



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF POLICY AND MANAGEMENT
INTERGOVERNMENTAL POLICY DIVISION

April 16, 2015

Mr. Mark Alexander
Bureau of Policy and Planning
Connecticut Department of Transportation,
2800 Berlin Turnpike, Newington, Connecticut, 06131

Re: Notice of Scoping:
Replacement of Bridge No. 02866 - Route 275 over the Willimantic River

Dear Mark:

The Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has reviewed the Notice of Scoping for the Replacement of Bridge No. 02866 - Route 275 over the Willimantic River and submits the following comments:

- An online search shows the area to be a popular access point to the river and Eagleville Lake and online satellite imagery shows parking areas near each end of the bridge. The map of officially designated greenways shows the Willimantic River Greenway crossing at the bridge (see <http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/greenways/greenwaysmap2014.pdf>).

The paddle guide at http://www.willimanticriver.org/recreation/cg_print_nps-guide.pdf recommends that people park in one of those lots and carry canoes and kayaks across Rt 275 to access the downstream section of the river. The Eagleville Preserve guide, available at <http://www.mansfieldct.gov/filestorage/1904/5357/eagleville.pdf>, also directs people to also park there and cross Rt 275 to enter to the town preserve and adjacent state land south of Rt 275.

The stop signs and alternating one-way traffic of the existing bridge have probably maintained a relatively safe interaction between drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians traveling along Rt 275, entering or exiting the parking areas, and crossing the road to access the river or trails. How will the proposed project affect each? Will drivers be expected to stop at the new bridge? If vehicular traffic is heavy enough to require such a wide bridge, the loss of stop signs at each end of the bridge could jeopardize safety of people crossing the road, particularly those carrying a canoe or kayak. Given the state's and others' commitment to the greenway, it is important that a state action not impede people's use of the greenway.

- Minutes of DOT's 2/25/2015 public meeting, in a paragraph responding to public concerns regarding how the proposed bridge would affect parks/greenways/waterways, include this explanation by DOT and/or its consultant:

The concerns relating to the greenway and waterway access had not been investigated due to the current design stage (environmental review is still ongoing).

Even before beginning the environmental review, such concerns should have been considered during DOT's determination of consistency with the State Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD). The POCD includes several references to greenways and other such resources. Many people would consider such concerns to be a central feature of an environmental review, especially one that implies there is little alternative to the proposal. At what point does DOT ordinarily begin investigating such concerns?

- The Notice of Scoping mentions that the railroad bridge immediately east of the Willimantic River bridge is also too narrow to pass two-way traffic on Rt 275. The minutes of DOT's public information meeting indicate that the railroad bridge "will not be rehabilitated as part of this project." Is DOT aware of any interest in or plan for modifying the railroad bridge to also allow two-way traffic there?

If there is no expectation to widen Rt 275's passage beneath the railroad bridge, what is the functional benefit of widening the Willimantic River bridge to 32 ft? If it is reasonably foreseeable that the railroad crossing might also be widened, what is the potential impact on vehicle speeds and traffic at the river crossing and in the area of tight turns in town just a few hundred feet east of the bridges, where speed limits are 25 mph?

- The Notice of Scoping says "The replacement is necessary because the existing bridge structure is structurally deficient, functionally obsolete, and hydraulically inadequate." However, the minutes of DOT's public information meeting say the bridge will not actually be made hydraulically adequate. Those minutes also refer to a state statute and federal requirements that the bridge be at least 28 ft wide. CGS 13a-86 and 13a-86a grant DOT the authority to build a narrower bridge when appropriate. What are the federal requirements that impose a minimum width and is there a waiver or other process that can allow DOT to correct the structural deficiency without also widening the bridge to that extent?

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Notice of Scoping and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely:



Bruce Wittchen
Office of Policy & Management
450 Capitol Ave, MS# 54ORG
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 418-6323
bruce.wittchen@ct.gov