



SUMMARY OF MEETING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Date: August 20, 2002

Project: **I-95 Branford to Rhode Island Feasibility Study**
Connecticut Department of Transportation

State Project No.: 170-2295
CHA Project No.: 11530

Location of Meeting: New London City Hall; New London, CT

Date of Meeting: July 25, 2002, 3:00 p.m.

Subject of Meeting: **Local Outreach Meeting No. 4**

Project Overview by Jim Andrini of ConnDOT and Rod Bascom of CHA:

- In 1999, ConnDOT prepared a Southeastern Connecticut Corridor Study that identified lack of capacity and recommended a more detailed study of alternatives and improvements; hence this Study which will look at I-95 from Branford to the Rhode Island state line, including 85 intersections.
- Project will not only study the main line of I-95 and its interchanges but will also include limited lengths of the feeder roads adjacent to interchanges. A big safety issue that will be studied is the amount of weaving that occurs at ramp merges.
- Project will include studying the feasibility and environmental impacts of adding a 3rd lane in each direction for 58 miles on I-95 and will also look at alternative systems and ways to mitigate traffic on I-95 such as Rideshare and other intermodal transportation, including AMTRAK and Shoreline East. The Study team will coordinate with Southeast Area Transit (SEAT).
- The Study includes an Implementation Phase and will involve stakeholders in prioritizing improvement projects. This will allow ConnDOT to identify deficiencies that can be addressed and corrected in the short term. These critical spot improvements can be constructed in advance of major highway improvements if they have minimum potential for environmental impact or property acquisition.
- Project will include Public Outreach on 3 levels:
 - 1) A Study Advisory Committee established specifically for this project and consisting of local, regional and state stakeholders, including COG/RPA and town representatives and special interest groups (6 meetings to start in August or September).
 - 2) Local Outreach: Meetings with local towns (40 meetings)
 - 3) Public Informational Meetings (6 meetings)
- In addition, we will establish a 1-800 phone line, web page and Email address where people may learn more about the project and provide comments.

- The outreach sessions will allow the Study team to learn about the specific conditions, issues and concerns locally and to better understand future traffic demand since we are requesting that Towns provide information relative to growth and land use (e.g. Plans of Development, major proposed developments, etc).
- Current I-95 projects in the study area (in planning phase or scheduled for construction) include:
 - 1) ITS (Intelligent Traffic Systems) projects: CONNDOT has two on-going incident management or ITS projects that will help manage congestion on I-95. These ITS projects will likely include: closed circuit TV traffic flow monitoring, pavement sensors to monitor traffic, highway advisory radio, and variable message signs. An elaborate fiber optics network will connect the ITS to both Bridgeport (control center operated by State Police) and CONNDOT headquarters. The ITS projects include:
 - Exit 54, Branford to Exit 64, Route 145. This project is in final design and is scheduled to begin construction in the summer 2003;
 - Exit 64 (Westbrook-Clinton Town line) to Rhode Island State Line plus portion of I-395 from I-95 to Route 2. This \$8M project is the development stage (preliminary design). Transcore is the consultant. Construction August 2003, 18 months to 24 months duration.
 - 2) Exit 81 of I-95 – replacement of Cross Roads bridge and relocation of north bound on-ramp. This project will be advertised in November 2002.
 - 3) Resurfacing of I-95 from the Baldwin Bridge to Waterford/New London Town line. This project will include bridge parapet replacement and improvements to sight lines. Project schedule calls for bidding in December of 2003 with construction in 2004-2005.
 - 4) Route 11 Extension Project: will finish Final EIS by late Summer/early Fall with preferred alternative. Next step will be design.

Questions and Comments *(with ConnDOT or CHA's response in italics)*

- Will more land be needed in New London for expansion of I-95? *We will look at possible right-of-way acquisitions.*
- How long would it take to design acquired right-of-way and build? *15 years.*
- Then you're building an obsolete road? *Project methodology includes conducting traffic counts at 85 intersections for Friday p.m. peak hour. ConnDOT will then generate future year 2025 traffic and growth of background traffic and new traffic generation from proposed development. (It is important, therefore that the towns provide information on projected growth in their towns). Once we have this projected traffic demand we can assess the capacity of the highway and look at traffic and safety improvements for the entire corridor. Traffic projections of the Study will therefore factor in growth of background traffic and growth in high growth areas.*
- The New London City Planner has information on the Plan of Community Development and growth in the City.
- Reliance on the automobile is a problem, the more lanes we build the more they are used. *Any improvements beyond 3 lanes on I-95 would probably not be possible, therefore, the next solution would be non-physical.*

- Will Study include an analysis of alternative routes during accidents on I-95 and Route 1? *Not part of scope but ITS (Intelligent Traffic Systems) program will help.*
- Will we look at re-building interchanges? *Yes*
- COG will be the grant manager for a \$500,000 Study of a new inter-town bus system that will be geared to lure people (especially tourists) out of their cars.
- Will we look at a do-nothing or 'no-build' option for I-95 where the only alternative is to increase mass transit? It may be that highway congestion could improve mass transit feasibility by making it more attractive for people to leave their cars at home? *Not specifically part of the scope but the team will look at various models for improving mass transit ridership.*
- Another mechanism that some parts of the country are using or considering is 'congestion pricing' where electronic tolls ('Smart tolls') are levied against vehicles that travel the roads only during peak hours. Will something like this be considered? *Nothing is ruled out; however, ConnDOT is not a fan of congestion pricing because it negatively affects commerce.*
- Price of round-trip rail is higher than airfare. Will people use airport more if traffic congestion is worse? Fares subsidies for rail travel is a good idea, but what happens if it's still not competitive with auto travel? *The Study will look into providing better rail transit facilities (stations and parking at Shoreline East) to increase rail ridership.*
- I-95 is a special issue in New London since it is the primary east-west route (there are no other bridges to Groton). The City is very concerned about the possibility of a new casino in New London (near I-95) that would worsen congestion.
- Will this Study encourage the Cross Roads bridge reconstruction and the Route 11 extension projects? *The Cross Roads projects is slated to begin in 2003...this Study will assume that those two projects are implemented and base new highway improvements on matching those. Other projects that have the potential to decrease congestion on I-95 in the New London area are the Route 2/2A/32 (Mohegan Peguot Bridge) projects that will be expand Route 2 and provide a bypass to the Thames River crossing at Route 2A. The final EIS for Route 2/2A/32 is in process.*
- SEAT has 1-2 hour headways due to limited demand on service. This makes it difficult for people to seriously consider buses as a reliable and convenient transit alternative.
- Improvements to I-95 are sorely needed since the Southeast region is quickly becoming another Orlando...high traffic volumes and congestion could very well negatively affect commerce in the SE area of the state.

-END-