



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Project Advisory Committee Meeting #2

**Brattleboro Municipal Center
230 Main Street
Brattleboro, VT 05301**

MINUTES

March 13, 2017

Project Advisory Committee: Peter Elwell (Chair), *Town Manager, Town of Brattleboro, VT*; Michael Abbott, *Representative, New Hampshire State Legislature*; Jen Austin, *Coordinator, The Downtown Brattleboro Alliance*; Mollie Burke, *Representative, Vermont State Legislature* (via conference call); Steve Diorio, *Board of Selectmen Vice Chair, Town of Hinsdale, NH*; Rod Francis, *Planning Director, Town of Brattleboro, VT*; John Gomarolo, *Member/Resident, SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee/Town of Winchester, NH*; Bob Harcke, *President, Hinsdale Commercial and Industrial Development Commission*; Fred Moriarty, *Board of Trustees Treasurer, Brattleboro Museum and Art Center*; Kate O'Connor, *Executive Director, Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce*; Edwin Smith, *Member/Resident, SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee/Town of Hinsdale, NH*; Lew Sorenson, *Member/Resident, WRC Transportation Committee/Town of Dummerston, VT*

Project Advisory Committee Lead Team: Chris Baker, *Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans)*; Chris Company, *Windham Regional Commission (WRC)*; Raul Gonzalez, *Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC)*; Dan Landry, *(VTTrans)* (Via Conference Call); Don Lyford, *NHDOT*; J. B. Mack, *SWRPC*; Erica Roper, *WRC*; Bill Saffian, *NHDOT*; David Scott, *NHDOT*; and Trent Zanes, *NHDOT*

Guests: Stephen Barrett, *Director of Public Works, Town of Brattleboro, VT*; Frank Podlenski, *Highway Superintendent, Town of Hinsdale, NH*

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Elwell called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and all attendees introduced themselves.

II. Approval of Minutes of February 1, 2017 Meeting

The minutes of February 1, 2017 were approved by unanimous vote.

III. Project Advisory Committee Questionnaire

Don Lyford began the meeting by explaining that NHDOT would prepare the existing bridges over the Connecticut River for pedestrian and bicycle use once the new bridge is constructed. He added that it is likely that NHDOT would make it so both pedestrian and bicycle activity would be situated in the travel lanes. The existing cantilevered sidewalks would be removed. He envisions bollards on either side of the bridge to prevent vehicles from entering the bridges. Once initial preparations are completed, the towns of Hinsdale and Brattleboro would be responsible for keeping the bridges open for bicycle and pedestrian use. The states of New Hampshire and Vermont would be responsible for structural repairs. He stated that it is

likely that with no vehicle traffic on the old bridges, there would be much less structural repair needed once the initial bridge improvements are completed.

Michael Abbott recommended that the new Hinsdale-Brattleboro bridge project be considered separately from the old bridges. He stated that the initial concerns regarding the bridge project should be safety, followed by functionality. He also said that it will be important to not hold up new bridge's construction schedule by focusing on the old bridges. Don Lyford replied that NHDOT would likely advertise work on the old bridges as another project.

Don Lyford referred to the questionnaire that was distributed as part of the meeting packet which begins with a question as to whether a sidewalk should be incorporated into the new bridge design. Steve Diorio stated his belief that most people will walk or bicycle using the old bridges. He stated his concern regarding bicycle traffic on Route 142. Fred Moriarty stated that many pedestrians would likely opt to use the old bridge route as a convenience as it is closer to downtown Brattleboro and does not slope to the degree that the new bridge would. Edwin Smith replied that there are functions that the new bridge would have that the old bridges do not have, especially since the new bridge will last longer, and that it is important to include sidewalks on the new bridge. Peter Elwell added that, in the absence of sufficient funds being committed to a trust fund, he had previously believed that the committee should consider the possibility of making the pedestrian use of the new bridge as desirable as possible and removing the old bridges as part of this project. His concern was regarding Hinsdale and Brattleboro having to shoulder the structural costs of the bridge. However, if NHDOT is looking for maintenance and not structural funding from the towns, he sees no issue with keeping the old bridges.

Frank Podlenski asked what Brattleboro could do for removing snow from the bridge given that most of the bridge is in Hinsdale. Steve Barrett said that Hinsdale and Brattleboro could enter into an agreement that would work for both communities. Don Lyford added that Vermont Route 142 would have a shoulder and a path that could be used for bicyclists and pedestrians. Lew Sorenson asked if the shoulders on the new bridge could also be used for bicycles. Don Lyford stated that they could be used by bicyclists.

Motion: To include a sidewalk on the new Hinsdale-Brattleboro Bridge.

Motion by Edwin Smith, seconded by Bob Harcke. Approved by unanimous vote.

Michael Abbott commented that he believed the bridge rail should be simpler and that outlooks on the bridge would not be used. Don Lyford said that in 2005, CN Carley Associates, an architecture and planning consultant hired by NHDOT, came up with more elaborate bridge designs, including a "nautical" theme and sweeping piers. Lew Sorenson asked if the sidewalk would only be on the north side of the bridge. Don Lyford confirmed that it would be. Lew Sorenson added that would be an opportunity for motorists and, in particular, their passengers to see the river and the landscape. Michael Abbott asked if the past delays in bridge construction were because of the elaborate bridge design from CN Carley Associates. Don Lyford replied that this was not necessarily the case, and that NHDOT's other Ten Year Plan project priorities were more of a factor.

Frank Podlenski commented that certain railings are better for snow removal than others. Bill Saffian commented that NHDOT's standard steel rails do not require balusters whereas the concept presented by CN Carley Associates has the need for balusters to address spaces between rails. Peter Elwell asked if the rail would be required to be crash tested to withstand a 35 mph test-level crash. David Scott stated that NHDOT has not yet noticed the need for the rail to go through the crash test. Edwin Smith inquired on the bridge speed limit and Bill Saffian replied that it would be 35 mph.

Edwin Smith said that if there are less barriers in the way of snowplows, and if there are no barriers between the sidewalk and the travel way, that it would be preferred. Frank Podlenski asked what the sidewalk reveal would be. Bill Saffian responded that it would be seven inches in height. Lew Sorenson asked what the width of the sidewalk would be. Bill Saffian said the minimum width of the sidewalk would be six feet. Peter Elwell also added that an eight-foot wide vehicle breakdown lane would abut the sidewalk. Frank Podlenski noted that, with a low sidewalk reveal in place, Hinsdale could potentially plow most of the sidewalk with its regular plows if the Town is unable to deploy its sidewalk snow clearing equipment quickly.

Lew Sorenson asked if there would be lighting on the bridge railing. Bill Saffian stated that he was not aware of railings with built-in lighting and that running conduit might be a maintenance issue. Lew Sorenson added that he would like to see options that could include alternative lighting techniques, instead of just the standard lighting. Fred Moriarty stated that he would prefer keeping the lighting simple and standard.

Peter Elwell asked if having a standard rail on the outside area of the bridge and no rail on the inside would preclude the light designs in relation to the rail system. Bill Saffian said that NHDOT would look into it. David Scott said that he believed so, but if not, they could come back to discuss that issue at the next PAC meeting.

Motion: To incorporate a standard (T4) rail on the outside of the bridge, and no rail separating the sidewalk from the roadway.

Motion by Michael Abbott, seconded by Edwin Smith. Approved by unanimous vote.

Don Lyford then discussed the question regarding overlooks on the bridges. Peter Elwell asked if NHDOT has a recommendation regarding overlooks. Bill Saffian says that it's NHDOT's preference to avoid overlooks that require extra support from the bridge piers. He showed some pictures of overlooks that don't require the extra support. The shorter and smaller design would be a cost savings over the Carley concept. Don Lyford explained that sometimes overlooks are used for fishing as well. However, he said he did not see the overlooks being used for fishing in this case because of the bridge's height. Bill Saffian said that NHDOT would prefer to not have such a large overlook.

Michael Abbott stated that he did not see a purpose of having an overlook, especially since Hinsdale Island would serve that purpose. Lew Sorenson said that he would support a modest overlook and would leave it to the design person as to where it would be located. He added that he thinks it would be appropriate to determine the most desirable location. Peter Elwell said that what the PAC is saying is that they are open to the possibility of small overlooks, but are requesting the design team to not have large overlooks that would require structural changes to the bridge.

Motion: To limit the number of overlooks and to not include overlooks that require extensive structural changes to bridge piers.

Motion by Michael Abbott, seconded by Bob Harcke. Approved by unanimous vote.

Bill Saffian began a discussion about pier design and showed the Carley pier design which has a gap near where the bridge meets the pier. He explained that the design would be a long-term maintenance concern because birds are likely to congregate in the gap. Bird activity would deteriorate the concrete over time.

Bill Saffian went on to show the shape of the Carley pier. He noted that the Carley pier design is not structurally necessary. It was designed for its aesthetics and meant to look nautical. He explained that

bridge piers can be developed in various shapes including V, upside-down V or straight up and down. He explained there are other types of aesthetic treatments that can be made to piers and presented images of different treatments for the exterior façade of the pier. NHDOT could include form liners on the pier. There are multiple examples of form design ranging from faux stone to more modern facades. He showed another design example that gives the appearance of negative space in the pier.

Steve Diorio asked if bridge form liners would be expensive and he stated that he liked the way they look. He asked if this was similar to a bridge he has seen in Brattleboro. Bill Saffian added that they would be a modest increase, but that putting up a large sweeping pier like the Carley concept would be a significant cost in the neighborhood of several million dollars. Chris Baker said that he believes Steve Diorio is referring to the West River Bridge, and that the bridge uses actual stone rather than a form liner. Michael Abbott asked if the liners could only be seen from below the bridge and not from the bridge itself. Bill Saffian said that was correct.

Fred Moriarty asked if the design of the piers would be shaped like a V or an inverted V. Bill Saffian replied that NHDOT has the flexibility to do either and there are other hybrid examples. Erica Roper added that it seems like the committee is not attached to having the large sweeping curves and suggested that the committee make a motion not be committed to a specific design. Peter Elwell said that the committee could make a motion to adopt a traditional pier without any voids in it for birds to nest. He also would like the design team to provide options regarding the piers' design. Bill Saffian noted that there will be seven piers on the bridge. Peter Elwell added that, unlike the I-91 bridges which are straight, people would see the piers as they approach this curved bridge, particularly on the Hinsdale side.

Motion: To have the shape of the piers be a more traditional style rather than the Carley concept style and to avoid piers with gaps that encourage bird activity.

Motion by Edwin Smith, seconded by Fred Moriarty. Approved by unanimous vote.

Peter Elwell said that it might be best that the PAC wait to answer the remaining design questions for other meetings so that the project lead team can develop some new drawings to show the decisions that have been made so far. Don Lyford added that through today's meeting, NHDOT now has answers to five questions on the questionnaire. He added that the question on whether to incorporate a pedestrian landing at the intersection of VT 142 and NH 119 could be discussed at a later point. Lew Sorenson suggested that the landing be more modest as he is concerned with the location being used as a homeless camp. Rod Francis added that the old bridges would be used for pedestrian use and that if a sidewalk is put on VT 142, it would be unappealing to bicyclists and pedestrians. He said the project may want to consider putting the sidewalk on the south side of the new bridge as well.

J. B. Mack asked if Brattleboro had any long-term plans for opening up the waterfront area for bicyclists and pedestrians and how that would relate to the bridge design. Rod Francis replied that Depot Street has a parking lot for Amtrak and for local businesses and will remain in its current form. Closer to the bridge is a tank farm. At least a third of the lot will be used for the bridge project and it remains to be seen whether the remaining two thirds (which also include tanks) will be purchased by VTrans. The Town of Brattleboro's preference is that it becomes open space. It can then be used by bicyclists and pedestrians to travel under the bridge and can have them avoid traveling on VT 142. Peter Elwell added there is a trestle bridge that Brattleboro is working on with Hinsdale. This could connect to the New Hampshire trails that go to Keene and beyond and would be a tremendous recreational resource. Rod Francis added that trails would be connected to form a figure 8 with Hinsdale and Brattleboro right in the middle. He also added that if the old bridges are taken down in 30 years' time, there would still be a need for bicyclists and pedestrians to cross the river.

Motion: To have the railing detail on the northern side of the bridge follow the contours as shown in the NHDOT CADD Plan View of Corner Contours, 2016 (as shown in slide 15 of the February 1, 2017 NHDOT presentation).

Motion by Rod Francis, seconded by Lew Sorenson. Approved by unanimous vote.

IV. Next Steps

Peter Elwell asked what the next steps would be for the Project Advisory Committee. Don Lyford said that he believes NHDOT has to do some more engineering and design work before next steps are made. Peter Elwell added that it would be helpful if drawings and renderings are incorporated in the design process. David Scott asked the committee to provide NHDOT with pictures of the designs that they liked.

V. Next Meeting

Peter Elwell suggested that a poll be sent out early so that the committee may have ample time to choose a date for the next meeting. J.B. Mack suggested putting out another Doodle poll to select the next meeting date.

VI. Public Comment

There were no additional public comments.

VII. Adjourn

Respectfully submitted,

Raul Gonzalez
Planner
Southwest Region Planning Commission