

Meeting Summary

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

Event: Public Information Meeting #1

Date and Time: Thursday, February 25, 2021, at 7:00 PM

Location: Zoom Webinar Platform

1. Attendees

[New Hampshire Department of Transportation \(NHDOT\)](#)

Donald Lyford, Project Manager

John Butler, Highway Design Engineer

Margarete Baldwin, Roadway Section Group Leader

Chris Turgeon, Assistant District Engineer

Rebecca Martin, Senior Environmental Manager

[Consultant Team](#)

Roch Larochelle, Consultant Team Project Manager (HDR)

Keith Cota, Senior Technical Advisor (HDR)

Smith Siromaskul, Senior Traffic Engineer (HDR)

Kenneth Howe, Roadway Designer (HDR)

Marcy Miller, Public Involvement Manager (FHI)

Susan Bemis, Environmental Resources (FHI)

Laura Parete, Public Involvement Specialist (FHI)

Approximately 30 members of the public attended the meeting.

2. Presentation Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), with assistance from HDR and FHI, hosted the project's kickoff Public Information Meeting (PIM) for the Lebanon 29612 project on Thursday, February 25, 2021, at 7:00 PM via the Zoom Webinar platform. Ms. Marcy Miller, FHI Public Involvement Manager, opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Ms. Miller introduced key project team members, reviewed the agenda, and provided an overview of how to participate in the virtual PIM meeting.

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 and studies, the project development process to be taken, and HDR's ongoing study efforts. The project area includes the I-89 Exit 18 interchange, and approximately 1.1 miles of NH 120, beginning at the Hanover Street intersection and extending northerly, through the interchange, to a point just north of the Etna Road intersection. 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.

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Mr. Larochelle discussed the project approach and key considerations. He explained that NHDOT initiated the project in late Summer 2020 and the team started collecting traffic, environmental resources and field data. The team is identifying a comprehensive list of mobility and safety 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 tested against the Purpose & Need. After a thorough review of the alternatives and public input, a preferred alternative will be selected for environmental documentation and, if right-of-way acquisition is necessary, will be presented at a formal public hearing. Upon completion of the preliminary design phase, the project will advance to the final design phase.

Ms. Miller provided an overview of community outreach efforts for the project. She also 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 discussed the role of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC). She explained that the Project Team distributed a postcard in January 2021, which has information about an online survey and interactive map. The postcard was sent to constituents in the project area to encourage them to identify mobility needs and safety issues on the interactive map and to complete the survey. Ms. Miller provided a brief overview of the survey results, so far.

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 complete the project study. He stated that the on-line survey and interactive map would be available through the end of March 2021. The next PAC Meeting is being targeted for April 2021. Completion of the preliminary design phase, including selection of a preferred alternative, is envisioned for mid-2022.

During the presentation, the public 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. Open Discussion

The questions and comments below were received and responded to via Zoom chat function as well as verbally during the meeting Q+A sessions and discussion.

Questions

Q – What year is the project in?

A – Construction funding is in fiscal year 2023

Q – What is the cost of the project?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that we are in the early project process. We do not currently know what the preferred alternative will be. Once we determine the preferred alternative, we will be able to estimate a cost. NHDOT Project Manager, Don Lyford noted that there is about \$3 Million in the current State's Ten-Year Plan for construction.

Q – With results of the upcoming Census Report numbers, do we anticipate an increase in population numbers for Hanover and Lebanon?

A – Mr. Larochelle said he did not have census information, but noted that for associated traffic projections for the future year design, it is being assumed that several developments that are being

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proposed and/or underway will be included in the built-out traffic scenario. He also noted that the Team is assuming a 1% background growth rate on top of the development.

During the discussion, a meeting attendee noted in the Zoom chat that: Between Census ACS studied and NHOSI population estimates, Lebanon is projected to increase somewhere between 600 – 1000 people since 2010. Not sure about Hanover.

Q – What is the level of service for the intersections in this area?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that we are just getting to the point of looking at background/existing traffic conditions and current traffic operations so the design team does not have that level of detail at this point to explain the current level of services for the intersections. He also added that the Team is looking at Pre-Covid traffic conditions to build the existing traffic model to assess those operations. Once that information is complete the Team can start looking at alternatives that might help to alleviate some of the congestion. Mr. Siromaskul added that pre-COVID, the traffic was backing up so badly that it was impacting the ramps on I-89 indicating that current operations are poor especially at the interchange location.

Q – Has the Dartmouth Coach Bus Terminal increased or decreased in ridership during COVID-19?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that we do not have those numbers, but we will work with them to obtain that data. However, transit ridership is down across the state due to Covid restrictions.

During the discussion, a meeting attendee noted in the Zoom chat that: Judging by the Dartmouth Coach parking lots their ridership may be significantly down. Another attendee noted in the Zoom chat that: I have heard from a Dartmouth Coach representative that ridership has decreased substantially since COVID started in Spring 2020, but he did not share specific percentages.

Q – I see a picture of a stop sign at the intersection of 120 and Hanover Street. Is it part of your project to do something with that sign? Or to leave it as is?

A – Mr. Larochelle noted this intersection is within the study area. He also stated the team is aware that the City has input on a concept layout for this area. We will be working with the City on this as we evaluate the alternatives for the corridor.

Q – What is the relationship with historical preservation and the NHDOT project?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that project will go through a series of meetings with appropriate Natural and Cultural Resource Agencies to seek their input. However, the Team must complete the data collection phase for known natural, cultural, and historic resources in the area. Impacts to these resources will be evaluated as part of the project development process. As the Team continues to develop the project, the Team will meet with representatives of each of those resource agencies to present our findings, recommendations and solicit input on the alternatives for documentation in the environmental document.

Q – Is the intersection between the exit and the high school where most of the accidents happen?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that there are a number of crashes throughout the project area. There have been approximately 200 crashes for an average of about 20 per year. The data does show a higher crash risk at several of the intersection locations. The Team is still reviewing the available collision data which will be summarized in a brief technical report to assist in the alternatives analysis.

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Q – Is there an estimate of cost of these collisions, in terms of property damage, health, or lost work?

A – Mr. Larochelle noted the data obtained to date does not provide this level of detail information on actual property damage and specific injuries.

Q – The City is considering redesign of Hanover Street as part of a visioning process. How will this project integrate the City's plans?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said the project will partner with the City who is represented on the PAC to ensure compatibility with their plans especially at the junction of NH 120 with Hanover Street.

Q – Will there be any synergies between this project and Statewide 43131? Seems that relocating/replacing guardrails should be done in sync especially if other uses of the ROW may be considered as part of this project. The City just got noticed of 43131 but no detail about its specifics aside from that it will address parts of Route 120.

A – Mr. Turgeon (NHDOT Assistant District Engineer) noted that the work under 43131 is not within this project limits and is along NH 120 south from Lebanon towards Plainfield.

Q – Do we anticipate working both day and night to expedite the project?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that once a preferred alternative is identified, the Team will look into how it will be constructed. Construction scheduling would be determined at a later point in the project.

Q – Why would we add pedestrian and bicycle facilities to 120 if there are less congested, better alternate routes?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that it is something that is on the table while we are assessing how best to proceed. We recognize that there is a multi-use path along Mt. Support Road from north of Etna up to DHMC. How this path can compliment or be intergrated into the NH 120 project has not been decided.

Q – Is rebuilding the Hanover Street overpass for vehicular traffic on the table?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that this option is on the table. Public feedback on that topic is welcomed. However, the project is slated to make improvements on NH 120, not Hanover Street. The Hanover overpass is something that will be studied during this project to determine its potential impacts with regard to changes in travel patterns, and its affect on operations along NH 120

Q – Given the wetlands situation how do you propose to expand/change intersections to ease congestion?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said the development of alternatives will consider the constraints created by right-of-way, natural environment, cultural, and other factors. There are treatments that will be analyzed to look at increase capacity without necessarily requiring additional lanes or pavement. We have not started the alternatives analysis for this project as we are still in the data collection phase. Wetlands will be a factor as to what improvements can be made.

Q – What changes are anticipated to on/off ramps onto I-89 at Exit 18? How extensive will they be?

A – We are developing traffic forecasts that will be used to assess what improvements will be necessary for the design year of 2044. Once we get those forecasts, we will develop alternatives for consideration. At this stage of the project process, we are still in a data collection phase and do not have an answer. We will have this information and present it at future meetings.

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Q – Is there an opportunity for interested parties to join the PAC? Is there a list of PAC members?

A – Ms. Miller said that members of the public interested in joining the PAC can reach out to her. A list of PAC members can be found on the NHDOT NH 120 project page. PAC meetings are open to the public.

Q – Are you reviewing the intermodal hub study?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that he is not aware of this study. According to David Brooks at City of Lebanon, this study was conducted in 2008 by UVLSRPC. The project team will look into this study as to how it may help to inform the NH 120 study.

During the discussion, an attendee noted in the Zoom chat that: The intermodal hub study was led by the UVLSRPC about 8 years ago designed to site a park and ride and shuttle, transit, and commuter bus facility in Lebanon. Final preferred site was the Brickyard site just west of LHS, although the site was quite controversial. Nate Miller knows all the details on this project as does Christine Frost who headed up the UVLSRPC when the study was completed. Brickyard was controversial because NHDOT bought the land and it took a long time to sell again.

Q – Have you considered roundabouts instead of traffic lights?

A – Mr. Siromaskul said that this option is being considered but will likely be dependent upon traffic forecasts and projected traffic volumes.

Q – Will the attendees from today be informed of future meetings?

A – Future public informational meeting information will be posted on the project website.

Q – Is there a way to look at ways to decrease the amount of traffic?

A – Mr. Larochelle said that project will consider traffic management and multi-modal alternatives that help get folks out of their cars. Mr. Butler said that reducing traffic demand via other complimentary projects, such as construction of park and rides, can be an important part of an overall transportation strategy.

Q – Regarding wildlife crossings on state roads, can only NHDOT put up wildlife crossing signs along route 120, or can the City or private groups do that?

A – Mr. Lyford said that it is regulated by the NHDOT Bureau of Traffic. With specific recommended locations, we can coordinate a review by NHDOT.

General Comments from the discussion and Zoom chat (not specifically discussed)

- We need to know how we can get the stream of traffic entering Route 120 northward slowed down. Too many cars go above 50mph, even 60 mph, despite the 40mph speed limit provided to try to stop the danger to the walkers, bikes, and many wild animals who have always lived on both sides of that road and traveled across for reasons of food and water and population genetics. Narrowing the road, which is artificially made to look like a multi-lane speedway by the wide side breakdowns/bike lanes (can't tell which) with no separation of them from the roadway itself would be a major improvement, as you had to narrow Route 10 from Hanover to Lyme visually for this reason. The speeders gain at most a minute on their drive by speeding, given the short distance.
- When I tried to fill out the survey last summer (Lebanon Route 120 Corridor Study??) it sounded like you (Lebanon?) were not interested in our speeding problem. I was recently encouraged to try to bring this up anyway.

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- There is a lot of traffic that goes north and south on Hanover Street that would be affected by any change in that intersection.
- Lebanon Conservation Commission noted that a memorandum was sent to NHDOT on February 17, 2021. Our main concern is protection and improvement of the environment along NH Route 120. We submitted five items for consideration.
 - Protecting wildlife habitats in the corridor. The wildlife is in danger. We want to encourage the building of wildlife accessible culverts under the road, which provide continuity for the wetlands.
 - Protect the existing wetlands.
 - Landscape of the median strip from exit 18 to Hanover Street. There's a section that seems suitable for the planting of shrubbery and trees.
 - Mitigate traffic noise and speed.
 - Provide mass transit, pedestrian and cycling options.
- Several years ago, when work was done on the highway bridge where the I-89 on/off ramps are (exit 18) they changed the light timing of the two lights on the bridge. Prior to the bridge work, the timing worked well, and traffic flowed better. After the bridge work, it's been awful. Please put the timing back the way it was.
- I think we should consider potential decreases in traffic due to COVID. There are lots of possibilities to deal with traffic issues besides building more roads.