

Connecticut Department of Transportation

**State Project No. 30-97
Federal-Aid Project No. n/a
Hop River State Park Trail
Coventry and Columbia**

**June 25, 2019 6:30 p.m.
Yeomans Hall, 323 Jonathan Trumbull Highway, Columbia, CT 06237**

Minutes of Public Informational Meeting

Present:

Coventry Town Manager – John Elsesser
Columbia Town Administrator – Mark Walter
CTDOT – Hugh Hayward, Brian Natwick, Matthew Blume, Dennis McDonald
Department CLE Liaison (VHB) – James Kulpa, Chris Faulkner
Department Design Consultant (BL Companies) – Brett Stark, Dominick Celtruda
East Coast Greenway – Bruce Donald
Approximately 30 members of the public

Presentation:

The purpose of the meeting was to inform the public of the Hop River State Park Trail project and to solicit questions and comments. This trail is part of the East Coast Greenway, with the goal of connecting Florida to Maine with multi-use trails. The project proposes to construct a new pedestrian bridge over the Hop River, replace an existing culvert that allows the trail to cross under Flanders Road, and reconstruct approximately 4,500-feet of trail along the Hop River State Park Trail in Coventry and Columbia. The construction of this segment will close the final gap and complete the Hop River Trail system.

A one-half hour open house was hosted before the presentation began to allow the public to view various exhibits and discuss the project with Department representatives.

Mark Walter, Columbia's Town Administrator, opened the formal presentation at 7:00 pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

James Kulpa, of the Department Liaison firm VHB, introduced the project, provided an overview of the meeting format, discussed Title VI requirements, introduced the project team, and described how this project fits within the regional and national network of multi-use trails as part of the East Coast Greenway.

Dominick Celtruda, of BL Companies, the design engineer, continued the presentation by providing an overview of the proposed project, describing the project's purpose and need, and described the existing conditions. Mr. Celtruda then described the project elements and improvements proposed along the approximately 4,500-foot long project corridor, including, but not limited to: surface treatments, trail safety improvements, replacement of the existing structure over the Hop River, replacement of the "cattle crossing" structure, and replacement of the existing culvert that allows the trail to pass under Flanders Road. Mr. Celtruda also described the proposed detour route that is required for the Flanders Road culvert replacement. Mr. Celtruda concluded the presentation with a discussion of anticipated permits for the project as well as the project's schedule and approximate construction costs.

Dennis McDonald representing the Department's Office of Rights of Way provided a description of the rights-of-way acquisition process.

Public Comments and Questions:

Comment: A number of members of the public commented on the lack of parking for the trail and asked if anything could be done to add parking to the project. The public also mentioned the barricading of a parking area on Route 66 just west of the Willimantic River. They indicated that the area used to be open for parking and used for fishing access and kayak and canoe put in. The public asked if this area could be reopened.

Response: Parking lot construction is not part of the current project but will be evaluated for inclusion if locations can be found during the final design process.

Comment: A member of the public asked what the status of the construction funding was.

Response: The Department indicated that this project was part of the previous governor's multi-use trail program, and funds for construction have not yet been allocated and would have to go through the State Bond Commission for approval.

Comment: A member of the public asked who will maintain the trail once it is complete.

Response: CTDEEP will maintain the trail. It was noted by the Town of Coventry Town Manager that they have done maintenance work on the trail on a voluntary basis to assist DEEP, who provided materials for them to place and compact.

Comment: A member of the public asked if property would be acquired prior to funding being obligated for construction.

Response: The Department indicated that to proceed to construction, all property needs to be acquired and added that when they purchase property they intend to build the project. The Department also indicated that if something happened and the project couldn't be built, the acquired property can be turned back to the property owner.

Comment: A member of the public who had served with the Windham Regional Council of Governments noted that when the rail corridor was taken over by the State, there was a take-back clause on this section of the Hop River Trail which would allow a rail operator to re-establish rail operations if they determined it was feasible.

Response: Comment noted.

Comment: A member of the public asked if the "cattle crossing" being replaced is currently used by animals.

Response: It is not known if the "cattle crossing" is being used by animals, however, the pipes being used to replace the crossing will be large enough to accommodate most wild animals.

Comment: A member of the public asked if there was an alternative to chain link fence that is being proposed between some of the commercial properties and the trail

Response: The chain link fence in the locations being proposed is quite a distance of the trail so will likely not be noticeable except at those times of the years when the trees are dormant.

Comment: A member of the public requested that if parking is added to the project that consideration be given to providing an area away from the main parking for the parking of horse trailers since the trail gets quite a bit of equestrian use.

Response: Comments noted.

Comment: A member of the public asked what the sequence of construction would be and if portions of the trail will need to be closed during construction.

Response: The existing portion of the trail that is currently usable (between the Willimantic River and Flanders Road) will need to be closed during portions of construction. Appropriate signage will be put in place to direct trail users to an alternate route.

Comment: A member of the public asked what the environmental impacts of the project are.

Response: There are vernal pools in the area that will be evaluated as the design progresses as well as in water work when then bridge over the Hop River is replaced. Environmental permitting through the CTDOT, DEEP and ACOE will ensure that impacts to the environment are minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Comment: A member of the public requested signage be installed to limit motorized vehicles.

Response: The project will include signage that prohibits motorized vehicles on the trail. Additionally, the trail entrances will be designed such that it will be difficult to access the trail with a motorized vehicle.

Comment: A member of the public asked if interpretive signage to describe the railroad is a part of the project.

Response: Interpretive signage is not a part of the project.

Comment: A member of the public asked what the decking surface on the bridge would be and asked if it could be made horse friendly.

Response: The current plans for the bridge have a concrete bridge surface.

Comment: A member of the public asked if bar gates are going to be used at the road crossings and that provisions be provided for wheelchair users to get around the gate.

Response: Treatments at the road crossing will be designed to ensure that all users will be able to access the trail.

Adjournment: Discussions before and after the presentation generally mirrored those heard during the Public Comment and Question period. The meeting concluded at approximately 8:30 p.m.