
From: Rob Driscoll < >
Sent: Friday, July 01, 2016 2:18 PM
To: DOT Environmental Planning
Subject: Route 136 (Cribari) bridge - Westport

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

Dear Mr. Alexander:

I am writing regarding the proposed repair or replacement of the Cribari bridge on Route 136.

I urge DOT, in considering this proposed project, to respect the bridge's historic significance and community importance and the needs and concerns of Westport residents and businesses. Simply put, the vast majority of Westporters do not want any changes made that would permit large truck traffic through the Saugatuck neighborhood, would encourage diversion of traffic from I-95 onto our local streets or would endanger the character of the special neighborhood in which the bridge is located. I know these issues were explored thoroughly at the recent meeting at Westport Town Hall in which several DOT representatives participated, so I will not in this brief note dwell on each of the issues, but I would like to reiterate a few points:

— There is zero support in Westport for, and much concern about the possibility of, a replacement or repair strategy that would result in an increase of the height restrictions on the bridge. The fact that DOT has been unwilling to assure us that it will maintain the current height restrictions has led many to conclude that, in fact, the DOT intends to make changes that would permit huge trucks to drive across the bridge and through the small roads in Saugatuck neighborhood. That outcome would be a disaster for Westport and if that is in fact DOT's intent I urge you strongly to reconsider. On the other hand, if that is not DOT's intent, then DOT should come out and tell us that. Doing so would eliminate much of the worry and tension relating to this proposed project.

— Westport has recently received a state grant for use in Transit Oriented Development (TOD) planning. It would be a huge mistake, and a missed opportunity from a planning perspective, to proceed with a major bridge project without considering how the bridge may fit into future plans for the Saugatuck area.

— DOT has suggested that bridge widening (which also seems to provide the excuse for raising the clearance above) is necessary due to an unusually large number of accidents. But as was explored at the meeting, the validity of that conclusion is far from clear. When you look at DOT's own statistics, it is evident that there actually have been very few accidents on the bridge itself (as opposed to the surrounding roadways). In addition, a walk over the bridge, looking at the damaged areas on the trusses, would make obvious that the bridge strikes were the result of plows traversing the bridge during a winter of extreme weather, not normal car traffic. It is a myth that the narrowness of the bridge is causing cars to run into the trusses or into each other.

— The limitations of the bridge have a calming effect on local traffic. While increasing the speed of traffic flow might in other contexts be a worthy goal, in this situation it could have a negative effect on the safety of the many walkers and bike riders in the neighborhood.

— Westport has already been hit by the substantially degraded level of service provided by Metro North (a vendor that DOT is supposed to manage) as well as by DOT's mismanagement of local road projects, such as the North Avenue Bridge construction project which has put a major Westport road out of commission for the second summer in a row. The last thing we need is another potentially multi-year DOT project that is implemented without sensitivity to community needs.

— Finally, given CT's dire financial condition, is a bridge replacement costing tens of millions of dollars really a prudent use of our money?

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Best,

Rob Driscoll