CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
REPORT OF PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING

State Project No. 0103-0274
Safety Improvements on Route 82 in Norwich

June 23rd, 2022 – 7:00 PM
Kelly STEAM Magnet Middle School, Norwich, CT

ATTENDANCE:

Connecticut Department of Transportation

Scott Bushee P.E.	Highway Design - Project Manager *(Presenter)*
Michael Laurice P.E.	Highway Design - Project Engineer *(Presenter)*
Dennis McDonald	Rights-of-Way - Coordinator *(Presenter)*
Mark Lenters P.E.	Kimley-Horn (Consultant firm) *(Presenter)*
Garrett Eucalitto	Deputy Commissioner
Shannon King	Strategic Communications Manager
Michael Calabrese P.E.	Highway Design - Transportation Division Chief
Matthew Vail P.E.	Highway Design - Principal Engineer
Colin Baummer P.E.	Traffic Design – Project Manager
Kevin McKernan	Traffic Design – Project Designer
Eileen Ego P.E.	District 2 Construction – District Engineer
Jason Burgess P.E.	District 2 Construction – Supervising Engineer
Mark Elliot	District 2 Construction – Project Engineer
Jessica Darling P.E.	Highway Design - Project Designer
Zachary Duell	Highway Design - Project Designer
Michael B. Julian	Highway Design - Project Designer
William Strong	Highway Design - Project Designer

Additional Notable Attendees

Catherine Osten	Connecticut State Senator
Peter Nystrom	City of Norwich - Mayor
Patrick McLaughlin P.E.	City of Norwich - Public Works Director
Joseph DeLucia	City Council Member - President Pro-Tempore
Swarnjit Singh	City Council Member
Stacy Gould	City Council Member
Derell Q. Wilson	City Council Member

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this meeting was to present the 30% design plans for State Project No. 103-274, *Safety Improvements on Route 82 in Norwich (Phase 1*). This project is the first of two planned corridor safety improvement projects on Route 82 in Norwich. This meeting was held in-person and was also live streamed to YouTube.

PRESENTATION:

Beginning at 6:30 PM, informational roundabout videos were played on screen for the public to watch as they entered the meeting facility. Project handouts with comment sheets were provided to attendees outside the auditorium -- available in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Approximately 120 people attended the meeting, including residents, property owners, and local business representatives.

The formal presentation started at 7:00 PM and was initiated by Mayor Peter Nystrom who introduced the Department and noted the meeting format. A technical presentation was delivered by Scott Bushee (Project Manager) and Michael Laurice (Project Engineer), which covered the purpose and need of the project, location of improvements, existing conditions, proposed design, and cost/schedule. Rights-of-Way information was provided by Dennis McDonald (ROW Coordinator). Mark Lenters (Kimley-Horn) explained his involvement with the Department's design development over the past few years. Mr. Lenters expressed support for the proposed design based on his extensive roundabout corridor experience. Mr. Lenters also reviewed examples of other roundabout corridors on a national level, including safety and operation benefits, as well as business and tax growth.

The presentation covered the following items:

- Title VI Civil Rights details and the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) process
- Project Location: The entire project area of Route 82, encompassing Phases 1 and 2, extends from approximately Salem Plaza east to Fairmont Street, between I-395 and the Thames River/downtown in the City of Norwich. Phase 1, the subject of this public informational meeting, runs from Banas Court to Fairmount Street.
- Purpose and Need / Existing Conditions: To address the safety and access needs on Route 82, which experiences higher-than-average crash rates at both intersections and driveways. Seven intersections along this stretch of Route 82 are currently controlled by traffic signals, and the existing lane configuration makes turning left into driveways and at intersections difficult.
- Proposed Design: The proposed safety solution involves the construction of a raised median along Route 82 for access management, combined with replacing seven traffic signals with six modern roundabouts. Phase 1, which was the focus of this presentation,

would replace three traffic signals at Asylum/Mechanic Streets, Mount Pleasant Street, and Osgood Street with modern roundabouts. The Dunham Street intersection would be redesigned to allow for U-turn capability but would remain a signalized intersection until its conversion to a roundabout during Phase 2. A video was presented showing a visual simulation of the proposed Phase 1 design. Safety and environmental benefits, as well as multimodal accommodation of the proposed design, were presented as part of the project.

- Impacted Properties & Rights-of-Way (ROW) Processes: It was noted that several private properties would be affected by the proposed work including the probable acquisition of five businesses. The ROW process and relocation procedures were described in detail by Dennis McDonald.
- Technical Review – Mark Lenters with Kimley-Horn: Mark Lenters, a leader in roundabout design, corridor studies, and safety audits, provided a national perspective on the proposed design. Mark emphasized the safety and economic benefits of roundabout corridors by providing examples across the country where roundabout corridors were successful in traffic safety, operation, and commercial development.
- Construction Considerations: Traffic delay and impacts to local businesses during construction could be mitigated by:
    - Substantially relocating utilities prior to the roadway work
    - Focusing work on a single intersection at any given time
    - Closing select side streets for two-week periods
    - Utilizing nightwork for certain construction operations
    - Providing a community and business liaison to communicate with the contractor, residents, and business owners.

DISCUSSION (QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS):

Following the presentation, a question-and-answer session was held for meeting attendees to communicate their questions, concerns, and feedback to the project team. Some attendees expressed their support and recognized the need for the project, while others expressed concern and were in opposition.

- Many concerns were related to the impact of businesses, including:
    - Total acquisitions associated with the proposed design (five in Phase 1 and four anticipated in Phase 2).
    - Loss of business revenue during the relocation and re-establishment period including the potential for job loss by employees.
    - Business relocations in regions with less traffic volume and visibility, which may result in loss of revenue due to less advertising.

- Loss of revenue for all businesses along the corridor while each Phase is under construction, due to the public avoiding the area.
  - Response: The Department explained the ROW process – appraisals, negotiations, relocation benefits and reminded everyone of plans to hire a community and business liaison and plans to phase construction in a way that could mitigate some of the traffic delays during construction.

- Multiple requests for a smaller scale project and/or for alternative safety measures to implement prior to the proposed design were made, including:
  - Left-turn lanes at each intersection
  - Solar-powered speed signs
  - Speed bumps
  - Increased police enforcement
  - Traffic cameras
    - Response: While left-turn lanes would help solve some safety problems at intersections, it would not provide the same level of intersection safety that could be achieved with a roundabout and would not solve traffic operation and safety problems occurring between the intersections which account for a significant percentage of crashes. The Department previously investigated adding a two-way left-turn lane as a potential solution; however, this would likely make left turns from driveways more difficult and would involve more extensive impacts to properties between intersections due to widening for a full additional lane along the corridor.
    - Speed bumps do not address the left-turn operation and safety needs at driveways or intersections and could result in drivers accelerating rapidly between speed bumps resulting in further safety problems. Traffic volumes are too high for application on Route 82.
    - Other solutions, such as solar-powered speed signs, increased police enforcement, and cameras at intersections are not permanent solutions. Although they may slow speeds for a period, they do not address the need for access control, speed mitigation and driver behavior resulting from traffic congestion, which lend themselves to crashes and injuries.

- Suggestion was made for a larger gap between construction of Phases 1 and 2 (15-20 years) to give local businesses time to recover from construction and provide a trial period for the Phase 1 roundabouts.

- Concern was raised that side streets will be used as a cut-through to avoid roundabouts, during and after the construction process.
  - Response: Some additional side street traffic is expected during construction as people will use their GPS to find alternate routes. If it becomes a problem, DOT can discuss mitigation strategies with the city. The Department is confident that fewer drivers will use side streets as a cut-through once roundabouts are installed, because Route 82 will operate much more efficiently.

- Concerns were raised regarding congestion at the New London Turnpike intersection, part of Phase 2. Traffic is rerouted to New London Turnpike when there is a crash on Interstate-395.

- Request was made for the outside shoulder to be marked as a bike lane.
  - Response: The Department will coordinate with the City of Norwich to determine if the shoulder can be designated as a bike lane.
- Question on how delays from school buses will be addressed, since they can no longer be passed in between stops, and if drivers will need to stop for school buses traveling in the opposite direction.
  - Response: The project intent is to provide a safer roadway environment for all users.
- Who is responsible for removing snow from the center median?
  - Response: Only the crosswalk requires snow removal, and the Department will coordinate with the city.
- Question on how large trucks will be able to make their deliveries.
  - Response: The Department has coordinated with business owners along Phase 1 of the corridor to best ensure the design allows trucks to enter and exit each driveway. These large vehicles may utilize the truck apron provided at each roundabout to proceed through the intersections, however, are not permitted to travel on or over the center median, except for emergency vehicles.
- Comments suggesting the public is unclear on how to use a roundabout.
  - Response: The Department acknowledged that public outreach and education could be beneficial. For pedestrians, crossing is simplified because of reduced speeds, larger gaps, less unprotected crossing distance, and only needing to cross one lane at a time.
- Question on whether utility lines can be re-located underground.
  - Response: The Department investigated with Norwich Public Utilities and estimates that relocating the overhead utilities to underground would cost $18 million, while relocating in-kind (above-ground) is $850,000.
- Request for beautification of green spaces at and adjacent to the roundabouts, and question on who is responsible for maintenance.
  - Response: The Department is open to working with the city on what is desirable in the green spaces. The current plan is to utilize native/multi-colored plantings, illuminated from below, that require minimal maintenance and provide good aesthetics and visibility to drivers.
  - The city will be responsible for maintenance of the central island, trees along the median, and other green spaces.
- Concerns about impacts to the public bus system, which currently stops as needed to pick-up passengers and is not limited to stops at bus shelters.
  - Response: The Department will work with public transit system, SEAT, and the city to ensure this is addressed. At this time, the bus shelter within phase 1 will be moved a few hundred feet west across the Mount Pleasant Street intersection.
- Question on lighting at each roundabout.
  - Response: The Department explained that a thorough engineering study will be performed on the lighting at each roundabout to ensure all road users will have adequate visibility.
- Was a feasibility study performed to find other solutions that had less impacts on properties?

- Response: The Department performed a detailed feasibility study evaluating different alternatives and found that roundabouts with a raised median were the best solution with respect to safety and the most limited in project footprint/property impacts. Many design iterations have been performed to limit the number and extent of impacted properties.

- Concern that the underground water main is old and fragile and that it should be upgraded during project construction to ensure proper service.
- Comment made that emergency services will not be able to utilize a pre-emption system in this section of the corridor since there will be no traffic signals.
- Some residents stated support for the project, recognized the need for safety and acknowledged the need for the roundabout corridor.
- Concern on available gaps in traffic for vehicles exiting driveways after reducing from two lanes in each direction down to one.
  - Response: The Department presented the traffic model that displayed larger gaps due to improved efficiency; traffic will be steadier and will not come in large platoons. Vehicles will only be able to make right turns and only need a gap in one lane of traffic, which will make for an easier maneuver and require shorter gaps. Reduced speeds will further assist with access and safety.
- Question on when the estimate for the cost of the project was made and if it had built-in contingency.
  - Response: The project cost estimate accounted for inflation and has approximately 15% built-in contingency.
- The Department noted that there are socioeconomic costs due to emergency services needing to respond to a high number of crashes on this corridor, which would be reduced after completion of this project.
- Question on why the decision was made to begin construction on the eastern side of the corridor and if each phase is independent of the other.
  - Response: The eastern end of the two projects has less traffic volume and all roundabouts would be single lane designs, which are simpler for drivers to navigate and become acquainted with.
  - Phase 1 of the safety improvement work is independent of Phase 2 and can provide good traffic operation and safety within its section, without Phase 2 being constructed.
- Questions on if there will be a 'choke point' at the Dunham Street traffic signal.
  - Response: The Department's Traffic Engineering Unit has reviewed adjacent signalized intersections and does not anticipate any operation problems. The traffic volumes being managed through the signal will not change as a result of the project.

The meeting was adjourned around 9:45 PM. Mr. Bushee reminded everyone of additional resources on the project website and contact information on the hand-out. Mr. Bushee reiterated that the design team could be contacted for on-site or virtual meetings for specific property inquires or additional information at any time.