

Meeting Summary

Project: Lebanon 29612 – I-89 Exit 18 / NH Route 120 Improvements

Event: Project Advisory Committee Meeting (PAC) #1

Date and Time: Thursday, December 17, 2020, 4:00 – 5:30 PM

Location: Zoom Online Meeting Platform

1. Attendees

PAC Members

Erica Brittner, Assistant City Engineer, City of Lebanon
Megan Butts, Interim Director, Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
Jennie Chamberlain, Chair, Hanover Bike Walk Committee
Van Chestnut, Executive Director/Member, Advance Transit/Upper Valley Transportation Management Association
James Donison, Director of Public Works, City of Lebanon
David F. Duncan, Vice President of Facilities Management, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center
Bethanny Fleishman, Transportation Program Manager, Vital Communities
Bruce Garland, Lebanon Commissioner, Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
Rebecca Owens, Associate Planner, City of Lebanon Planning
Perry Seale, Facilities Manager, Hypertherm
Colin Smith, Chair, City of Lebanon Pedestrian & Bicyclist Advisory Committee
Brian Vincent, City Engineer, City of Lebanon

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT)

Margarete Baldwin, Roadway Section Group Leader
John Butler, Highway Design Engineer
Donald Lyford, Project Manager

Consultant Team

Roch Larochelle, Consultant Team Project Manager (HDR)
Rick Plenge, Project Engineer (HDR)
Smith Siromaskul, Senior Traffic Engineer (HDR)
John Stockton, Senior Structural Engineer (HDR)
Kenneth Howe, Roadway Designer (HDR)
Susan Bemis, Environmental Resources (FHI)
Marcy Miller, Public Involvement Manager (FHI)
Laura Parete, Public Involvement Specialist (FHI)

2. Presentation Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) hosted the first PAC meeting for the Lebanon 29612 project on Thursday, December 17, 2020, from 4:00 – 5:30 PM via the Zoom Online Meeting platform. Ms. Marcy Miller, FHI Public Involvement Manager, welcomed the PAC members. Ms. Miller introduced key project team members, reviewed the meeting agenda, discussed the role of the PAC on the project, and provided an overview of how to participate in the virtual PAC meeting.

Ms. Miller explained that the members of the PAC each represent a different group in the community and that the project team wants to hear their feedback. She asked the meeting attendees to introduce themselves and the organization they represent. Ms. Miller explained the importance of the PAC in spreading project information to the community and helping to inform the study process. PAC meetings will be held virtually, for now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be assessed on a meeting-by-meeting basis. PAC meetings will be held at different milestones or when the team has new information to share.

Mr. Roch Larochelle, Consultant Team Project Manager, provided an overview of the project's background and objectives. He discussed the initial project area limits, previous improvements, project development, and ongoing study efforts. Mr. Larochelle explained that the primary objectives of the project are to reduce traffic congestion, improve safety and mobility for all users, minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources, and support the economic needs of the community. Mr. Larochelle paused to ask if the PAC had questions or comments. Questions and comments are noted later in this document.

Mr. Larochelle discussed the project approach. He explained that the project began in late Summer 2020 and the team recently started collecting data. The team is identifying a comprehensive list of mobility issues, which will help inform the goals, establish a vision, and develop a Purpose and Need for the study. As the project progresses, the team will develop conceptual alternatives, which will be shared with the PAC and public to gain their feedback. Once a preliminary design is selected, it will advance to the Final Design phase under a separate contract. Mr. Larochelle paused to ask if the PAC had questions or comments. Questions and comments are noted later in this document.

Ms. Miller provided an overview of community outreach efforts for the project. She explained that a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is posted on the NHDOT's website. The PIP is a living document, which outlines public outreach efforts throughout the project. Ms. Miller explained that the Project Team has developed a postcard, which has information about an online survey and interactive map. The postcard will be distributed to constituents in the project area to encourage them to identify mobility needs on the interactive map and to complete the survey. Ms. Miller asked PAC Members to help disseminate information to their distribution lists or interested parties. She explained that public feedback on the map and survey will help to inform the study.

Mr. Larochelle concluded the formal presentation portion of the meeting by explaining the next steps. He said the project is in the data collection phase. The Project Team is collecting the data needed to inform the study. He encouraged the PAC to send community surveys, data, and information about previous work in the area that they feel would be helpful to the Project Team. Mr. Larochelle reviewed the project schedule and stated that the survey and interactive map would be available through Spring 2021. A public meeting is targeted for February 2021. The next PAC meeting is targeted for April 2021.

During the presentation, PAC members asked questions and offered other comments. Questions are noted below in italics with responses made by NHDOT or the consultant team members. Comments are included at the end.

3. Discussion

Questions

Q – What metrics will be used to measure project “success”?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that we are collecting traffic data from various sources including proposed and approved developments along the corridor which are being used to develop a base traffic model. Mr. Smith Siromaskul said that the Project Team is aware of traffic congestion and existing conditions, which will be evaluated as part of the study. He noted that Level of Service/delay metrics will be considered for vehicular travel modes, but that improvements for all modes are being considered.

Q – Is there anything that can be done to improve the bicycle/pedestrian conditions?

A – Mr. Plenge said that the Project Team is looking at opportunities for bicycle/pedestrian improvements along and crossing the corridor. He said that there are a lot of good recommendations for off-street systems that being considered. Mr. Plenge added that the Project Team was not able to get data for normal bicycle/pedestrian patterns before COVID-19, but they have received reliable background data from the municipalities. Mr. Siromaskul mentioned that the Project Team would like input from the PAC on areas of importance and places that can use mobility improvements.

Q – Can you tell us more about the recommendations and what they may entail?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that we are not sure of the solutions yet, but we are going to look at safety and mobility for all users. Recommendations will be developed throughout the study with consideration of comments provided through the public process.

Q – Have you considered sources like Streetlight data that would have bicycle and pedestrian trip data? What type of data is being used to track bicycling and walking?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that there are some limitations with Streetlight data. It is important during COVID-19 conditions, but the Project Team is using big source data that is more robust than Streetlight and provides a broader view of the region for Pre-COVID-19 conditions to account for missing information.

Q – Are pedestrians being counted?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that the Project Team has raw data sets with pedestrian and bicycle counts that were completed in November 2020, while school was in full-session and before snow.

Q – Will counts be done during more seasonable weather?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that since the original counts were taken in late fall and were very low there may be a desire to collect additional information in the spring for a better representation.

Q – Would the Project Team consider using Strava heat map data?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said the Team has considered this resource however acknowledged that the dataset in Strava works well at counting recreational bicycling trips. It does not reflect utilitarian pedestrian and bicycling trips as well.

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Q – Is there an opportunity for members of the PAC to provide the Project Team with new information about possible upcoming developments in the project area without messing up creation of the base model?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that anything the PAC can provide would be helpful. Mr. Siromaskul added that it is not difficult to layer on new data once the base is created.

Comments

- Most trips in Grafton County are five miles or less. Please look at more opportunities for walking and biking in the area. A representative from the City of Lebanon offered to send the Project Team this data.
- Please be aware of traffic diversion using Exit 17 to avoid congestion at Exit 18. The Project Team said that they are aware of and evaluating this area as part of the study.
- Clear and strong recommendations must come out of this project. This project may not be able to solve all issues, but it should set a framework for other potential complimentary projects.
- There have been a lot of studies out there and a lot of talk about the things we want. We do not want more lanes and more pavement. Congestion only occurs during relatively short periods of time overall.
- Many people are walking with grocery bags and the project team should be sure they (pedestrians making local trips) are being included in study data. Please keep an eye out for this because many places are not functioning at full capacity right now due to the pandemic.
- There are several new developments just outside the study area. Consider the cumulative impacts of these projects.
- Thursdays from 4:00 PM – 5: 30 PM are a good time for the PAC to meet if they have advanced notice.
- A PAC member requested for meetings to not be held on the fourth Thursday of each month.