
From: Francis, Eileen <efrancis@westportct.gov> on behalf of Marpe, Jim <JMARPE@westportct.gov>
Sent: Thursday, June 30, 2016 1:14 PM
To: DOT Environmental Planning
Cc: Redeker, James P; Bhardwaj, Priti S.; Nezames, Theodore H; Fields, Timothy D.; Gail Lavielle (Gail.Lavielle@housegop.ct.gov); Gail Lavielle (gaillavielle@aol.com); Jonathan Steinberg (Jonathan.Steinberg@cga.ct.gov); Jonathan Steinberg (jpsteinberg@optonline.net); Toni Boucher (Toni.Boucher@cga.ct.gov); Toni Boucher (toniboucher@aol.com); Tony Hwang (SenatorHwang@gmail.com); Tony Hwang (Tony.Hwang@cga.ct.gov)
Subject: Saugatuck River Bridge (State Bridge #01349), Westport, Rehabilitation Study Report
Attachments: 06-30-2016 Letter to M Alexander CT DOT re Saugatuck River Bridge (State Bridge # 01349), Westport.pdf

Mr. Alexander,

Please see the attached correspondence related to the Saugatuck River Bridge Rehabilitation Study Report. Kindly include it in the formal record of the meeting of June 15 and any future reporting or documentation regarding the Bridge.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jim Marpe
First Selectman



Town of Westport



WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

JAMES S. MARPE
First Selectman

June 30, 2016

Mark W. Alexander
Transportation Assistant Planning Director
CT DOT, Bureau of Policy and Planning
2800 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, CT 06131

Via e-mail: dot.environmentalplanning@ct.gov

Re: Saugatuck River Bridge (State Bridge #01349), Westport

Dear Mr. Alexander:

I would first like to thank the Connecticut DOT and the staff members who came to Westport on June 15 to conduct the public scoping session and present the findings of the Saugatuck River Bridge, (State Bridge # 01349) Rehabilitation Study Report ("RSR"). It was a very informative discussion that clearly demonstrated the alternatives and some of the potential impacts related to the DOT's plans for the Bridge.

As First Selectman, I made comments as part of the proceedings on June 15. I want to follow-up with additional written commentary for inclusion in the formal record of the meeting and any future reporting or documentation regarding the Bridge. Since the time of the meeting, I have heard from many Westporters regarding their views and preferences concerning how the project should proceed. This has informed my current set of comments.

My comments, observations and recommendations are as follows:

- 1) As previously expressed, the physical safety of the Bridge is a primary concern. I am particularly concerned with those physical deficiencies that affect the underlying structure of the bridge and that require necessary and expedient repair in order for the bridge to safely carry the daily traffic load. The underlying infrastructure issues with the deteriorating Support Pier #2 certainly need to be addressed as soon as possible. The damaged and weakened non-weight bearing truss members also appear to need repair.

I am less concerned with the "functional obsolescence" deficiencies related to lane width and height clearance. Westporters are accustomed to these conditions, know how to traverse the Bridge carefully, and can deal with the somewhat narrower conditions than are found on most

modern day bridges. I do not believe that a major widening of the Bridge is a priority for most Westporters.

- 2) The historic nature of this iconic Bridge is important to the community. Its historic look and feel must be maintained as much as possible.
- 3) Any solution that creates additional traffic problems and congestion for the Saugatuck area and/or Green's Farms Road and Bridge Street is unacceptable. If the Bridge is rehabilitated or reconstructed in such a manner that allows it to be used as an attractive alternative for more automobiles and for large, 18-wheel trucks when backups occur on I-95, then safety and traffic control will be compromised.
- 4) The current top superstructure of the Bridge with its lower clearance acts as a barrier to higher-profiled truck traffic. This is a feature that must be maintained, no matter the chosen option. In each option presented, it seemed that it was the DOT's intent to raise the clearance of the bridge to current standard federal height. I oppose any option that would institute a clearance height that would allow 18 wheel semi-trucks to clear the Bridge easily.
- 5) I would like to see what improvements could be made to make the Bridge safer and more accessible for both pedestrians and bicycles. This may require a modest amount of widening which seems acceptable to most Westporters.
- 6) As suggested by some, if it is possible for the Bridge to be raised an additional four feet above the water (approximately the height of the rail bridge) then there would be far fewer requirements to mechanically open the Bridge for marine traffic. In addition to the cost that is ultimately charged to the Town of Westport, these openings currently take significant time and cause large scale traffic backups. A bridge with a higher clearance underneath would allow for a larger percentage of boats to pass under it.
- 7) While briefly discussed at the meeting, as part of this project, attention needs to be paid to improving the intersection of Riverside Avenue and Rte. 136 at the Bridge. This intersection is where the congestion and backups occur. The Bridge itself acts as a "traffic calming" device because vehicles are required to move slowly. An extended westbound right turn lane and any other possible improvements in that area would be helpful.
- 8) The required discussion of possible land "acquisition" at the June 15 session caused a great deal of anxiety among residents. I am aware that the DOT has retained some land and easements from the last rehabilitation project, but I am unaware of the specifics. *For each considered option*, I would like 1) information as to what parcels of land are currently under the

DOT's jurisdiction; and 2) detailed information as to what land rights the DOT would need to obtain and where specifically such rights would be required (e.g. right of way; temporary construction easement; taking of land permanently through the State's eminent domain powers).

9) I know that the DOT intends to continue with future studies and public outreach to the community stakeholders and will be hosting public information sessions before making any final decisions on direction and/or alternatives. I would appreciate the consideration of being kept informed with regard to such outreach and to have input into that process as it is planned.

10) I understand that Federal funding requirements are the primary driving force in the study for the reconstruction option and are mandating some of the new width and height requirements that the DOT is considering implementing. If it is a matter of "Federal funding mandates" that are driving certain DOT actions, I would recommend that the rehabilitation be considered as a "State funded only" project. The Bridge is unique to Connecticut and to the U.S., so the manner in which its preservation is funded may need to be unique as well.

Given what is known at the moment, it is my opinion and recommendation that the DOT move forward with a focus on the "rehabilitation" option for the Cribari Bridge. This would entail maintaining the Bridge's current scale, appearance and operation, but repairing its supporting infrastructure. The construction of a new bridge is not an option favored by those in the community who are most directly affected. I understand that the major focus for the next year or so involves the development of extensive plans for a bridge reconstruction. I question whether there is truly a need to continue with the expense and time required for such plans. I would suggest that the time be spent planning the rehabilitation effort and moving as quickly as possible to address the safety needs of the Bridge. Spending a significant amount of time studying a reconstruction option that is not desired, and which will most likely be met with strong resistance from the community, seems redundant and wasteful.

I am prepared to meet with Governor Malloy, DOT Commissioner Redeker, and our State representatives to advocate for the Bridge and the Town of Westport. I urge proceeding with the rehabilitation option and performing the necessary repairs as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and effort. I look forward to having an opportunity to discuss the questions and recommendations raised in this letter.

Sincerely,



James S. Marpe
First Selectman

cc: Commissioner James Redeker, CT DOT
Senator Toni Boucher
Senator Tony Hwang
Representative Gail Lavielle
Representative Jonathan Steinberg
Priti Bhardwaj, CT DOT, Project Manager
Theodore Nezames, CT DOT, Manager of Bridges
Timothy Fields, CT DOT, Transportation Principal Engineer