

Fourteen Years Later – the Reconstruction Begins at Exit 20 of I-89

Bill Clinton was still in his first term in the White House when Don Lyford began as the NHDOT project manager for the I-89 Exit 20 interchange reconstruction project in Lebanon in 1996.

The project aimed at addressing congestion issues along a busy commercial corridor on NH 12A near the Connecticut River and the Vermont state line has taken a few twists and turns over the past 14 years. But Lyford says the project now under construction in 2010 actually closely resembles what was first presented at a 1999 public hearing.

“The original plan was bigger with more property and business impacts along Route 12A,” Don Lyford recalls. “In response to concerns expressed by the City of Lebanon and the business community, the project was scaled back to just the interchange.”

The project involves the reconstruction and widening of Route 12A from 5 to 7 lanes at Exit 20 of I-89 to improve traffic flow. It also involves the construction of a new connector road that will connect the Upper Valley Plaza and the K-Mart Plaza, and includes the construction of an underpass under I-89.

In order to make room for the widening of Route 12A, the I-89 bridges will be demolished and new, longer bridges will be built. All the interchange on and off ramps will also be widened and realigned.

In what amounted to what is now known as “context sensitive solutions”, Don Lyford said the design of the project evolved to eventual consensus by the NHDOT working with a local committee which had input on everything from the scope of the project to lighting and the planned detailing of the concrete bridge arches. It wasn’t always easy.

“An initial one page agreement for the eventual shared maintenance of the connector road between the state, the city and the two shopping plazas grew to an eight page document before it was accepted by all parties,” Lyford says.

The first of three summer construction seasons for the \$20.3 million project will see the demolition of the existing I-89 southbound bridge over Route 12A and the construction of a new longer bridge. Work is also underway on the new connector road and utility relocation.

Funding for the project is from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. That funding freed up previously committed federal funds to pay for the construction of 35 local road and bridge projects across the state, including 19 bridges on the Municipal Red List.