

Meeting Summary

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

Event: Project Advisory Committee Meeting (PAC) #2

Date and Time: Thursday, April 29, 2021, 4:00 – 6:00 PM

Location: Zoom Online Meeting Platform

1. Attendees

PAC Members

Megan Butts, Interim Director, Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
Van Chestnut, Executive Director/Member, Advance Transit/Upper Valley Transportation Management Association
Bethanny Fleishman, Transportation Program Manager, Vital Communities
Julia Griffin, Town Manager, Town of Hanover
Robert Houseman, Director of Planning and Zoning, Town of Hanover
Peter Kulbacki, Public Works Director, Town of Hanover
Ernst Oidtmann, Chair, City of Lebanon Conservation Commission
Rebecca Owens, Associate Planner, City of Lebanon Planning
Fritjof Pameijer, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center
Joanne Roberts, Superintendent, Lebanon School District
Colin Smith, Chair, City of Lebanon Pedestrian & Bicyclist Advisory Committee
Brian Vincent, City of Lebanon Engineering

Other Attendees

Alex Belenz, Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
James Donison, Director of Public Works, City of Lebanon
Phone Caller (unidentified)

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

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

Consultant Team

Roch Larochelle, Consultant Team Project Manager (HDR)
Keith Cota, Project Engineer (HDR)
Smith Siromaskul, Senior Traffic Engineer (HDR)
John Stockton, Senior Structural Engineer (HDR)
Kenneth Howe, Roadway Designer (HDR)
Bryan St. George, Project Engineer (HDR)
Susan Bemis, Environmental Resources (FHI Studio)

Marcy Miller, Public Involvement Manager (FHI Studio)
Laura Parete, Public Involvement Specialist (FHI Studio)

2. Presentation Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) hosted the second PAC meeting for the Lebanon 29612 Project on Thursday, April 29, 2021, from 4:00 – 6:00 PM via the Zoom Online Meeting platform. Ms. Marcy Miller, FHI Studio Public Involvement Manager, welcomed the PAC members. Ms. Miller introduced key project team members, reviewed the meeting agenda, and provided an overview of how to participate in the virtual PAC meeting.

Ms. Miller explained that project team members would give task updates. She provided an overview of the public outreach tasks that have occurred since the first PAC Meeting in December 2020. The project held a Public Information Meeting on February 25, 2021. The team launched a survey and interactive map to collect feedback from the public and learn about the multi-modal transportation improvements and needs that are important to people in the study area. Over 527 responses were collected from the questionnaire and 425 from the interactive map. The top themes of the responses were to reduce speed and traffic congestion, preserve natural resources, and improve pedestrian and bike facilities along NH Route 120 between Hanover and Lebanon.

Ms. Susan Bemis, FHI Studio Environmental Resources, provided an update on the environmental work. The study team conducted initial field screenings of wetland areas and habitat. They reviewed and collected data on stream crossings, floodplains, conservation lands, and threatened and endangered species. The study team is conducting agency coordination with the NH Natural Heritage Bureau, the USFWS, and via the NHDOT Natural Resources Agency Meeting held in April. Ms. Bemis discussed environmental compliance, noting that it will include National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 4(f), Section 6(f), and supporting studies. She summarized the cultural resources work done to date, including submitting the Request for Project Review to NH Division of Historical Resources. She noted that those interested in the Section 106 consultation process should contact Jamie Sikora at FHWA to participate. Ms. Miller asked if the PAC had questions or comments. Questions and comments are noted later in this document.

Mr. Keith Cota, HDR Project Engineer, gave an overview of the history of safety issues in the NH Route 120 Corridor. Mr. Cota provided information about the crash history from 2010-2019 and described the primary causes of the incidents. Mr. Roch Larochelle, Consultant Team Project Manager, discussed multi-modal traffic data collection. He said that the study team is evaluating pre-COVID traffic data, the use of big data for origin-destination information, and information collected from previous studies. Mr. Larochelle discussed key network intersections along NH Route 120 that are being reviewed as part of the study.

Mr. Smith Siromaskul, HDR Senior Traffic Engineer, provided an overview of traffic patterns during peak periods of 7:00 AM – 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM Tuesday - Thursday. Mr. Bryan St. George, HDR Traffic Engineer, demonstrated a traffic simulation model that showed peak periods of traffic, as mentioned by Mr. Siromaskul. Ms. Miller paused to ask if the PAC had questions or comments. Questions and comments are noted later in this document.

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Mr. Larochelle presented the project's draft Purpose & Need (P&N) Statement. He explained the key considerations and influencers and the definition and use of the P&N. Mr. Larochelle asked the PAC for their thoughts about the draft P&N. He explained that input from the PAC is critical to confirm the initial findings of the study. Comments are noted later in this document.

Mr. Larochelle introduced the Alternatives Screening Process. He explained the three levels of screening and what they entail. Mr. Larochelle reviewed the 2017 NH120 Study Corridor Outcomes chart and shared the Initial Screening Matrix that will be used by the study team. The PAC was asked to provide feedback on the matrix in advance of the next PAC Meeting.

Mr. Larochelle concluded the formal presentation portion of the meeting by explaining the next steps. He said that the PAC would receive a package of information containing the Initial Screening Matrix, and the draft Purpose & Need Statement. Mr. Larochelle explained that the study team would like PAC members to provide their thoughts and feedback on each of these items prior to the next meeting. The next PAC Meeting is anticipated for late May or early June 2021. A Public Informational Meeting is anticipated in June 2021. Mr. Larochelle reviewed the overall project schedule.

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 – Did the study team review the Lebanon Natural Resources Inventory?

A – Yes, we reviewed this before we went into the field for visual observations.

Q – What assumptions are being used to estimate 2044 traffic?

A – 1% annual growth rate plus the known developments that are planned for DHMC, Marek, Michaels, Alteria.

Q – What was the annual percentage increase in traffic per year?

A – 1% per year.

Q – How many accidents happened from running a red light?

A – 12 crashes were documented due to disregard of traffic lights.

Q – Can you tell me about the potential for people to change their transportation mode choice habits?

A – The vehicular congestion problem exists today, so it needs to be addressed; however, there is a concern that we not overbuild just to address the peak hours. The peak hours are very concentrated. The assumed 1% growth rate provides a conservative growth value.

Q – Is the southbound flow in the PM a problem from a safety standpoint?

A – We are not there yet as we are in the data collection phase to evaluate and recommend potential alternatives later.

Q – Do we have data about some of the different alternatives and what the impact of induced demand might be? Do we have enough information on people taking the bus and other modes of transportation?

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A – We can look at origin and destination data and see how people are getting from point A to point B. People would use NH Route 120 if it were less congested. It would be desirable to get that (diverted) traffic off Mount Support Road and onto NH Route 120.

Q – Regarding the Initial Screening Categories matrix, is safety applied within different modes or as a separate category?

A – Safety is expected to be an outcome of the improvements. It is difficult to quantify so we do not have it as a separate category.

Comments

- Residential habits in this area may change based on COVID-19 remote work habits. The study team will keep this in mind in their data analysis.
- Regarding the traffic model, the school district is seeing morning congestion, especially with bus drop-off at the schools.
- Regarding the traffic model, Advanced Transit buses keep having to add more time to the schedule for buses waiting in the traffic queue.
- The biggest safety concern is the backing up of ramps onto I-89 during the morning hour. The conditions are prime for a bad accident. A lot of fender benders are happening because people are trying to jockey their position.
- Regarding the traffic model, a PAC member said that as presented, the conditions are almost exactly as they see when traveling through this area.
- A PAC member said that they look forward to traffic solutions.
- A PAC member mentioned that there are message boards that warn about the backups (on I-89 mainline) which help the morning commute.
- A PAC member encouraged Bike/Pedestrian data collection to be taken during the school year to capture the true impacts of transportation-related traffic.
- Regarding the Purpose & Need, consider adding information about the need to protect natural resources and avoid further impacts related to transportation. Especially as development intensification already increases impacts.
- Regarding the Purpose & Need, consider adding language about improving opportunities for safe routes to schools for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicular traffic, including buses.
- Regarding the Purpose & Need, consider making the language more accessible for the public. For example, instead of "multimodal," we can say "pedestrian, bicycle, and transit."
- Consider landscaping the wide median between the interchange and Hanover Street.
- Regarding the Initial Screening Categories matrix, add "natural resources" to the column with wetlands.
- Regarding the Initial Screening Categories matrix, transit access is more than bus stops. Transit improvement or convenience are ways to describe this column. Consider using "transit access and operations."
- Are ADA accommodations and the elderly being considered in pedestrian mobility? Consider adding continuity and connectivity of pedestrian and bike facilities to the Initial Screening Categories matrix.
- Traffic congestion and delay are two different focus areas. These feed into level of service. Consider adding vehicular mobility to the Initial Screening Categories matrix.