



Connecticut Department of Transportation

State Project No. 0302-0023 Federal-Aid Project No. TBD Danbury Branch Track & Slope Stabilization Towns of Wilton and Bethel

August 29, 2024 at 6:00 PM
Virtual Meeting via Zoom Webinar

Minutes of Virtual Public Informational Meeting

In Attendance:

Panelists:

Alvaro Garica Jr., P.E. - CTDOT, Consultant Bridge Design, RBS – Principal Engineer
Gregory A. Funk, P.E. – CTDOT, Consultant Bridge Design, RBS – Project Manager
Trevjis Karanxha – CTDOT, Consultant Bridge Design, RBS – Project Engineer
Richard Bray, P.E. – HW Lochner (Designer of Record) – Project Manager
Kevin McDyer, P.E. – HW Lochner (Designer of Record) – Project Engineer
Ganesh Anandakumar, P.E. – GM2 Associates, Inc. – CLE
Dennis Garceau, P.E. - GM2 Associates, Inc. – CLE

Attendees:

There were approximately 8 attendees from the public. The Director of Public Works at Bethel, Eric Swenson was in attendance among the public.

Presentation:

A Virtual Public Information Meeting (VPIM) was held for this project on August 29, 2024. This virtual meeting was conducted via Zoom Webinar; technical difficulties precluded the YouTube Livestream. A recording of the presentation was uploaded to the Connecticut Department of Transportation YouTube account the morning after the meeting.

A recording of the presentation can be found at: <https://portal.ct.gov/dotdanburytrack0302-0023>

Ganesh Anandakumar acting as the Consultant Liaison Engineer (CLE) opened the meeting and described the means of communication open to participants during the live Q&A session, introduced the project team, and presented Title VI procedures. He also discussed the existing conditions and proposed plans of the project (see details below). Dennis Garceau, GM2 CLE, solicited questions and comments from attendees and directed these questions to various panelists to be answered.

During the meeting, links pertaining to the project email address, project phone number, project webpage, voluntary post-meeting survey, and civil rights information were posted for all attendees within the Zoom Webinar Chat.



General Overview and Existing Conditions

- The project areas were presented with location maps and aerial satellite views for both sites.
- A schematic of different elements of the railroad track was shown to help attendees better understand track-related terminologies.
- Existing photos from both the sites were shown to identify need of the project.
- The Purpose and Need statement “to address the track and slope deficiencies of MNR Danbury Branch Track at the two sites, and to provide a track profile that will improve reliability and reduce maintenance needs of the MNR track” was presented.

Proposed Plans

- The existing and proposed profiles of the track was presented, showing the limits of the track undercutting, proposed reinforced concrete culvert, corrugated metal pipe culvert, and proposed retaining wall as well.
- The existing and proposed typical section at both sites for the track was shared.
- Proposed drainage improvements at both sites were presented along with contractor access for both sites.

Impacts

- It was stated that no relocation of utilities will be required.
- It was stated that no temporary or permanent property impacts are anticipated.
- It was stated that Danbury branch track will be impacted over several weekends during construction phase.
- It was stated that permits from CT DEEP and USACE will be required prior to construction.

Construction Schedule and Cost

- It was stated that the anticipated schedule is for construction to start in Spring 2026 and to be complete by Fall 2026.
- It was stated that the anticipated construction cost is \$4,000,000 and the project is to be 80% federal-funded and 20% state-funded.
- It was noted that the right-of-way impacts, environmental impacts, and the project cost and schedule are all preliminary and subject to change as design progresses.

Public Questions and Comments:

The following questions were asked and answered during the live Question & Answer session through the Zoom Webinar Q&A tool:

Question: An attendee asked if the recent rain and flooding affected any of these areas and heard that some areas of the track were closed. Further, he asked if those areas are open now?

Response: Gregory Funk responded that the recent flooding did not impact these areas although the Danbury line was impacted. Currently, the Danbury line is on a normal schedule and only the Waterbury line has disrupted service.

Question: An attendee asked if there will be normal service during Monday to Friday commuter hours.

Response: Rick Bray answered the intent is to have normal service. There is expected to be several weekend outages for the work done outside of the commuter times.



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Question: An attendee asked about the noise level during construction.

Response: Gregory Funk answered that the noise level will be below 90 dB at a residence or an occupied building nearest to the site, which is equivalent to that of a hairdryer or a power tool.

Question: An attendee asked if eventually we will increase service/frequency or if this project will provide an opportunity to increase service?

Response: Rick Bray answered that this project is going to improve the reliability and maintenance of the existing service but is not intended to increase track capacity.

Question: An attendee asked if there are impacts to available parking spots in commuter lots at Wilton and Bethel.

Response: Gregory Funk answered that we do not anticipate any impacts to the parking spots of the community at this time.

Question: An attendee asked about noise levels expected for this project?

Response: Dennis Garceau pointed that this question was answered already. Gregory Funk reiterated that the noise level will be below 90 dB at a residence or an occupied building nearest to the site, which is equivalent to that of a hairdryer or a power tool.

Question: An attendee asked when do we anticipate this project happening?

Response: Gregory Funk answered that we are anticipating construction to start and end during the 2026 construction season. So, this would typically be between April and November. But this is dependent on the track outage and equipment availability for the track undercutting work.

Question: An attendee asked if there will be any passenger accommodations for track disruptions.

Response: Gregory Funk answered that we are evaluating options which may include optimizing workflows to reduce any schedule disruptions or providing bussing from Danbury to Norwalk during track outage periods. However, this has not been finalized.

Question: An attendee asked if there will be any impact to the embankment on the Trowbridge side of the track and they are at 16 Trowbridge Drive right above the construction.

Response: Rick Bray answered that there is no planned impact on the steep slope going up to drawbridge drive and we are working alongside the track and towards the pond.

Question: An attendee asked where the Contractor will access the track with their equipment.

Response: Ganesh Anandakumar answered that there are two locations both north and south of the project sites at railroad grade crossing which the Contractor can use to access sites.

The following question was asked and answered outside of the live Zoom Webinar after the meeting during the subsequent two-week comment period:

Question: Would you be able to tell me how this work in Wilton and Bethel might impact/support operations at Branchville (Ridgefield) and West Redding. My readers live in Redding but also in these neighboring towns. I am one of the reporters attending tonight's meeting. My story has a Saturday deadline; so, a Friday response would be helpful. Thanks! (sent via project email).

Response: The project is working to mitigate passenger service impacts as much as possible. At the current stage of design, we believe construction can be performed during off peak hours utilizing weekday overnight service outages as well as weekend service outages. As design progresses, we will have a better idea of the work windows required and will evaluate options such as bussing. In addition to our normal communication channels, our office will work with Metro-North Railroad to ensure any service disruptions are advanced through their notification system. The Branchville and West Redding stations are between the two project sites. Any track outages would disrupt service on the line between Danbury and South Norwalk.



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Adjournment:

The project was generally well received by the attendees. The live virtual presentation was closed at approximately 6:40 p.m. Dennis Garceau of GM2 restated to the attendees the means of contact for submitting any comments/questions after the presentation regarding the project. Attendees were notified of the end date of the comment period which is September 12, 2024. Participants were encouraged to take the voluntary post-meeting survey. All attendees were thanked for their time and attention related to the project presentation.