

REPORT OF MEETING

June 24, 2024, 7:00pm

PROJECT: State Project No. 0094-0267

Shared Use Path and Pedestrian Improvements on Southbound Gold Star Bridge (Bridge Nos. 02514A&B) and Approaches
I-95 Southbound over Thames River, Local Roads, Railroads
Cities of Groton and New London

SUBJECT OF MEETING: Hybrid Public Information Meeting

LOCATION OF MEETING: Zoom and New London City Hall – City Council Chambers

IN ATTENDANCE:

Public:

18 in-person attendees

11 virtual attendees

Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) Project Team

Bartholomew Sweeney – Division of Bridges

Bao Chuong – Major Structures Unit

Tracey A. Brais – Major Structures Unit

Luis Alfonzo – Major Structures Unit

David Mancini – Major Highways Unit

Karen Isherwood – Major Highways Unit

Matthew Geanacopoulous – Rights-of-Way

John Deliberto – District 2 Construction

Consultant Project Team

Thomas M. Ryan – Close, Jensen and Miller, P.C. (CJM)

John H. Miller II – Close, Jensen and Miller, P.C. (CJM)

Michael Jacovino – Close, Jensen and Miller, P.C. (CJM)

Steven Fraysier – BL Companies (BL)

Jason Ellis – BL Companies (BL)

David Giel (Traffic Lead) – HNTB

Rudy Franciamore (Highway Lead) – HNTB

Samantha Scharpf (Roundabout Lead) – HNTB

Other:

Kate Rattan – Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG)

Amanda Kennedy – Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG)

Christine Conley – State Representative

1. Meeting Format and Attendance:

The Public Information Meeting took place in person on Monday, June 24, 2024, at the City of New London's City Hall, located at 181 State Street, New London, CT, 06320.

The Meeting was simultaneously held virtually via Zoom. There were 18 in-person attendees, and 11 attendees online from the public.

No in-person, real-time translation services were requested. Closed captioning—including Spanish and other non-English translation options—was available online.

Display boards with project plans and proposed improvements were available for attendees to view before, during, and after the meeting. Project Team members were available to speak one-on-one with attendees. Fact Sheet handouts were also provided.

2. Presentation given by CTDOT, CJM, BL and HNTB: State Project No. 0094-0267: Shared Use Path and Pedestrian Improvements on the Southbound Gold Star Memorial Bridge and Approaches, in New London and Groton.

- A. Overview of Title VI: Civil Rights that will be adhered to during the development of the project.
- B. Overview of Project Team: CTDOT and Consultant Teams were introduced.
- C. Project Location and Purpose and Need of the project was covered: Non-vehicular travel improvements are needed between the Cities of New London and Groton to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- D. Gold Star Bridges Project Overview: an overview of all of the projects on the two bridges was covered (Project No. 94-256 Northbound Bridge Truss Repairs, Project No. 94-235/261 Northbound Bridge Rehabilitation, Project No. 94-268 Southbound Bridge Steel Strengthening, Project No. 94-267 Shared Use Path Construction on Southbound Bridge and approaches), showing timelines for completion. It was noted that all projects are anticipated to be completed by the end of 2029.

- E. Proposed multi-modal improvements on the Southbound Gold Star Bridge involve shifting the highway barrier toward the roadway and eliminating an I-95 Southbound travel lane to widen the sidewalk and create a shared use path that has a maximum width of 14 feet. Renderings of the proposed path were shared, showing the metal bridge rail separating the widened path on the bridge from I-95 Southbound vehicular traffic.
- F. The following I-95 Southbound Maintenance and Protection of Traffic topics were presented: the need to start construction of the shared use path after the crossover associated with the Northbound rehabilitation project (No. 94-235/261) is removed, the need to reduce I-95 Southbound to three lanes and Route 32 off-ramp (I-95 Southbound Exit 84) to one lane during construction, the need to close the existing sidewalk for up to 1.5 years during construction, and the proposed plan to provide shuttle services for pedestrians and cyclists that would use the sidewalk.
- G. The existing locations and conditions of the approach sidewalks leading up to the bridge in New London and Groton were described. Currently there is a 5 foot wide sidewalk between the west end of the bridge and Bailey Circle in New London. On the Groton side, a 5 foot wide sidewalk turns under the bridge, is carried along the I-95 Northbound Exit 85 off-ramp and ends at Bridge Street.
- H. The proposed approach path improvements were presented, which include widening the path to 10 feet, and constructing a spur path in New London from the existing sidewalk location to Williams Street. The approach path on the Groton side will still connect to Bridge Street and modifications to flatten the grade and meet ADA standards are proposed.
- I. Work proposed to widen the sidewalk on Bridge No 01638, which carries the I-95 Northbound Exit 85 ramp over Amtrak, in Groton, was presented. The work proposed consists of a partial reconstruction of the bridge deck and the removal of a ramp lane to widen the existing sidewalk to 10 feet.
- J. The Bridge Street Intersection improvements were presented: a roundabout is proposed to replace the existing signalized intersection. The

traffic analysis was presented, which discussed improvements to the overall level of service that the roundabout provides compared to the existing signalized intersection. Maintenance and protection of traffic during the roundabout construction were discussed, mentioning that the roundabout will be constructed from east to west, and the center of the roundabout would be constructed last.

- K. Right of way impacts were presented: minimal impacts are anticipated. A construction easement is potentially needed to reconstruct a retaining wall on North Street. Right of way impacts are to be re-evaluated when the survey is complete.
- L. Anticipated environmental permits, project schedule and project costs were presented. The estimated project construction cost is \$55.5 million, and construction is estimated to start in the Summer of 2028, following the traffic crossover for Northbound Gold Star Bridge Deck Replacement (project 94-235/261). Construction is estimated to be completed in the Fall of 2029.

3. Post-Meeting Question & Answer (Q&A) Session

The following is a summary of the questions asked at the public meeting, along with the answers that were provided. It has been edited for clarity. A recording of the entire meeting can be accessed on the Connecticut Department of Transportation's YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrcBMizOIUA>

Q. Representative Conley noted that residents and commuters in the area will have construction fatigue due to the 5 year duration of construction and asked what CTDOT planned to do to alleviate it.

A. The concern about the duration of construction is understood. A traffic safety analysis was performed and showed that constructing the shared use path following the crossover removal was the safest option. A positive aspect of the crossover is that the traffic patterns will be long-term and will not frequently change during construction. This should allow local travelers to become familiar with the traffic pattern. Construction alerts and updates will

be posted to the project throughout construction to make the public aware of upcoming traffic pattern changes.

Q. Representative Conley appreciated the higher fencing/guardrail to prevent people from jumping over.

A: Tests on the guiderails show that the guiderail posts and rails barely move when hit by a truck at high speed. It was noted that the proposed anti-climb fence would be 10.5 feet high from the surface of the sidewalk which should deter people from jumping into the water.

Q. Representative Conley stated she had a hard time seeing how traffic operations would not be affected by reducing I-95 Southbound by one lane.

A: A traffic analysis was performed which compared anticipated traffic operations on I-95 Southbound at the end of construction (year 2029) and in the future (year 2053) for the no-build and proposed lane configurations. CTDOT said they will share the traffic analysis report.

Q. Representative Conley shared concerns that property easements will not be accepted by New London residents very well, and that the Department will need to be clear with them.

A: Only temporary easements are anticipated at this time for the proposed project. A representative of the CTDOT Division of Rights of Way will meet with property owners to discuss any questions or concerns.

Q. A member of the public recommended that the plan view of the proposed shared use path improvements over the bridge is shared with the public to clearly show the proposed I-95 Southbound lane configuration.

A. CTDOT will share future design submissions, which will include the proposed plan view.

Q. A member of the public appreciated the new Williams Street spur, but had concerns about how the spur would safely connect to existing and proposed bicycle facilities on Williams Street. It was noted that there is available space for bike lanes and better lighting should be provided along Williams Street.

A: Early plans for the proposed bicycle facility improvements on Williams Street were shared with the project team recently, and the project team will look to provide safe connections to the bicycle facilities. Installation of lighting is being considered for the proposed shared use path.

Q. A member of the public stated that wayfinder signs should be installed along the shared use path, including mile markers on the bridge to aide emergency responders in locating people needing help.

A. Installation of wayfinding signs will be considered as the design progresses.

Q. A member of the public asked if Groton could also get a Spur path connecting the bridge shared use path with the corner of Riverview Avenue and Walker Hill Road, like the proposed one to Williams Street. The person stated that a roundabout would provide the opportunity to create a gateway into the City of Groton. It was noted that a landmark, or something similar, should be added within the roundabout center.

A. CTDOT will coordinate with the Cities of New London and Groton on this project and proposed aesthetic treatments at the roundabout as the design progresses. CTDOT stated that municipal participation would be requested in funding the installation of a landmark or special aesthetic treatments.

Q. A member of the public expressed disappointment with the closure of the sidewalk on the bridge after the fire, and the length of time it took for the shuttle service to be established. The person mentioned the shuttle service was not frequent enough and better scheduling should be coordinated for the proposed sidewalk closure during construction.

A. CTDOT has started coordination for the shuttle service proposed during construction. CTDOT stated that the shuttle service during the recent sidewalk closure after the fire ran more frequently than once per hour, for longer than 10 hours a day. CTDOT will continue with coordination for shuttle service and evaluation other options to transport those affected by the sidewalk closure.

Q. A member of the public asked how often maintenance and inspection vehicles would go on the path and if the path would need to be shut down during maintenance operations and inspections.

A. Inspections are performed every two years using underbridge access equipment such as snoopers. Coordination was performed with the CTDOT inspection and maintenance staff to develop a plan to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists during inspections or repair work. With the wider shared use path, it is anticipated that there would still be room for pedestrians and cyclists to pass while maintenance or snow removal is performed. It was mentioned that a trafficperson or crew member is proposed to be on the path approaches to help safely direct pedestrians and cyclists around the maintenance and inspection vehicles. Depending on the maintenance operation, there may be a need in the future to temporarily close the shared use path for repairs; however, the partial deck replacement and new railing and fence proposed in this project should result in minimal bridge maintenance needs for several years.

Q. A member of the public said that it is difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to cross at roundabouts due to a steady stream of vehicular traffic entering the roundabout. The person noted that pedestrians and cyclists would likely have to wait a long time to cross.

A. The proposed two-lane roundabout will be designed with safety at the forefront, implementing ways to keep drivers in their own lane such as using paved indicators to reduce sideswiping. Other features being considered for implementation are raised crosswalks, hybrid signals and flashing signals. The design speeds are slow approaching the roundabout and reduce even further once inside the roundabout.

Q. A member of the public mentioned the start of construction seems to be far in the future and was worried about funding being pulled from this project.

A. Funding for this project is available, and the BIP funding is contingent on completing the design by certain dates. The project team is working to deliver the project by those dates.

Q. A member of the public asked if a bicycle lane on the roundabout was considered.

A. It would be safer for bicycles to use the shared use path instead of circling with vehicular traffic; however, this will be taken into account as the design progresses.

Q. A member of the public stated that the approach sidewalks are dangerously dark and asked if lighting is going to be installed.

A. Safety is paramount: lighting will be designed for this project, and the project team is currently looking into it.

Q. A member of the public shared concerns that the open bridge railing will allow more debris onto the shared use path. The person stated that the current concrete barrier prevents a lot of debris from going onto the sidewalk.

A. The barrier is very strong, with a 12-foot separation between the lanes of vehicular traffic and the barrier. This should minimize debris launching onto the sidewalk. One reason to have an open bridge rail is to make the shared use path feel more open. Another reason is to reduce the weight on the bridge, which would reduce the amount of steel member strengthening that will be required under a separate project to strengthen the Southbound bridge (Project No. 94-268).

Q. A member of the public asked if the barrier will be standardized across all bridges.

A. The project team is still evaluating the concrete barrier on the south side of the bridge to see if the existing deck with new barrier can sustain the impact forces from a truck. The team is looking to see if this can be done under this project, or another project.

Q. A member of the public mentioned that it is difficult to visualize the height of the barrier on the highway side. The person was worried about truck tires and other debris hitting people using the shared use path.

A: The proposed metal barrier between the I-95 travelway and shared use path is 54 inches tall on the shared use path side.

Q: A member of the public commented that the proposed railing along the north side of the shared use path on the bridge look like steps that someone could use to climb up and over the fence.

A: The top of proposed anti-climb fence is approximately 6 feet above the top rail of the metal barrier. The metal railing is there to prevent bicycle handlebars from snagging, and the mesh fence is anti-climb, so it is harder for someone to grab and pull themselves up.

Q. A member of the public asked if the path will be bidirectional and if the path will be striped.

A. The path will be bidirectional and striped.

At this point in the meeting, there were no further questions or comments from meeting participants. Tracey Brais, CTDOT Project Manager, concluded the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 P.M.