

October 17, 2008

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

**CONFERENCE REPORT**

**PROJECT:** BERLIN  
X-A000(052)  
12958B  
NH Route 110 Reconstruction/Relocation (Phase 2)

**DATE OF CONFERENCE:** August 28, 2008

**LOCATION OF CONFERENCE:** City Hall, Berlin

**ATTENDED BY:** DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Chris Waszczuk	John Butler	Marc Laurin
Trent Zanes	Victoria Chase	Joyce McKay

Federal Highway Administration

Jamie Sikora

**SUBJECT:** Public Workshop/Informational Meeting

**NOTES ON CONFERENCE:**

The Public Workshop was held from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm in the Berlin City Hall. Approximately 70 people attended the open forum where information was provided on the two proposed alternatives, historic significance of the surrounding area, and Right-of-Way process. Attendees were also urged to complete questionnaires and comment sheets to help identify the interests and needs of the community. The open forum provided an opportunity for residents and other interested parties to meet one-on-one with the project manager and/or other Department staff and discuss specific elements of the project, Right-of-Way process, and historic matters, amongst other project related aspects.

The formal Public Informational Meeting began at 6:30 pm, and C. Waszczuk began with a discussion of the meeting agenda and highlighted the pertinent aspects of the project history, background, and need. He explained the importance of Route 110 as an east-west connection from US Route 3 in Northumberland to NH Route 16 in Berlin. The project was initiated to address the section of Route 110 that winds through a residential neighborhood before reaching Route 16.

The current location of Route 110 was identified as problematic as early as the 1970's. The City commissioned several studies, and in the 1990's a Route 110 Committee was formed. A recent

Phase 1 project constructed a new railroad bridge over Green Street to provide satisfactory clearance for truck traffic, which was previously detoured via several routes.

Conceptual alternative routes were developed in 2001-2002 and then presented at several scoping meetings in Berlin for public comment. Following the initial scoping meeting, preliminary studies were performed to identify historic and socioeconomic concerns. In 2004, FHWA issued a determination on the Section 4(f) impacts that concern the historic elements in the project area. Recently, the project has received federally earmarked funds and work has resumed on the preliminary design and environmental studies. Phase 2 has been included in the current Ten Year Plan (2009-2018).

C. Waszczuk identified the project's need to safely and efficiently convey Route 110 traffic through downtown Berlin. At present, traffic winds through a dense, residential neighborhood and must make sharp turns on narrow streets with steep grades. Large trucks account for a significant portion of the traffic and pose a significant safety hazard when attempting to negotiate the tight corners. Prior to the Phase 1 project, trucks were detoured away from the deficient clearance under the bridge on Green Street. One consolidated and designated route is desired to improve safety and alleviate congestion.

Route 110 in downtown Berlin is a Class 4 highway located within the City's urban compact. The average daily traffic in 2003 totaled 5,110 vehicles, 10.8% of which were trucks. An accident report from 1994-2002 listed a total of 96 accidents. One fatal accident occurred with a bicyclist, and 27 other crashed resulted in personal injuries.

C. Waszczuk highlighted the pertinent issues as follows: safety, efficient operations, neighborhood/community impacts, relocation, impacts to historic resources, consistency with long-term planning, and community support.

T. Zanes discussed the earlier conceptual studies that were refined to two preliminary routes. He then provided a detailed review of the two developed alternatives.

#### Alternative 2

The typical cross-section for this design includes two 12 ft travel lanes with 4 ft shoulders and 6 ft sidewalks. Beginning at Green Street, the new alignment curves onto Second Avenue and then cuts through two blocks to reach Third Avenue. The alternative proposes to narrow Third Avenue from 64 ft wide to 32 ft. The existing sidewalk location would remain along the front of properties and a landscaped buffer is proposed. The proposed route would then follow the current Route 110 location onto Wight Street and extend just past Duguay Street.

#### Alternative 4E

The intended route of this proposed design attempts to skirt the neighborhood and relocate Route 110 closer to the railroad corridor. Beginning at the new railroad bridge, the new alignment begins by curving north to follow First Avenue. Properties west of the alignment are proposed to be minimally impacted with drive matches and sidewalk adjustments. The properties along the eastern side of First Avenue would need to be acquired to accommodate the new roadway. A wider typical section is proposed consisting of two 12 ft travel lanes, 4 ft shoulders, 8 ft grass panels, and 6 ft sidewalks.

Where First Avenue presently becomes a dead end, the proposed Route 110 would continue parallel with the railroad until it reaches Wight Street (near Fourth Avenue).

## Wight Street

The proposed improvements on Wight Street do not change with either Alternative 2 or 4E. Beginning near the Fourth Avenue intersection, Wight Street will be improved as far as Duguay Street and will include two 12 ft travel lanes, 4 ft shoulders, and 6 ft sidewalks.

T. Zanes discussed a number of characteristics and impacts associated with both alternatives. Several impacted properties include apartment buildings, and an effort was made to determine how many housing units might be affected. The following table includes information relevant to design, Right-of-Way impacts, and costs for each alternative.

SUMMARY OF IMPROVEMENT ALTERNATIVE CHARACTERISTICS / IMPACTS				
Characteristics/Impacts	Transportation Improvement Alternatives			
	Concept No:	Alternative 2	Alternative 4E	Wight
<b>Transportation System Efficiency &amp; Safety:</b> <small>Ease of access and lack of congestion. (1 being best)</small>				Similar
<b>Length of NH 110 Improvement (ft)</b> <small>( see plans )</small>		1890	2075	1510
<b>Length of Side Roads Improvement (ft)</b> <small>( see plans )</small>		675	800	190
<b>Number of Intersections</b> <small>( see plans )</small>		7	6	4
<b>Number of Drives</b> <small>( see plans )</small>		30	10	
<b>Horizontal Alignment</b> <small>( see plans )</small>		(30 mph Design) Moderately curvilinear	(30 mph Design) direct	More Closely follows existing alignment. Slight shifts west and east to minimize impacts
<b>Vertical Alignment (Max. Grade)</b>		4.5% (7% vicinity of bridge)	4.0% (7% vicinity of bridge)	-3.4%
<b>Intersection Sight Distances</b>		Sight distance is poor or limited at 4 intersections.	Sight distance is limited at 2 intersections.	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		Proximity of intersections of 2ND and 3RD	Proximity of Hillside RR crossing to intersection	
<b>Property Impacts:</b>				
<b>No. of Parcels Impacted</b>		33	45	34
<b>No. of Total Property Acquisitions</b>		12	27	0
<b>(No. of Housing Units Affected)</b>		(19)	(48)	
<b>Additional Potential Total Acquisitions</b>		0	1	0
<b>Community/Neighborhood Integrity</b>		Splits Neighborhood (Thru 2 City Blocks)	Preserves Neighborhood (Along RR Corridor)	
<b>Cost: (2008 Dollars)</b>				
<b>Preliminary Engineering</b>		\$500,000	\$500,000	Construction Costs Included In Alternatives
<b>Right-of-Way*</b>		\$3,000,000	\$5,600,000	
<b>Construction</b>		\$3,800,000	\$4,000,000	
<b>Total</b>		\$7,300,000	\$10,100,000	

\* ROW Cost includes Relocation.

M. Laurin explained the required environmental documentation to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Section 106 of NEPA mandates an assessment of historic and archeological resources and potential impacts resulting from each alternative. In addition, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act declares that the project must “minimize harm” to any historic resources.

M. Laurin generally described the limits of the historic district from the railroad to Fourth Avenue, and extending to as far south as Harding Street. Both alternatives would have impacts to the historic district, however it is not clear which would best minimize the harm. Alternative 2 has the least number of property acquisitions, however perpetuates the existing truck traffic through the center of the district. Alternative 4E impacts twice the number of properties, yet may provide greater benefits to the entire district by skirting the neighborhood.

J. Sikora further explained the FHWA's role in the project and in identifying and working with all applicable cooperating agencies and consulting parties involved in order to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as other environmental laws such as Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the U.S. Transportation Act. He explained that Section 4(f) is one of the more complex laws that would need to be addressed as part of the project and that it is a very stringent law, which sets the bar very high when it comes to avoiding and/or minimizing impacts to Section 4(f) properties, such as historic properties and resources. However, he did stress that when evaluating such impacts under Section 4(f) it is not simply a numbers game and the evaluation involves determining which alternative provides the most appropriate balance of overall environmental impacts and least harm to the Section 4(f) resources.

C. Waszczuk addressed the project funding and anticipated costs. He explained that 80% of the project costs would be funded with \$5.6M of federally earmarked money. The City would be responsible for the 20% matching costs. The current estimated project costs are shown in the table on page 3. Both alternatives have similar engineering and construction costs. Alternative 4E has almost double the Right-of-Way cost of Alternative 2 because of the additional property acquisitions.

A tentative project schedule has been set to include a second Public Informational meeting in December 2008, followed by a formal Public Hearing held in the spring of 2009. Subsequent to a successful hearing, the project would proceed to the final design phase where Right-of-Way can be purchased, construction plans developed, and the necessary permits will be secured. Construction of the project could begin in late 2011.

### Questions/Concerns

David Bertrand (Mayor) stated he was pleased with the number of people who came to the meeting. He noted that this is an important opportunity for the people to make comments and provide input on the project. Mr. Bertrand stated his strong support for Alternative 4E. He stated that safety would be improved by decreasing the number of intersections, and by removing Route 110 from the middle of the neighborhood. He believed Alternative 2 would promote higher speeds through the neighborhood. Mr. Bertrand noted that Alternative 4E fits the City's new master plan and would better suit the future needs of the City.

Mr. Bertrand did not feel there were any historic or archeological resources in the project area, adding that there was too much federal regulation regarding these concerns.

John Moulis (School Superintendent) voiced his safety concerns for kids walking to school. He supported Alternative 4E to reduce the number of pedestrian crossings.

Lucie Remillard (City Council – Ward I) encouraged people to offer their comments, and she agreed with the Mayor's comments supporting Alternative 4E.

Pam Kocher (Senator Sununu's Office) reported that Senator Sununu has helped to procure funding this project and she believes the City's support of Alternative 4E is valid.

A question was asked regarding the recent improvements to the Post Office entrance. C. Waszczuk explained that as part of Phase 1, the entrance was narrowed to help control speeds and better define access.

A resident from Mannering Street complained about the heavy truck traffic by their house, especially the trucks hauling gravel for the new federal prison. The mayor addressed the latter concern by stating that the prison construction is only a temporary nuisance.

Tom McCue (City Council – Ward II) noted his support for Alternative 4E as the best solution. He stated that the proposed \$80,000 Community Impact Assessment (CIA) was not necessary. He noted that the City would be responsible for \$20,000, which is almost the same amount as the lost tax revenue associated with Alternative 4E (estimated to be \$25,000).

Paul Cusson supported Alternative 4E and he thought skirting Route 110 around the neighborhood was best for future commercial opportunities. He noted that the ice arena would be easier to find for visitors. Mr. Cusson also discussed the pedestrian safety with regards to the children at the Bartlett School. He stated that with Alternative 2 Sessions Street would become a dead end road with a steep grade.

Tom Sutton stated that he works with the buses located on Third Avenue, and he preferred Alternative 4E. He noted that many of the properties to be acquired are currently vacant, and C. Waszczuk acknowledged that future efforts will be taken to determine how many housing units are occupied and which are vacant.

Anne Carter stated that she owns the property on the corner of Green Street and Second Avenue. Ms. Carter felt surrounded by the proposed roads and she requested to be acquired, regardless of which alternative is selected. C. Waszczuk asked that anyone wishing to be acquired should mail those requests to the Department. The Department would coordinate with the City and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) when considering requests.

Don Bouchard asked who would be responsible for maintaining the new grass areas. C. Waszczuk responded that it is yet to be determined, but the entire area is within the urban compact, thus the City would have jurisdiction in the decision-making.

Lucien Langlois (Planning Board/Water Commission) supported Alternative 4E. He cited that the new location of Route 110 would expedite responses to railroad incidents. He also felt Third Avenue could be better developed with this option.

Roland Donovan asked if more of the recently constructed work on Green Street could be retained with Alternative 4E. C. Waszczuk agreed that further review of the design might preserve more of the reconstructed areas.

A question was asked if the construction for Phase 2 could proceed faster than Phase 1 did. C. Waszczuk responded that the construction for Phase 1 was one year longer than anticipated due to unexpected ledge removal and difficulties coordinating with the railroad. He added that from a traffic control perspective, Alternative 4E would be easier to construct being on the periphery of the neighborhood. Lucien Langlois added that the Alternative 4E would have much fewer impacts to the existing sewer and water utilities.

Paul Cusson suggested using the new green spaces for additional parking, particularly at the police station. C. Waszczuk said it would be up to the City to determine the best use of these areas.

Lionel Caron stated that he has lived in the same house on Second Avenue/Hillside Avenue for 80 years. Alternative 4E will require the acquisition of his property. Mr. Caron would like to keep his home, but he supports Alternative 4E as the best solution for Berlin's future needs. He also requested that a microphone be utilized at the next meeting.

A question regarding Alternative 4E involved the intersection of Route 110 with Hillside Avenue and whether or not signals will be installed. C. Waszczuk responded that Second Avenue would not be connected, and signals are not warranted. A separate comment was made that the railroad signals may be in the process of being replaced.

Dick Huot stated that he lives on the corner of First Avenue and Green Street. He reiterated the pedestrian safety benefits and improved access to the ice arena that would result from Alternative 4E.

Tom Sutton asked that consideration be given to adequate storage on Hillside Avenue between the stop sign at Route 110 and the railroad tracks (under Alternative 4E).

Barry Kelley stated he lives on First Avenue and supported Alternative 4E because it protects the neighborhood and enhances Third Avenue.

Submitted by:

Trent C. Zanes, P.E.  
Preliminary Design

NOTED BY: CMW, JDB

cc: B. Cass  
C. Waszczuk  
T. Zanes  
M. Laurin  
J. McKay  
J. Sikora – FHWA  
V. Chase  
W. Lambert  
G. Placy – District 1  
Pam Laflamme – City of Berlin