

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

CONFERENCE REPORT

PROJECT: WALPOLE-CHARLESTOWN 14747
Reconstruct NH-12 from Main Street in North Walpole north approximately 3 miles to NH 12A in Charlestown

DATE OF PUBLIC MEETING: April 29, 2009

LOCATION OF PUBLIC MEETING: Fall Mountain Regional High School, Langdon, NH

ATTENDED BY: NHDOT and UVLSRPC

Nate Miller, Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC
Donald Lyford – NHDOT Project Manager (PAC Member)
Michael Dugas – NHDOT Chief of Preliminary Design
Jon Evans – NHDOT Bureau of Environment (PAC member)
C.R. Willeke – NHDOT Preliminary Design Engineer
John Kallfelz – NHDOT Assistant District #4 Engineer

See attached attendance sheet for general public and Project Advisory Committee Members

SUBJECT: Public Informational Meeting #1

NOTES ON PUBLIC MEETING:

On April 29, 2009 approximately 100 people gathered at the Fall Mountain Regional High School cafeteria in Langdon, NH for a meeting facilitated by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC). The intent of the meeting was to review and discuss the ongoing Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process and a set of five preliminary design alternatives for the reconstruction of NH 12 from Main Street in North Walpole to the intersection of NH12/NH 12A in South Charlestown. In addition, public comments were solicited to get feedback from the general public relative to the various alternatives.

Introduction

Donald Lyford, project manager for the NHDOT, welcomed everyone and introduced the project team and John Kallfelz from District #4. Mr. Lyford then turned the meeting over to Nate Miller from the UVLSRPC.

Review of Project CSS Process

Nate Miller presented a slide show describing the on going Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process for the project. Nate gave an overview of how the CSS process started, the limits of the project, and the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) team members. Nate went on to describe the CSS philosophy, the CSS process steps, the development of the project's Problem Statement and Vision Statement, and the screening criteria that were developed to evaluate alternatives. A link to the CSS Presentation can be found below:

http://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/walpole14747/documents/pim_04-29-09.pdf

Nate Miller mentioned that the NHDOT has developed 5 alternatives based on the PAC's previous work during the CSS process. He indicated that the PAC and the NHDOT are looking for comments at the end of tonight's meeting to get feedback from the general public relative to the options presented. He then turned the meeting over to C.R. Willeke to describe the existing conditions, project vision, and preliminary design alternatives.

Review of Preliminary Engineering

C.R. Willeke, preliminary design engineer for the NHDOT, presented a slide show describing the existing conditions and problems associated with NH 12, the proposed vision for the corridor, and five preliminary alternatives that attempt to accomplish the future vision.

He summarized the Problem and Vision Statements as developed by the PAC as follows:

NH 12 Currently:

*Has narrow lanes,
Does not have adequate shoulders,
Has inadequate guardrails,
Is squeezed between the river and the railroad,
Has aging infrastructure and drainage problems,
Has a history of riverbank instability
Hinders travel for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists, and
Detracts from access to and scenic beauty of the river valley.*

NH 12 Should:

*Be safe, efficient, attractive, and environmentally sensitive,
Serve the needs of all modes of travel including rail service,
Be wider with adequate shoulders and guardrail,
Have safe passage for bicyclists and pedestrians,
Have improved access to and parking for the river, and
Preserve and enhance the scenic qualities of the area.*

C.R. Willeke presented slides, typical cross sections, and plans to describe the five preliminary design alternatives. A link to the Preliminary Alternatives Presentation can be found below:

http://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/walpole14747/documents/4_29_09_pimlr.pdf

Review of Preliminary Design Alternatives

C.R. Willeke highlighted the following alternatives:

- Option #1 – Maintain Existing Condition
- Option #2 – Hold Railroad as Control and Widen Westerly Toward River,
- Option #3 – Hold River as Control and Widen Easterly Toward Railroad,
- Option #4 – Relocate NH 12 easterly to “The Other Side of the Tracks”,
 - #4A – Close to Railroad, Similar Profile as RR,
 - #4B – Hillside Alternative, More Balanced Cuts and Fills,
 - #4C – Hillside with new Bridge over RR near Len-Tex
- Option #5 – Online Alternative with Geotechnical Measures

He explained that Option #1 – Maintain Existing Condition is usually carried through the evaluation process to use as a “book end” when comparing various alternatives. He then went on to highlight elements, benefits, and disadvantages of each option:

Option #2 – Hold Railroad as Control and Widen Westerly Toward River:

C.R. Willeke reviewed the “Railroad as a Control” alternative, noting that this option would see the railroad location held as is, with road construction happening to the west (toward the Connecticut River). In general a 39 ft offset from the center of the westerly railroad track to the center of the proposed NH 12 reconstruction keeps the new layout as close to the railroad as possible while still providing for 12 ft travel lanes, 4 ft shoulders, and a standard ditch line next to the tracks. In several areas where the railroad track elevation rises above the NH 12 elevation, the 39 ft offset requires retaining walls between the railroad and the proposed northbound ditch line rather than a standard grass slope.

Option #2 Highlights:

- Northern limit near NH 12A, Southern Limit near Len-Tex,
- Considerable slope fills into Connecticut River,
- Strong resistance from resource agencies due to river impacts,
- Relatively less business and residential impacts,
- Most likely less archeological impacts than other alternatives,
- Affects the railroad right-of-way but not the track operations,
- Preliminary cost estimate is approximately \$14 million

Option #3 - Hold River as Control and Widen Easterly Toward Railroad

C.R. Willeke reviewed the “River as a Control” alternative, noting that this alternative would see all the road construction happening to the east with minimal impacts to the Connecticut River. This alternative would require nearly the entire railroad track in the project area to be relocated prior to reconstructing the highway. He explained that this alternative would require significant cuts into the hillside to accommodate the easterly shift of the tracks.

Option #3 Highlights:

- Northern Limit near NH 12A, Southern Limit near Len-Tex,
- Utilizes stability of railroad location,

Relocates railroad easterly,
Allows for phased construction,
Avoids river impacts, likely has archeological impacts,
Has right-of-way costs for new railroad corridor,
Has engineering and constructions costs for new rail,
Has large cuts into hillside for railroad corridor,
Has ledge blasting near an active railroad line, and
Preliminary cost estimate range is \$15 to \$20 million.

Option #4A – Relocate NH 12 easterly to “The Other Side of the Tracks”

C.R. Willeke reviewed the “Other Side of the Tracks” alternative, noting that this alternative would utilize the existing NH 12A overpass to relocate NH 12 to the east of the existing railroad. This alternative does not require the relocation of the existing tracks or existing railroad service road; however, it does encroach into the existing railroad right-of-way. He highlighted the alignment and property impacts in the residential area adjacent to NH 12A in South Charlestown. He highlighted areas that would require large cuts into the hillside, and explained that the road would be very close to the Len Tex building and the existing Main Street Underpass that goes beneath the railroad in North Walpole.

Option #4A Highlights:

Northern limit extended, southern limit extended down thru Main Street,
Affects access for residents along NH 12 near Meany’s Cove,
Avoids river impacts,
Likely has archeological impacts,
Has a right-of-way cost for new highway corridor,
Has alignment similar to railroad,
Is as close to railroad as possible to minimize cuts slopes into the hillside,
Is within railroad right-of-way but not track or service road,
Affects railroad drainage system,
Has ledge blasting near an active railroad,
Has unbalanced cuts and fills,
Affects property and access near Old State Road in South Charlestown,
Affects Len-Tex building located east of the railroad, and
Preliminary cost estimate range is \$15 to \$20 million.

Option #4B – Hillside Alternative

C.R. Willeke noted that similar to #4A, this alternative would see NH 12 use the existing NH 12A overpass in Charlestown to align NH 12 on the east side of the railroad tracks. This alignment however is shifted further to the east to minimize encroachments into the railroad right-of-way. He highlighted the alignment and property impacts in the residential area adjacent to NH 12A in South Charlestown. He explained that this alignment has large cut areas similar to option #4A, but it also has large fill areas and creates more of a balance between cuts and fills. This alignment also has similar constraints near the Len Tex property and the Main Street underpass as option #4A.

Option #4B Highlights:

Northern limit extended, southern limit extended down thru Main Street,
Affects access for residents along NH 12 near Meany's Cove,
Avoids river impacts,
Likely has archeological impacts,
Has a right-of-way cost for new highway corridor,
Uses hillside alignment to minimize railroad right-of-way impacts,
Affects railroad drainage system,
Has ledge blasting near an active railroad,
Has more balanced earthwork but still large cuts and fills,
Affects property and access near Old State Road in South Charlestown,
Affects Len-Tex building located east of the railroad, and
Preliminary cost estimate range is \$15 to \$20 million.

Option #4C – Hillside with new Bridge over RR near Len-Tex

C.R. Willeke explained that this alternative is basically the same as Option #4B except that it avoids the Main Street area in North Walpole by shifting the alignment back onto Church Street (existing NH 12) near the Len Tex property.

Option #4C Highlights:

Includes new bridge over railroad,
Has skewed bridge,
Has horizontal curve on bridge,
Impacts Len-Tex property and parking near Church Street,
Has retaining wall to avoid Len-Tex building,
Bridge and retaining wall are near slope stability area of concern,
Avoids sending NH 12 traffic onto Main Street in North Walpole.

Main Street Existing Conditions and Potential Design Issues

C.R. Willeke explained that because Option #4A and #4B utilize Main Street in North Walpole, the Department has looked at potential issues that would result if traffic were to be increased on this road. C.R. noted that the initial assessment of Main Street is only a preliminary look and that a detailed assessment would need to be done if this option moves forward. He noted the following existing conditions for Main Street:

Wider than Church Street (existing NH 12),
Access to NH 12 at each end,
Two underpasses (Russell St and North Main Street),
Fire and police use the Russell Street underpass to cut response time and avoid trains,
Russell Street underpass results in deficient geometry (Down Up Road),
Has historic homes close to the road,
Has an adjacent school and cross walks,
Has drainage areas and sidewalk areas in marginal condition

He noted that the intersection with NH 12 at the southern end would likely need to be upgraded with a traffic signal or a roundabout to accommodate the increase in traffic. An upgrade to this intersection would likely result in impacts to the adjacent properties.

C.R. Willeke noted that it is unlikely that the Department could leave the existing intersection of Main Street and the Down Up Road in its existing configuration due to the deficient geometry. Several ideas have been discussed during previous PAC meetings including discontinuing the underpass, narrowing the median between Main Street and the Down Up Road, prohibiting left turns from Russell Street onto Main Street, and lowering the profile of Main Street to allow for an at grade connection with Russell Street. The profile adjustment option would result in substantial property impacts and affect the driveways to properties on the east side of Main Street in the vicinity of the intersection.

C.R. Willeke mentioned that as the alignment transitions from the hillside to Main Street, it impacts the Len Tex property and the Len Tex building to the east of railroad tracks. In addition, the existing Main Street area leading up to the Main Street underpass would need to be filled in and would result in loss of access under the railroad at this location.

Option #5 – Online Alternative with Geotechnical Measures

C.R. Willeke discussed an alternative developed by the geotechnical section at the NHDOT. This alternative investigates what additional engineering measures would be required to keep the roadway near its current alignment with minimal impacts to the river and railroad. He explained that the road would be constructed as close to the railroad as possible, widened to provide shoulders, and that retaining walls would be used to prevent roadway slopes from filling in the river. Due to slope stability concerns, the railroad would need to be moved in several locations in the southern portion of the project area. In order to build the retaining walls, the aerial utility poles would require relocation prior to construction. In addition, alternating one-way traffic during construction would be necessary due to the limited width available.

Option #5 Highlights:

- Online option with retaining walls along riverside,
- Avoids impacts to river,
- Minimizes impacts to railroad,
- Difficult and expensive to construct,
- Involves alternating one way traffic,
- Preliminary cost estimate range is \$23 to \$25 million.

C.R. Willeke ended his presentation and opened up the meeting for questions and comments.

Questions and Comments:

- A North Walpole resident commented that there is virtually no closed drainage system on Main Street north of Mountain View Road, only dry wells and that there are no as built plans for the drainage system.
- A North Walpole resident expressed concerns with the grade on Mountain View Road as it approaches Main Street, the potential impacts to the park on Main Street and the increase in traffic on the Down Up Road associated with Options #4A and #4B.
- A North Walpole resident expressed concerns with the speed of traffic and property impacts associated with Option #4A and #4B. He mentioned that improvements to Main Street would increase speeds on Main Street.
- A gentleman suggested a new Option #1A, which would involve just reducing the speed limit and making minor improvements to the existing roadway.
- A North Walpole resident expressed concerns with potential property impacts on Main Street with Options #4A and #4B.
- A lady expressed concerns with the lifespan of the retaining walls mentioned in Option #5. She was concerned that the expensive walls would need to be replaced again over time due to river erosion.
- A Meany's Cove resident supported shifting the railroad to the east (Option #3)
- A gentleman mentioned the 1996 slope failure and predicted that more failures would occur in the future. He recommended fixing the slopes where they are today.
- A lady asked what happens with the bypassed road?

C.R. Willeke indicated that the normal process is for the Department to reclassify the highway as a Class V town road. He indicated that this process requires cooperation with the town. He mentioned that if the remnant highway is not reclassified as a town road and accesses are affected by the roadway relocation, then the Department would need to provide access for the abutters to the new state highway or purchase the properties.

- A gentleman asked if FEMA could assist in the stabilization of the highway slopes along the Connecticut River and also asked why the State would have trouble getting a permit to fill in the Connecticut River if Home Depot could get a permit to impact the Ash Swamp Brook in Keene?

C.R. Willeke indicated that FEMA normally gets involved with roadway failures similar to the recent flooding events and not roadway improvement projects such as this one, which are intended to avert failures. He indicated that just because the DOT is a state agency they are not guaranteed a wetlands permit. He mentioned that it is often times more difficult for state agencies to get permits than private companies and that the Connecticut River is a particularly valuable resource to the permitting agencies, probably more so than Ash Swamp Brook.

- A gentleman asked what agencies are involved in reviewing impacts for state highway projects?

Jon Evans indicated that numerous Federal, State and Local agencies and organizations have been involved with the project. These include the Federal Highway Administration, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, NH Department of Environmental Services, NH Fish & Game, NH Office of Energy & Planning, NH Division of Historical Resources, the Connecticut River Joint Commissions, etc. The Department will continue to involve these organizations throughout the design process.

- A lady asked about the cost to the town for this project and the potential impacts to Len-Tex business operations?

C.R. Willeke indicated that this project is on the state's Ten Year Plan and that funding for this project is 80% federal and 20% state. There would be no town funds involved unless other items such as town utilities were relocated or upgraded as part of the project. He went on to mention that if Len Tex or other abutters were impacted by the project that the Department would reimburse them through the right-of-way process for the value of the impact. He indicated that the impact could be as small as a grass strip along someone's frontage to as large as complete property acquisition. He mentioned that the timing of the right-of-way process is such that relocations of businesses can happen prior to highway construction to prevent down time or loss of production.

- Charlie Lennon of Len-Tex indicated that he does not support the new alignments (Options #3 or #4). He also indicated that sooner is better for project completion to avoid any potential slope failures. He mentioned that the Department should lower the speed limit to 30 mph and focus on the immediate problems.
- John LeClair, Charlestown Selectman, indicated that whatever is done the project needs to stabilize the bank. He thinks that the road should be kept where it is today and impact the river if necessary.
- A gentleman mentioned that the changing water levels by the dam operations along the Connecticut River are helping to destabilize the bank. Also he asked how the project would deal with storm water?

C.R. Willeke indicated that storm water along the corridor would need to be collected and treated prior to discharging to the Connecticut River.

- A gentleman mentioned that taking traffic off of Church Street and putting it onto Main Street would hurt the existing Church Street businesses with Options #4A and #4B.
- A North Walpole resident expressed concern with the potential impact of ledge blasting on hillside slopes.

Prior to concluding the meeting, Nate Miller asked for the attendees to indicate either thumbs up (support) or thumbs down (opposition) for each option.

Option #1 received only a couple of thumbs up in support,
Option #2 received many thumbs up in support,
Option #3 received many thumbs up in support,
Option #4A received many thumbs down in opposition,
Option #4B received many thumbs down in opposition,
Option #4C received many thumbs down in opposition, and
Option #5 received a marginal amount of thumbs down in opposition.

Submitted by,

C.R. Willeke, P.E.
Preliminary Design Engineer

Attachment – 4/29/09 Sign In Sheet

cc: D. Lyford
M. Dugas
J. Evans
W. Cass
D. Graham – District #4
W. Lambert – Traffic Bureau
Nate Miller – UVLSRPC
J.B. Mack – SWRPC
PAC Members

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