

July 21, 2021

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

CONFERENCE REPORT

PROJECT: Epping 29608
NH Route 125 Capacity Improvements

DATE OF CONFERENCE: July 14, 2021

LOCATION OF CONFERENCE: Via Zoom

ATTENDED BY:

- Greg Dodge – Epping Town Administrator
- David Walker – Assistant Director, Rockingham Regional Planning Commission
- Scott Bogle – Sr. Transportation Planner, Rockingham Regional Planning Commission and Bike/Ped representative
- Wendy Johnson – NHDOT, Project Manager
- Gerry Bedard – NHDOT, Design Engineer
- Dan Prehemo – NHDOT, Design Group Leader
- Jennifer Riordan – GM2, Environmental Engineering Design Consultant
- Chris Turgeon – BETA Group, Inc., Engineering Design Consultant
- John Byatt - BETA Group, Inc., Engineering Design Consultant

SUBJECT: Public Advisory Committee Meeting #2

NOTES ON CONFERENCE:

Wendy Johnson opened the meeting and thanked all in attendance. Everyone introduced themselves and their role in the community or their area of interest relative to the NH Route 125 corridor. John Byatt recapped the project limits, the project background and the project needs and objectives. He then discussed the current projects status which is that the project is in the alternative evaluation and public participation phase. BETA has developed a draft Alternatives Study which has been reviewed by NHDOT. This meeting, and subsequent public informational meetings, are to present the alternatives evaluated in the report and to receive comments from the advisory committee and the public on the alternatives. An update on the schedule was also provided. Refer to the attached meeting presentation for additional information of the items discussed.

Chris Turgeon began discussing the alternatives evaluated as follows:

Town Line to Fresh River Rd/Main Street

This first segment is from a pavement joint 240' south of the Bentwood/Epping town line, to the Fresh River Rd/Main St intersection. Intersections are located at Brickyard Square, the Route 101/125 interchange and at Fresh River Rd. This segment has minimal geometric improvements. What is currently proposed is pavement resurfacing and restriping to mostly maintain the existing lane and intersection configurations, while also providing 5' shoulders throughout the segment and maintain the existing curb and sidewalk. New pedestrian ramps have been constructed recently. The main proposed improvement is signal system coordination and optimization between the four signals in this area to improve traffic operations and level of service (LOS).

Park and Ride

Chris Turgeon discussed the alternative to align the park and ride access drive as the 4th leg of the signalized intersection with Brickyard Square Plaza. This would also add a southbound left turn lane on NH 125. The relocated drive will make access and egress for the park and ride easier and safer and hopefully encourage more use. It will require additional signal equipment. A drawback with this concept is that the land opposite the Brickyard Square Plaza is mostly wetlands and relocating the entrance will have extensive wetland impacts. In addition, it may require a median along the additional SB left turn lane, which would restrict NB left turn access to CVS and Mobil.

- David Walker expressed that aligning the driveways was a good idea but was concerned with wetland impacts and that the Mobil Gas Station would not have left turn access.
- Greg Dodge mentioned that the CVS drive acts as an unofficial entrance to Brickyard Square, although he expressed that it shouldn't be the case asking how to address it.
- Wendy Johnson said the town could shepherd a cross access agreement between CVS and the Mobil station.
- Greg noted concern with how the businesses would get notified of impacts prior to the beginning of the project. Wendy said they would be invited to the public informational meeting, the public hearing and would have individual meetings as part of the ROW process.

McDonald's / Dunkin Donuts/Sunoco/XtraMart access

Chris Turgeon noted this was another area of access management that was evaluated to see if some improvements could be made. The current dual drive locations do not meet signal warrants and no high crash rates have occurred. It is currently proposed to maintain the existing configuration.

- Greg Dodge: Based on his years as a police chief in Epping, expressed that there were a lot of accidents coming out of the McDonald's parking lot. He added that many of these accidents occur when a vehicle in one of the two southbound lanes stops to let a vehicle turn (left) out of McDonald's, but vehicles in the other southbound lane do not stop, resulting in a collision. Gerry Bedard asked Greg Dodge if combining access had been discussed by the McDonald's and Sunoco property owners. Greg did not know.
- It was asked if the design should be sidewalk on one side or both sides at this location, there were no definitive responses.

Fresh River Road to NH 27/Water Street

Chris Turgeon discussed the alternatives evaluated at this segment. The option currently proposed is a consistent typical section of two 11' travel lanes NB and SB, 14' two way left turn lanes (TWLTL) with 5' shoulders and 6' sidewalks the length of this segment. Thus, the lane merges in this segment would be eliminated and a more consistent corridor would improve capacity. This requires roadway widening and ROW impacts. The lane configurations at the intersections would remain roughly the same. It was noted that the proposed widening would encroach close to the driveways of Aroma Joe's and the property across Route 125 near Janell Ct. The right turn lane and access to Beehive Drive remains similar to the existing. A pork chop island at the Shell station driveway on the southern end of the property is proposed to be formalized which would mean perpetuating right in, right out access only.

- Scott Bogle: Likes the idea of sidewalks in this area due to businesses and some residences and thinks that sidewalks on both sides of the road either to the Rail Trail or NH Route 27 would be useful and provide connectivity to the rail trail. He felt that sidewalk on one side to NH Route 101 would be more appropriate as there was no destination at that section of the project.
- David Walker and Greg Dodge agreed that sidewalks in this area were a good idea.
- Wendy Johnson asked for their thoughts on putting sidewalks on both sides of the road north of Railroad Ave. There was some discussion about the need to have sidewalks on the east side of the road. Scott thought it would be good to have sidewalks on both sides of Route 125. Dan Prehemo said he saw an advantage of having the sidewalk on both sides of the street. There was discussion that there should be sidewalks both sides to Railroad Ave and one sidewalk from Railroad Ave to NH Route 27.
- Greg Dodge stated that he would stop the sidewalk at the rail trail as he doesn't see the need to install sidewalk past that point. He did, however, agree that a sidewalk on the west side of Route 125 might not be a bad idea for pedestrian connectivity to Water Street.
- David Walker asked if we need to limit vehicle access at Railroad Ave to right in and right out. Greg stated that there is no issue at Railroad Ave. that he's aware of.

Lamprey River Crossing Area

Chris Turgeon noted that the NB auxiliary lane over the Lamprey River is proposed to be extended further north than currently exists to allow more time for vehicles to pass slow moving trucks. John Byatt discussed how the width of the existing bridge carrying Route 125 over the Lamprey River would only allow for 4.5-foot shoulders/bike lanes (with lanes narrowed to 11 feet) as opposed to the desired 5-foot shoulders/bike lanes. He noted these 4.5-foot shoulders/bike lanes may be acceptable as the bridge is only 105-feet long, but other options were evaluated. These options include:

1. **Separate bike path/bridge:** Shifting the lanes to the west so a 5-foot shoulder could be provided for bicyclists heading north and providing a separate bike path in the railroad right of way for southbound cyclists. This would require a separate bridge be constructed over the river which could create historic issues if parts of the existing railroad bridge foundations need to be removed. The path would be approximately 10-feet wide to allow room for both pedestrians and bicyclist as pedestrians are bound to use the path also.
2. **Widen the existing highway bridge:** The existing bridge could be widened to provide 5-foot shoulders. Two options evaluated were:

- a. A 6.5-foot widening to add 5-foot shoulders on each side of the bridge (as well as maintain 12-foot lanes.)
 - b. An 18.5-foot widening to add 5-foot shoulders and 8-foot brush curbs on each side of the bridge. The 8-foot brush curbs are to allow for any future pedestrian accommodations approaching the bridge.
- Scott Bogle was concerned with relative costs between alternatives and wanted to weigh the usefulness of the stand-alone bridge against the cost. Scott asked for the cost for each option. John said the costs for each option were very approximately:
 1. Separate bike path/bridge: \$1.3 million
 - 2a. 6.5-foot bridge widening: \$800,000
 - 2b. 18.5-foot bridge widening: \$1.4 million
 - Scott said he believes that cyclists would prefer to stay along NH 125 even with the somewhat narrow 4.5-foot shoulder, rather than detour over the bike path/bridge. However, he did state that pedestrians would use the separate bridge, and that a 4.5' shoulder for pedestrians would be inadequate.
 - Scott also wonders what historical significance the stone abutments and concrete piers hold, but thinks the New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources (NHDHR) would not have much pushback and would appreciate any adaptive reuse of the structures.
 - Greg Dodge agreed with Scott's assessment and thinks the 4.5' shoulder option is the better option. However, he was interested in the use of the railroad corridor as a bike/ped path.
 - Scott thought the bike/ped path should be extended to the medical center.
 - Gerry Bedard noted that the Mill Street Lamprey River crossing is used by pedestrians as an alternative to Route 125.

NH 27 to Coffin Road

Chris Turgeon noted a mostly consistent typical section of 12' lanes, 14' TWLTL and 8' shoulders is proposed through this stretch and consists of mostly pavement resurfacing and restriping. There will be some widening and minimal ROW impacts if any. At the Elm St. intersection, the left turn NB onto Elm and TWLTL SB is maintained. Opposing lefts at Highland Drive were evaluated but didn't warrant left turn lanes as there were no significant safety issues. Carrying the TWLTL thru that intersection is proposed. With regards to access management, modifying the driveway entrance at Telly's Restaurant to prevent SB lefts into the entrance and modifying the BP driveway to make it more defined was evaluated as it is currently open and spread out. One other area of interest for access management is the DMV driveway. It has been discussed that people may have issues making a left turn out the DMV driveway.

- Greg Dodge noted there is a drive connection between the car wash and Telly's. He did not believe there were any issues currently with the access at the Telly's area.
- Wendy Johnson posed a question as to whether people are leaving the DMV through the State maintenance shed. Greg responded that he believed people were doing this. Dave Walker noted that taking a left out of this area is always challenging.
- Greg and David Walker noted that many people turn right out of the DMV driveway and then loop around if they want to go left.
- David asked if access from the DMV through the DOT shed to Coffin Road could be formalized.

- Scott Bogle suggested allowing pedestrians to cross Route 125 at Elm Street by using a pedestrian crossing signal. Chris Turgeon noted that there were no pedestrian counts at this location for the 7-hour window BETA performed traffic counts. Wendy Johnson responded that no pedestrian facilities exist at Elm or along Route 125 in this area so NHDOT would typically not put a pedestrian crossing signal here. Scott said there was no safe crossing for a mile and believes it would give residents the option to cross safely. He also said if they built the facility maybe people would come.

Fogg Road / Coffin Road Intersection presented

Chris Turgeon noted that at this location the proposal is to construct two 12' through lanes in the NB and SB direction through the intersection and then taper back to one lane in the northbound and southbound direction, with 12' left turn lanes onto Fogg and Coffin Rd with 5' shoulders. This configuration will ideally help with capacity issues, backups at the light and the level of service (LOS). As a result of the additional through lanes, there could be changes to access to some abutting properties such as right in/right out only at the Communications Construction Group and NAPA Auto Parts driveways. The Communications Construction Corp property has access on Old Stagecoach Road and NAPA has access on Coffin Road.

- David Walker noted that the intersection is a major location of NB queuing, particularly on weekends, therefore increasing capacity through the intersection would be good. Also, limiting the driveway access creating more driveway definition would be good too.
- Greg Dodge voiced concerns about the 2-lane to 1-lane merges proposed along NH 125 at the Coffin Road intersection as this was what was identified as a problem at the southern end between Fresh River Rd and NH 27 and it simply pushes the problem to the north. Chris explained that the advantage is the queues would be moving during the merge. Subsequent to the meeting, the NHDOT explains that the 2-lane to 1-lane merges along NH 125 at the Coffin Rd intersection will be longer than the ones at the Fresh River Rd and NH 27 intersections and have wider shoulders.

North of Coffin Road to NH Route 87

Chris Turgeon noted that the proposal is to just resurface and restripe to 12' travel lanes in each direction with 8-10' shoulders, similar to the existing with no widening proposed.

NH Route 87 intersection with NH Route 125

Chris Turgeon said three options were evaluated for this intersection:

1. **No changes:** The simplest option is to make no changes to the current configuration. It is important to note this is not a high crash area and it does not meet any signal warrants.
2. **Add opposing left turn lanes:** The road would be widened slightly to provide 12' travel lanes NB and SB and add 12' opposing left turn lanes and 5' shoulders. This would create a more defined intersection and improve safety with the dedicated lefts, especially as this is a high speed 55 mph zone. A left turn warrant is met for SB lefts onto NH Route 87.
3. **Roundabout:** A roundabout to provide turns onto Route 125 while not stopping traffic on Route 125 was evaluated. The benefits are slowing vehicles down in a high-speed area approaching an intersection while still keeping traffic flowing for improved safety. However, this option would result in extensive ROW impacts, and changes to abutting

driveways and access. There are not significant numbers of recent crashes so justifying construction of a roundabout is difficult.

- Greg Dodge noted there was a triple fatality at this intersection 15 years ago. A driver on Route 87 did not see the stop sign, went straight through the intersection, and collided with a tractor-trailer.
- There was discussion of oversize stop signs and advanced warning signs and flashing lights on Route 87. An advance warning sign currently exist but may be obscured by vegetation or is not placed in the proper location.
- David Walker noted that many people travel to Coffin Road instead of trying to take a left onto Route 125. He wondered if the road could be signed to direct traffic to use Coffin Road instead of Route 87.
- David asked if a two-lane roundabout was needed. Chris responded that two lanes greatly improve the LOS.
- David said that although there was limited development (space) at this intersection, he thought the roundabout was too much for what appears to be needed at this intersection, although preferred over a traffic signal.
- Greg noted he does not care for the roundabout option.
- There was discussion about the weekend traffic concerns with increased tourists NB on Fridays and SB on Sundays throughout the corridor.

Next Meetings/Steps

Greg Dodge asked if this presentation could be given to the Selectboard separately and before the planned public informational meeting. Wendy Johnson indicated this could be done. She also suggested that the presentation, with questions added to solicit comments, be sent to the members of the Public Advisory Committee who were unable to attend today's meeting. Subsequent to the meeting, in lieu of this action, it was decided that another Public Advisory Committee meeting would be held in early 2022. Greg said he would send an updated list of the PAC members.

Submitted by:

John Byatt, PE

cc: Attendees
Public Advisory Committee members

Attachments

1. Meeting No. 2 Presentation