could be a trigger word based on a recent campaign slogan that was not successful. It was also suggested that the Needs section was not stated as needs but as problems and perhaps it could be re-framed.

Existing Conditions Summary

T. Errico presented a brief summary of the Existing Conditions in the Corridor.

Topics included location of the intersections evaluated, traffic volumes, speed data, mobility, origin and destination, safety/crash data, and the topics under the environmental review. (Slides detailing this data are attached to this conference report.)

T. Errico noted that traffic volumes drop as you move west along the corridor and that speed is reduced due to traffic congestion during peak PM travel times. T. Errico also commented that it is very difficult to get out of driveways and that this specific mobility data will be very important when assessing the range of potential road improvements.

Crash Data shows that over a ten-year period, 1,200 crashes had been logged in the corridor which included all the way to the I-93 ramps and spanned through the Exit 3 construction projects. Most of these crashes were rear-end collisions.

- The PAC discussed the crash data, as 1,200 crashes seemed like a lot, but they understood they had no perspective on this. T. Errico indicated that this is a high number but not surprising given that it was over 10 years and the study would be looking at ways to mitigate this.
- The discussion also included questions on whether this level of crashes could prioritize the advertising of the project and its construction. W. Johnson said not at this time, the study needs to be completed first and a recommended solution needs to be developed before funding is considered. There was more discussion on specific kinds of funding such as CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) and whether any could be accessed by working with the Southern New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission; however these discussion would be after the recommendations are developed.
- The crash data needs to be refined and limited to study area, not the entire NH Route 111 corridor.

Potential Alternatives: General Discussion

T. Errico moved on to a general discussion of the kind of potential alternatives (solutions) that the study team would be looking at.

Increasing Capacity:

- Roundabouts: double or single depending on the level of traffic. Double, or two-lane roundabouts carry more traffic but also take up more space and can be more intimidating to some drivers.

- Adding lanes and traffic signals, both of which improve traffic flow and reduce vehicle delay.

Safety Mitigation:

- Traffic signal adjustment, adding new traffic signals
- Adding dedicated turn lanes
- Signs and pavement markings
- Guardrail
- Speed enforcement and management (not provided by NHDOT)
- Lighting

Access Management:

- Managing turning movements on and off Route 111, which can alleviate traffic pressure.
- Median or no median, planted or unplanted. W. Johnson noted that ongoing maintenance of landscaped medians is the responsibility of the town.
 - The PAC generally preferred tree-planted medians, but there was more discussion about the challenge of keeping the trees alive.

Active transportation:

It can be generally defined as any kind of transportation that involves personal movement: walking, biking, mobility devices. Active transportation could include such improvements as adding sidewalks and turning shoulders into bike lanes.

- Certain pavement markings, and bicycle symbols in shoulders, or pedestrian signalization are at the expense and future maintenance of the Town; municipal maintenance agreements are also required for some of these items.
- A wider, shared-use path for pedestrians and bicyclists is an option.
- Sidewalks can be wider on one side of the road than the other. Eight feet is the minimum width requirement for a multiuse path in constrained settings, but 10 feet is preferred.

Well-marked pedestrian crossings in roundabouts were applauded, and T. Errico noted that often bicyclists have a separate pathway through a roundabout. There was discussion that the PAC felt the long-term benefit of wider sidewalks.

PAC members inquired as to whether plan views of specific designed improvements for the NH Route 111 Corridor would be part of the upcoming presentation of Alternatives in coming months and T. Errico indicated that they would be.

Public Meeting and Next Steps

C. Morris noted that the first Public Meeting would be May 6 at the High School, with an Open House 6-7 pm with a presentation and public comment/questions following.

The agenda will be similar to today's PAC meeting, with a presentation on the survey results, and an overview of existing conditions and possible corridor improvements. She reminded PAC members that they should be in attendance if possible.

Next steps in addition to the Public Meeting are finalization of the Existing Conditions Report, finalizing the Purpose and Need Statement with any public comments, and the next PAC meeting where initial Alternatives would be presented, likely taking place in early summer.

Most PAC discussion was in regards to the Open House. There was concurrence that there should be PAC member representation at the meeting. Morris noted that local presence enhances project credibility/support. Also, the consensus was that people liked to see maps of the Corridor close-up and make comments, similar to what they did in the January election. S. von Aulock and D. Tilton offered to organize staffing for this, with an understanding that four large-scale maps would be needed.

There was also discussion regarding the need for a press release and social media, which C. Morris noted that she could provide for the Town and PAC to distribute, as was done for the survey.

The meeting ended at 6:10 pm.

ACTION ITEMS SUMMARY:

1. NHDOT will research the status of a separate NHDOT project to improve signalization.
Subsequent to the meeting this was investigated, there is a project (Londonderry-Windham-Seabrook 44355) in the current 10-year plan for signal optimization for the intersection of NH Route 111 with Hardwood Road, North Lowell Road, USPS, Wall Street and the southbound Exit 3 ramps. This has an anticipated advertising date in 2030.
2. Initial crash data included Exit 3, and NHDOT will look into refining the data to limit it to the corridor.
3. C. Morris will consider the need for a specific business outreach meeting once there are specific alternatives to consider.
4. C. Morris will create an edited version of the Purpose and Need Statement and send it out to the PAC for comments well in advance of public meeting so these suggestions can be resolved prior to the meeting.
5. C. Morris will add a discussion of various funding methods to the agenda in a future PAC meeting.
6. C. Morris will provide a PDF version of the presentation to the PAC the week after the meeting.
7. C. Morris will provide a press release and website/social media content for the Public Meeting by mid-April.

Submitted by: Carol Morris

CM/cm

NOTED BY: JAH

Attached: PAC Presentation #2, dated 03/14/24
cc: Attendees, file