

July 20, 2022

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

CONFERENCE REPORT

PROJECT: Epping 29608
NH Route 125 Capacity Improvements

DATE OF CONFERENCE: April 18, 2022

LOCATION OF CONFERENCE: Selectboard Meeting
Epping Town Hall

ATTENDED BY:

Town Officials

Joe Trombley, Chairman
Tom Gauthier, Vice Chairman
Michael Yergeau, Selectman
Bob Jordan, Selectman
John Cody, Selectman
Greg Dodge, Town Administrator
Joyce Blanchard, Board Secretary
Chief DeAngelis (fire)
Heather Clark, Vice Chair of the Planning Board
Mike Sudak, Planning Board
Members of the Epping Planning Board

Project Team

Wendy Johnson – NHDOT, Project Manager
Dan Prehemo – NHDOT, Design Group Leader
Chris Turgeon - BETA Group, Inc., Engineering Design Consultant
John Byatt – BETA Group, Inc., Engineering Design Consultant

SUBJECT: Public Officials Meeting

NOTES ON CONFERENCE:

W. Johnson thanked the Board for the time to present the project status and the project team introduced themselves. J. Byatt started the presentation by noting the project limits; the project background and the project needs and objectives. He then discussed the current project status which is that the project is in the alternative evaluation and public participation phase. BETA, the consultant firm leading the design, has developed a draft Alternatives Study which has been reviewed by NHDOT. This meeting was to present the alternatives evaluated in the report and to

receive comments from the Selectboard and Planning Board. An update on the schedule was also provided. The project has been delayed and the current advertising date of October 2024 will most likely be moved out.

J. Trombley asked how long the construction of the project would take and if consideration had been given to doing the work at night, the Town did not object to night work. W. Johnson responded that the project could take two to three years to construct and that specifics of nighttime work versus daytime work had not been evaluated yet as the DOT is only in the beginning phases of the design.

J. Trombley also mentioned that he believes portions of the roadway may have a concrete base.

C. 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 Brentwood/Epping town line, to the Fresh River Rd/Main St intersection. Intersections within this segment are located at Brickyard Square, NH Route 101/125 interchange (EB ramps, and WB ramps) and at Fresh River Road. This segment includes minimal geometric improvements. The current proposal includes pavement resurfacing and restriping to maintain the existing lane and intersection configurations, while providing 5' shoulders throughout the segment and maintaining the existing curb and sidewalk. The 5' shoulders would be accommodated by restriping the travel lanes from 12' to 11'. New pedestrian sidewalk ramps have been constructed recently. Asphalt sidewalks exist on the west side of Rt 125 from the Brickyard square to Main Street and from the Park and Ride entrance to Rt 101 interchange on the east side. The main proposed improvement in this segment is signal system coordination and optimization between the four signals to improve traffic operations and level of service (LOS).

- It was concluded that no additional sidewalk on NH Route 125 from NH Route 101 to Fresh River Road was needed.

Park and Ride entrance realignment

C. Turgeon discussed an alternative to realign 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 potentially encourage more use of the facility. This proposal will require additional signal equipment and upgrades to the infrastructure at this existing intersection. It was noted that this concept impacts the existing wetland system along the east side of NH 125, opposite the Brickyard Square Plaza entrance. In addition, it may require a median along the proposed Southbound NH 125 left turn lane, which would restrict Northbound left turn access to CVS and Mobil.

- J. Trombley noted that 50% of the park and ride has already been closed off with the limited use. He stated the impacts to the wetlands are significant.
- J. Trombley expressed interest in extending the median further to eliminate unsafe left turns.
- T. Gauthier asked if the changes to the CVS and Mobil access had been discussed with the businesses. W. Johnson noted that the DOT is not at the point in the process where

the impacts are discussed with businesses or abutters yet and will occur as part of the design process should that proposal be selected to move forward as part of the project improvements.

- T. Gauthier noted that connecting the sidewalks from Fresh River Road to the Park and Ride does not make sense to him.

McDonald's / Dunkin Donuts/Sunoco/XtraMart access

C. 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 been documented. The current proposal for this location is to maintain the existing configuration. It was noted that there is a shared access easement to NH 125 between these properties at this location.

- T. Gauthier indicated that the lights at Walmart are working well. He asked if there was any consideration given to a spur road at the Extra Mart/McDonald's drive to Main Street as there are concerns with left turns out of McDonald's. J. Trombley was not in favor of this suggestions.
- T. Gauthier noted he would like to see an access road between the properties.
- J. Trombley suggested timing the lights to make is easier for vehicles to get a gap in traffic to make left turns in and out of the McDonalds.

Fresh River Road to NH Route 27/Water Street

C. 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, a 14' two way left turn lane (TWLTL), 5' shoulders and 6' sidewalks for the length of this segment. Thus, the existing 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 NH Route 125 near Janell Court. The right turn lane and access to Beehive Drive would remain similar to the existing condition.

The Selectman and Planning Board were asked for input on sidewalks within this segment. It was noted and shown on the slides that proposed sidewalks in the current plan are shown on both sides of the road from Fresh River Road to Water Street. It was asked if sidewalks are desired from the rail trail to Water Street and if so, are sidewalks preferred on one or both sides of the road.

- T. Gauthier said he thought a sidewalk would be appropriate on the east side of Route 125 from the rail trail to Water Street. He said the sidewalk was not needed on the west side as pedestrians would use Main Street.
- J. Trombley said he does not see the need for sidewalks on both sides of Route 125 from the rail trail to Water Street. He was concerned with vehicles stopping on NH Route 125 for this crossing from a capacity standpoint.
- T. Gauthier indicated a sidewalk from the rail trail to Water Street was needed, noting there was future development planned about ¼ of a mile from this intersection.
- Heather Clarke of the Planning Board stated she believes sidewalks should be constructed on both sides of Route 125 in this area.

- T. Gauthier indicated that people on the west side of NH Route 125 would stay on Main Street versus using NH Route 125.
- B. Jordan noted that LED lighting was needed in pedestrian areas for safety reasons. He said drivers cannot see pedestrians without lighting. Subsequent to the meeting, it was learned that the Town of Epping does not have a lighting policy.
- J. Trombley noted that curbs for sidewalks are a safety issue as vehicles can jump the curbs and expressed concern over sidewalks in high-speed locations.
- A representative of the Public Works department stated that maintenance of sidewalks is difficult and costly, particularly winter maintenance, as about 1,000 feet of sidewalk takes about 3 hours to clear in the winter.
- J. Trombley asked if there were plans to widen Water Street at the intersection of Route 125 as he thought he had seen a widening shown on a previous set of plans. W. Johnson stated that there were no plans to widen Water Street.
- The conclusion was, considering maintenance, speed, and potential for added congestion:
 - Fresh River Road to the rail trail on both sides of NH Route 125
 - From the rail trail to Water Street (NH Route 27) on the east side of NH Route 125 only.

Lamprey River Crossing Area

C. Turgeon noted that the Northbound 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. J. Byatt discussed how the width of the existing bridge carrying NH Route 125 over the Lamprey River would allow for 4.5-foot shoulders/bike lanes (with travel lanes narrowed to 11 feet versus 12 feet that exists today). He noted these 4.5-foot shoulders/bike lanes are acceptable but other options were evaluated to consider pedestrians. These options include:

1. **Widen the existing highway bridge:** The existing bridge could be widened to provide 5-foot shoulders with 12 lanes. Two options evaluated were:
 - At least a 6.5-foot widening to add 5-foot shoulders on each side of the bridge (as well as maintain 12-foot lanes.)
 - At least 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 could allow for any future pedestrian accommodations on the bridge.
2. **Separate bike path/bridge:**
This option was eliminated as there was no support for it from the Public Advisory Committee.
 - J. Trombley stated he liked the idea of repurposing the existing railroad bridge abutments. J. Byatt noted that if a separate structure were constructed here, most of the existing abutment would be removed as a result of the grades, and the structural capacity of the piers would need to be investigated.
 - B. Jordan was not interested in a separate pedestrian bridge over the Lamprey River

NH Route 27 to Coffin Road

C. Turgeon noted a mostly consistent proposed typical section of 12' lanes, a 14' TWLTL and 8' shoulders through this stretch consisting of mostly pavement resurfacing and restriping. There will be some widening and minimal ROW impacts, and there are no sidewalks proposed in this

segment. At the Elm Street intersection, the left turn Northbound onto Elm Street and TWLTL Southbound is maintained. Opposing left turn needs at Highland Drive were evaluated but didn't warrant left turn lanes, and there were no known significant safety issues at this location. Carrying the TWLTL through that intersection is proposed.

- J. Trombley said he likes the idea of sidewalk and bike access north of Water Street to access businesses and residential areas in the northern section but is concerned about safety and current need.
- W. Johnson suggested the Town could consider making accommodations now for extending the sidewalks in the future.
- B. Jordan indicated he wanted to get the design right now as they have waited a long time for this project. His biggest concern was the loss of lighting in the corridor.
- T. Gauthier said two lanes in each direction should be continued to Coffin Road instead of merging after Water Street.
- The selectboard members stated that there are significant backups along Route 125 on Friday and Saturday nights going northbound and Sunday nights going southbound.
- Chief DeAngelis stated that this area is congested all the time.
- Mike Sudak of the Planning Board said he is in favor of two lanes in each direction from Water Street to Coffin Road.
- D. Prehemo said that traffic congestion is caused mainly by the signalized intersections and using two lanes at the intersections to get as many cars through as possible will alleviate congestion just as well as two lanes in each direction the entire way. Merges after the intersections will not create significant congestion in this area.

Fogg Road / Coffin Road Intersection presented

C. Turgeon noted that at this location the proposal is to construct two 12' through lanes in the Northbound and Southbound direction through the intersection and then taper back to one lane in the northbound and southbound direction, with 12' left turn lanes onto Fogg Road and Coffin Road with 5' shoulders. This configuration will ideally help with capacity issues, backups at the light and the level of service (LOS).

- H. Clarke said crosswalks should be included at the Fogg/Coffin Road intersection. She said there will be development in that area and children will try to cross Route 125.

North of Coffin Road to NH Route 87

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

- There were no comments for this section.

NH Route 87 intersection with NH Route 125

C. Turgeon said three options were evaluated for this intersection:

1. **No changes:** Maintain the current configuration. He noted that the available data does not indicate that this is a high crash area and does not meet any signal warrants.
2. **Add opposing left turn lanes:** The road would be widened slightly to provide 12' travel lanes Northbound and Southbound and add 12' opposing left turn lanes with 5' shoulders. This would create a more defined intersection and improve safety with the dedicated lefts, especially as this is a 55-mph zone. A left turn warrant is met for Southbound lefts onto NH Route 87.

3. **Roundabout:** A roundabout to provide turns onto NH Route 125 while not stopping traffic on NH Route 125 was evaluated. This option was eliminated as there was no support for it from the Public Advisory Committee.
 - C. Turgeon also noted that tree trimming at the existing stop signs and advance signage on Route 87 is recommended to help drivers know there is an intersection there and they must stop.
 - The Selectboard asked that a traffic light be placed at this intersection due to the number of fatalities and severe injuries at this location.
 - Bob Jordan noted that most accidents at this location are very serious and not just minor fender benders. He encouraged the DOT representatives to Google accidents at the intersection of Route 87 and Route 125 where several fatalities are indicated.
 - The Selectboard asked if the project team had the crash information. W. Johnson stated that crash information was received from the Department of Safety and includes all crashes reported by the Town. If the Town had other information that was not reported to the Department of Safety, then the DOT would like to receive this information from the Town.
 - There was a question from the audience about drainage concerns at the corner of NH Route 125/NH Route 87. This will be reviewed/evaluated in upcoming phases of design.

General Comments:

- H. Clark also said right-in/right-out only turns do not always work well in practice as people will still take a left where they are not supposed to.
- J. Trombley indicated there is no desire for a continuous median. This should not look like Plaistow. Epping wants to maintain a small-town feel. Islands should only be placed at the southern end of the project near the intersection of NH Route 101.
- J. Trombley asked if drainage would be looked at during the project design. W. Johnson said it would be looked at but the design has not progressed that far yet.
- J. Trombley asked to see the engineering calculations and reports when they are complete.

Submitted by:

John Byatt, PE

Attachments

1. Meeting Presentation