

**CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
DIVISION OF HIGHWAY DESIGN – PROJECT DEVELOPMENT UNIT (PDU)
REPORT OF MEETING**

PROJECT NO.: PP_129_002
 ROUTES: 190 & 83
 TOWN: Somers
 DATE: 12/13/23
 TIME OF MEETING: 6:00PM
 LOCATION OF MEETING: Somers Town Hall Auditorium
 SUBJECT OF MEETING: Public Information Meeting

PARTICIPANTS:

Name	Organization - Role	E-Mail Address	Role (Organizer/Participant)
Marissa Pfaffinger, P.E.	CTDOT – PDU – Principal Engineer	marissa.pfaffinger@ct.gov	Organizer
Andrew Correia, P.E.	CTDOT – PDU – Managing Engineer	andrew.correia@ct.gov	Organizer
Kevin McKernan, P.E.	CTDOT – PDU – Project Engineer	kevin.mckernan@ct.gov	Organizer
Timothy Keeney	Town of Somers – 1 st Selectman	TKeeney@somersct.gov	Organizer
Todd Rolland	Town of Somers – Director of Land Use and Public Works	TRolland@somersct.gov	Organizer

ATTENDEES:

Approximately 75 members of the public in person. Unknown number of viewers via YouTube with two commentators.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

The purpose of this meeting was to present concept plans to the public and provide an avenue for input regarding Proposed Project 129-002 (PP_129_002) which proposes to normalize the southern Route 83 approach to the intersection of Route 190 and Route 83 and construct a modern roundabout or install a new traffic control signal at the resulting intersection.

INTRODUCTION

Following opening remarks from Todd Rolland, the Director of Land Use and Public Works, and Timothy Keeney, First Selectman, from of the Town of Somers, the PDU provided a presentation lasting about 40 minutes which gave an overview of the subject area, the needs it presently has, and proposed solutions. Following the presentation, a comment period was held for approximately one hour where interested citizens were able to ask questions or make comments regarding the proposed designs.

COMMENTS/QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Commenter 1: You mentioned there will be information available on the website, will that include the PowerPoint?

We will have to follow up on that and make sure that it is, but we are not sure right now.

Commenter 2: I have talked with troopers regarding the problem with the current intersection ... the number of red lights blown at that intersection, it is insane and people coming in the left turn lane... running the left turn arrow arrow, getting people in the opposing lane, like me, pissed off, the running of... the red lights and the expired turn arrow is nonstop all day every day, I cannot advocate for the roundabout more strongly; please do it now. Thank you very much.

Commenter 3: Hi. I like the idea of aligning Route 83, that's a problem. Do you know who put this presentation together?

We did.

Did any of you spend any time observing traffic at rush hour here?

We've seen it and we've heard from the folks in town sharing as well.

It's been my experience that people tend to hesitate at roundabouts... do I enter, is the guy coming around or is he going that way, so you hesitate. I think you're going to have traffic backed up in all four directions. What I would propose, and I'm not a traffic engineer, align route 83 like you proposed, good idea, get rid of that ugly, yellow, national eyesore (applause) and what I would do is put a right turning lane in both directions of Route 83. You're gonna alleviate some of the traffic on 83 and if you do that you might be able to leave the green light longer on 190 and improve that traffic direction. But a rotary? I'm concerned. We have the NETTTS training school, two gas stations, and a lot of other tractor trailers that come through that intersection. I think you're going to make a mess.

Commenter 4: I would disagree with that gentleman; I think roundabouts are great. I used to live in Ellington and that roundabout ... is fantastic. I think the roundabout in Stafford is great. The only problem I ever had with a roundabouts was when I was in Australia and you have to drive the opposite way... but I think the way that you've designed this would alleviate any problem like that because you're leading people in the correct way to go. The only problem I see is; how are you going to control the traffic when you're building the roundabout? That's going to be a problem, but I support the roundabout entirely.

[I]t is a great question about ... building a roundabout ... The realignment, obviously happens offline; the major intersection isn't impacted when that work's happening. It is more impactful to build a roundabout verses a standard intersection. It's impactful for probably one summer's worth of work, maybe a little bit longer depending on the details. Our construction staff do try to coordinate those efforts too, they do all the outside work first before you get to anything on the inside which is disruptive, and it is disruptive for a while, there's certainly no denying that, but it is something that our construction staff is very comfortable doing, they've done it in other places, many around here as well, so while it is impactful it is a short term impact and it does end up providing the roundabout at the end of the day. So there are notices that are posted whenever lane closures are expected and the police department is very much involved ... I'm not sure, exactly, how much lane closures or breakdowns would happen that's kind of an individual project thing, but those notices go out ... to try to allow people to either avoid during this time of day or whatever the case may be. So construction staging is ... individual to every single project but you are absolutely correct that during that brief period of time, that one season, a roundabout does have impacts for operating traffic.

Commenter 5: Does the town have a choice or is this going to be the Connecticut DOT decides?

So that's part of the reason we're here tonight is to solicit this feedback and then to talk with the town afterwards. So we presented two options tonight because there are two options on the table. We do feel that the roundabout does have the data behind it to show that it is a preferred alternative but that does not mean that it is the only alternative, so that's a huge part of why we're out here tonight in order to show information

before any funding is committed so that we can decide what the next step is and we decide with the town's partnership.

Commenter 5: So I guess my next question is for our town leaders; do we have a choice or are you two going to decide what we're going to do?

1st Selectman: You definitely have a choice.

Commenter 5: So you think the construction will only be maybe three, four months?

So that's hard to say at this point, that's what we would consider a design level detail and that would be a part of what would be shared at that next public meeting, that 30% meeting where they would have more information. The exact amount of time can depend on a lot of different things. It can depend on when construction starts; if they aren't able to start until say August or September then there might be some impact during the winter but they probably wouldn't be actively working. If they're able to start right in the beginning of Spring and it's a light winter they might be able to go through in one season, so it's difficult to say but we would usually say one to two years at this point because there's a lot of variables that we just don't know.

Commenter 5: So the center of town would be under construction for one to two years?

On average, yes.

Commenter 5: Well, I can understand doing a roundabout when you have an intersection of five or more roads coming together but with a simple cross I don't see the value. I think it was said by another gentleman I feel that during rush hour it's going to be worse. My experience has been people get in the roundabout and they're going like bats out of hell ... people don't take turns ... and I think there's going to be more backup there than there is now. I've lived in town 55 years, I've lived in my place for 28. Since they changed the light at least I can get to the post office within two lights. People are all upset because... they have to wait during a rush hour, well, rush hour only lasts maybe half an hour. I've watched them back up to my house but then it's gone, so I don't support the roundabout. I think there's going to be other issues. Once it's done you don't undo it; it's going to be there permanently and ... we don't have much of a center of town anymore and you know the stuff about historic Center and a village; that's a bunch of baloney because it's all gone anyway, so I'm not in favor of the roundabout. That's my feeling, you haven't convinced me yet. Thank you for coming out, thank you for your presentation.

Commenter 6: I live next door [to Commenter 5] and am best friends and great neighbors but I 100% disagree and this is why... I grew up in other countries; my dad worked for the state department and every other country I lived at major intersections were handled with rotaries and the studies that you showed also proved the efficiencies and effectiveness of them. Last spring I had a chance to spend a week in Switzerland. In Switzerland rotaries are the norm and regular intersection is the exception, and it was unbelievable how easy it was to navigate around Switzerland with all the rotaries that they had there. So my feelings are that this would be a great thing. I think there's hesitancy because it's new to Connecticut and that's why people are concerned about it but I know, myself, in Ellington and in Stafford I think it's so much easier right now with the rotary there. Thank you.

Commenter 7: I just wanted to come and express that I'm in favor of the roundabout and I base that on the ones around here and Ellington, Stafford. Every time I go through I said this is so much nicer, you just keep moving and you know as far as some people concerned about the construction I remember in Stafford they tore down that diner and there was construction for a long period of time but they still kept the traffic moving. They cleared a lot of land but it kept moving so I don't think that's going to be a major concern. I said I'm in favor; I base it on Stafford and Ellington, as long as it's not like East Longmeadow which everybody

knows about; these are just round and they keep moving. So my question; I just live two miles away so I figured 10 minutes was plenty of time to get here so I apologize if this was covered before I got here but I got stuck at the light and I watched the change red to green a couple times, but I'm just curious about the existing properties; the two gas stations have recently been redone and the Old Somers Inn is being reconstructed; are they going to lose any land and is anything going to be moved?

So with regards to the gas stations, those are active businesses, when we were looking through options ... that was on our minds; it's their businesses, there people who use them, people who depend on them so to answer your question, with the roundabout the gas station on the southwestern corner would be untouched because we're moving the roadway in the other direction and with the Henny Penny... I would anticipate a slight sliver of the grassy area needed to either make room for a left turn lane in a signal or to make room for the splitter islands. That's what I anticipate, the actual design team may have different ideas. With the Old Somers Inn, that's another historic building and I know that the fellow in there [is] planning on opening up a new restaurant, so we definitely don't want to impact that, well, more than through construction and hopefully improving the entire area.

Commenter 8: We're in the last Development coming up to the light and we're often times never given any opportunity to get out of our own area because [drivers] won't even let you come in. With a turnabout you can move more traffic than [a signal] can so it's more comfortable for people who live anywhere on 83. Some neighbors at Colonial Drive might run into the same problem that we are and I think it's very thoughtful ad I support it.

Thank you. One thing I'll note too; it's not something that many people consider when you think about driving a round about but if you are on the approach coming towards it instead of needing to make a left across traffic one of the things you can do is make a right turn and then use the roundabout to make a U-Turn...if you don't feel safe making a left turn.

Commenter 9: I had some specific questions about the design for the roundabout. I noticed that there were center dividers on the feeder lanes into which, according to the drawing, would allow Henny Penny only to be able to get fuel trucks coming in from the east and would allow the mobile station to get trucks coming in from the west, and the new restaurant would only be able to draw customers in from the north. Your design cuts off 75% of access to ... these businesses that are there. We have a hard enough time in Somers right now attracting and maintaining viable businesses without having a design that cuts away 75% of their viable traffic. My other concern; you had mentioned, and it's true, in a roundabout you're looking left and turning right but you've talked about having pedestrian crossings, some of whom are going to be coming from the right. We need to have people looking both ways. I'm not sure how you encourage that in the design.

I worked in Hartford for many years and ... and I discovered that [the bus] was a wonderful way to get into Hartford and I could actually get work done or read a book while somebody else delt with 91. Connecticut hasn't done a really great job of expanding its mass transit network out to where people are; we're basically a suburban state with a rural bus system. You could alleviate much of this traffic congestion, much of the idling by having two or three morning or afternoon busses serving the I-91 corridor.

Thank you. I do just want to note with regards to the businesses that while the sketch did show the splitter islands one of the options that are in place ..., again it would be something that our design team would work with the details of, is actually breaking and separating the island to provide openings for cars to turn. So, while there have been cases [where] that hasn't been an option, our goal is to continue to provide access to businesses wherever possible. So while the comment is very valid that, sometimes, that does happen and access does change, the goal is to maintain access and there are tools in the toolbox to allow for that to happen.

Commenter 10: Who owns that monstrosity yellow building? I've been here 22 years [and] nobody has put a freaking penny into that thing. I've seen bilco doors be removed only with bilco doors put in that are rusted to pieces and they came from the town dumps. Nobody paints, nobody does anything to it. I wouldn't be surprised if there's homeless living there or rats so, that's my question to you two, who own's that place? [Response] Okay, I don't know if they're here, so don't shoot me if they are. They don't give a hoot about that building. If they did; I owned a historic building up in East Hampton Mass. I had that for 40 years, turned into a daycare; beautiful building. I put my heart and soul into it because of the center of East Hampton. These people don't do anything ... If they were business people they would have sold it years ago, I would imagine. I don't think they care about history or keeping it historic because if they did they would put some money into it ... So whoever owns it; they don't care. Are you going to grab it from them? Can you do it by [eminent] domain or something?

So we have a full rights of way process; we actually have a division of rights of way that helps with property acquisition during the process. The first step is usually to meet with the property owners. Property owners are compensated, some of the dollar amount that we saw was an estimate of some of those impacts. So that is a design level activity that would happen during the design phase; there would be a negotiation. If for some reason a property owner is not looking to sell or there's a reason that the project needs to move forward we do have the right of eminent domain but that is sort of a last resort option; we do try to work through and negotiate with the property owner.

Commenter 10: If they wanted to do something they would have done something already. I doubt very much if you're going to grab that building and have it wrecked. I don't think I'll be alive when we do a rotary here. I think by the time you deal with those people to try to grab it from them that's probably eight years from now through litigation and then you put on another five years to build a rotary. So good luck. I mean, I'd like to see a rotary myself, I think it works, I think you've done a great job with your engineering and setting this up but until you can get those people to move along, I think we're dead in the water.

Commenter 11: I agree that for sheer drivability roundabouts are wonderful but first is a question of construction. I believe that if you were to do a realignment of the intersection you could do the work on the southern part of 83 without changing the current arrangement until you had everything ready to cook. My other concern is a little selfish; I'm one of those pedestrians who walks around here and this town has made a commitment toward walkability including a sidewalk survey within the last two years. I think that trusting the goodwill of the traffic entering to let you play chicken to get over to your island of refuge and then get across again is a little wishful thinking. Maybe there'll be fewer car crashes but I'd rather not have a pedestrian crash. The few times that I try to navigate crossing 190 I use the crosswalks which means there's a signal which means they've got to stop and they ain't going to have to stop if you've got a roundabout so for my very own selfish concerns I would say between interruption and walkability I would tend to prefer a realigned intersection to a roundabout even though I agree that the flow is a lot smoother in a roundabout. Thank you.

Commenter 12: Right now it's very unnoticeable the way the alignment is that there is a lot of pavement there. I think if you realign 83 ... instead of having that jog you'll see a significant increase in what looks like a large pavement piece. I think if you installed a roundabout that would solve some of that issue so if the choice is realignment or a roundabout I think the roundabout, from that perspective, would be better. I am a little concerned about the maintenance of the interior of the roundabout because it's probably really nice and pretty when it first goes in but it has to be maintained otherwise it would just look lousy. It is the center of town and you've got people who are helping their properties to become better looking and it would be nice

to be able to keep some sort of maintenance agreement in place for that. I think if anybody needs some convincing on why or how a roundabout can better a traffic situation you should all head down to Hein Avenue in Glastonbury; they have installed a series of roundabouts and, unfortunately, they didn't do Main Street. They should have put one more in at the end there but that traffic has gone from ... when you got off of Route, 2 to get all the way to Main Street, you could sit there for 20 minutes going through the lights ... and now you just go in and you just keep breezing your way through the roundabouts and it's a much easier way to go. I will say that I agree with the pedestrian issue but I know they deal with that [in Glastonbury] and it seems to work so I would say if anybody wanted to see a nice example of how it works that's a great example.

I'll note too about the maintenance; that is one of the things that the design teams do work with the town on. Even in some of the photos that were presented, some of the center islands just had gravel and rocks for a sort of low maintenance treatment and others had far more involved and planted areas. Some towns have rotary clubs that can help to maintain those, some towns have garden clubs; every town is different and so the details on all of that are very specific to each individual town.

Commenter 13: I'm a big fan of roundabouts. I think there's one in Ellington, especially, and the new one in Stafford is good. The one concern I have, and this you can see in the old Stafford roundabout downtown, and I think it has to do with not having the curves to slow people down. A lot of people don't realize that a person entering has to yield and, I mean, I've been almost taken out several times by somebody coming up 32 North and there's barely any signage. I think there's very little signage on the new one in Stafford, so that would be my only concern.

I'm actually familiar with the Route 32 NB ... When it was just the painted area I was actually coming through in a state car and almost got hit for that exact reason, so signing is certainly important so thank you for your comment.

Commenter 14: Could I just follow up on [the] question and concerns about pedestrian experience in a roundabout? Even though I'm pro-roundabout I am curious what the encouragement is to make people stop for pedestrians. I know you have the hash marks but a traffic light certainly does the job better.

So kind of going along the same lines with the signage there's yield signs that are installed coming in as well as along with the splitter island there's also pedestrian crossing signs, the high fluorescent ones. What happens is, with the splitter island, as you enter it ... going along with the curvature you tend to slow down, so when you start slowing down ... you're paying attention a little more to what's going [on] around. So, when you're coming to an intersection, if someone is trying to beat the light... sometimes you're not focused as much whereas with the roundabout, since you're slowing down you're making a decision that you can't speed right through it. While you're doing that your eyes kind of follow the way the curves are going and the pedestrians are presented pretty much right in line with that curve to enter into the roundabout. So between the signs and the curvature of the roadway itself it kind of brings the focus of the driver to help out with pedestrians. So, we know we can't compel people to stop, if we could we wouldn't have a job, but the reality is that there are a lot of design features that can encourage people to do that and, frankly, this is a message for every town. If you folks are living here and driving, if you slow down you have the opportunity to allow a pedestrian to cross too so there is a behavioral component of it as well. We want to encourage that; the engineering supports that but it can't force people to do it. The other thing that I'll note too is, during less busy times, maybe during peak hour when there are constantly cars coming into the roundabout [crossing it] is more of a concern. People are still rushing trying to get through. On those off peak times... you don't necessarily need to wait for the pedestrian signal to come in, you can just make that crossing less controlled the same way that during an off peak time you might have a red light as a driver and you still need to wait for that red light. If there's no one else in the roundabout you could

just enter. So, you know pedestrian safety is a huge topic right now across the state we're seeing, frankly, horrific numbers with just some of the safety components and it is very much on the forefront of our minds. We are doing a lot of what we can with engineering tools but, frankly, a lot of it does come down to the behavior of the driver so I think it's important that it's noted. There is good data to support that slowing people down does encourage that but, unfortunately, there's no silver bullet for [pedestrian safety].

Commenter 15: Just to clarify the answer you gave earlier; do we have a choice or are you saying that our choice is between plan A and B and that the state's already decided that so we don't really have a choice but what is going to be a massive project?

So the no build is still very much a choice as well. We're here because there's interest in a project, we're here because the data says that there's a problem to be solved but, if at the end of the day there's no desire to move the project forward, the state would not compel a project on the town.

Commenter 15: Okay; has any consideration been given to fixing the lights if that's the main problem? I'm not hearing that safety is an issue there which is one reason that the state has pushed roundabouts on some towns... I'm also not concerned personally with the light... I would think that the brains at the state could figure out how to get more than three cars through the left turn onto 83 South. I don't understand why they haven't put a couple hundred thousand into that. I don't like either of the price tags, I think it's a waste for this state that's almost bankrupt to insist on all of these roundabouts and to say it's state and federal money I think probably everyone in this room is paying taxes into that state and federal money so we are paying for it. The alignment with 83, I feel with the traffic going exclusively north or south I don't see the big problem there because you've got your left turn lanes and you're not competing with traffic in the other direction so I think that's a lot safer than it was. As far as DOT maintenance I wouldn't count on it in the center. I've known people that had work done at the bottom of their driveways look beautiful and it's never been maintained so ... I'm not convinced about that and having made, I would guess, hundreds of trips through the two roundabouts in Stafford, I know I seem to be the lone person here, everybody else thinks they're wonderful, I don't. I've been cut off more than I've made it through and to me the big problem with roundabouts is drivers. Nobody knows how to use them. People refuse to use their directional signals so you're sitting there waiting to see where's this person in the roundabout going so I think a big part of it is driver education so that's another reason I don't like roundabouts and it took years for Stafford to complete those to projects so this is going to be disruptive for a very long time.

Commenter 16: I've driven all over the country for 40 years and I took a job down in Ellington five years before, I think it's four years after the roundabout was down there and every morning we couldn't get into that company or out of it and once they built that roundabout it just worked beautifully. Yeah it took a while to build it but once it came in the results were excellent and I just want to say I think, yeah, it's going to take a little longer it's a little more money but from a safety standpoint, it works. I've driven through it 25 times a week since they built it and it's great. Somebody mentioned a car usually slows down approaching it, you know, and they get a little leery about looking left and going right and that's usually a guy with a fedora on driving and old Buick and all you got to do is tap the horn, he'll take right off.

Commenter 17: You're as close to the experts as we're going to get here so what's your recommendation for what we've got.

We do prefer the roundabout for the combination of benefits. It does reduce sort of open [pavement], the reduced idling, just the general operations... as well the roundabout is projected to have more efficiency versus

even the improved signalized intersection. The signalized intersection does have benefits over the existing condition, but the roundabout is our preferred alternative as we see it.

Commenter 18: Regarding crosswalks; I think there's a problem with the way the crosswalks in Connecticut are designed because the traffic has to stop when you're in a crosswalk, right, but the problem is that the crosswalks don't start soon enough. I mean, if the crosswalk stop started before where they get into the roadway then the people who are driving would say, "well, they're in the crosswalk." If there was a designated area, and in Florida they have some great crosswalks down there, on Route A1A I know in East Melbourne because they divide the road so they actually put in stations along the road that are colored and then they've got that really nice sign where the crosswalks are and then they also have some flashers so you could make your crosswalks a lot safer than they are.

If you have time after I can actually talk with you about some of the specific things that are getting tossed around if you're curious.

Commenter 19: I'm familiar with many traffic patterns both in Europe and here in the United States and I am not at all deterred by a roundabout. One of the things I've discovered in Madison, at their roundabout on Route 79, is that they have a police presence at all the heavy traffic times. They're right there and they have a spot for them; it's not like they had to squeeze in and move something or be half on the sidewalk. If there was room where you could have that kind of supervision, I think a lot of people would feel a lot more comfortable in that kind of transition. They had elections, people were actually in the roundabout in Madison on Route 79 during the election in the center with their signs and the police let them do it, but the police presence was there on all of the intersections, so it made such a difference. People were not intimidated... I just think if we had something built into that project where we could have supervision at times where buses and trucks are having to augment a little bit into that pattern then that would be a big safety concern that I would feel much more comfortable with.

Commenter 20: I just have a couple questions. When you were talking about the roundabout, some of it sounds good, you're talking about this could be 3, 4 years down the road, so it's not imminent, but we have an imminent problem, right? So have you considered, let's say they decide that we're going to go that way, we have a problem so why can't we fix a little bit of the problem. First thing is the lights... I think the timing could be improved on two of the roads coming in where we get the biggest blockage and if that timing was [set so] they had more time to come through it would save the other ones aren't busy at the same time, like 4 to 6 at night during the week, that's one thing. The other thing is, sooner or later you're going to take the yellow house and maybe a little corner of the gas station; why couldn't we add a lane, especially with the yellow house. Could the state buy the yellow house and add a lane? That would be good too so we'd have two lanes there and see what we could do about possibly putting an extra lane just a little bit in to make a better turn for the trucks and stuff. You know you're going to buy it anyway so one way or the other, why couldn't we just start with that? That might improve the situation temporarily. Or do you have to do the whole thing at one time?

Usually we have to do the whole thing at once and that comes down to the administrative process that goes hand in hand with it. Sometimes, if our maintenance folks have the ability to get out a little bit faster they can do some work but most of the construction that you see is done by a contract and the process of awarding a project to a contractor has certain steps to it. Your point is certainly well received though, particularly about maybe retiming the light, that's something we can take back to our division of traffic engineering and see if there isn't an opportunity.

ONLINE COMMENTS

The Town of Somers streamed the meeting on its own youtube.com channel which can be viewed at the following address: <https://www.youtube.com/live/-lM-NfvBWTM?si=wEakPNdtvjbaZQgc>

A live chat feature was enabled in which there were two users evenly split between being in favor and against a roundabout at this location.

ACTION ITEMS

CTDOT - Project Development Unit

- *Collect public comments until December 27th*
- *Organize a summary of comments for Town of Somers*

Town of Somers

- *Upon receiving summary of public comments, decide upon favored course of action and submit this to PDU in writing*

Prepared by: Kevin McKernan P.E. - Project Engineer
Reviewed by: Andrew Correia P.E. - Project Manager

Date: 12/19/2023
Date: 12/21/2023

This report of meeting represents the writer's interpretation of the matters discussed. If there are significant errors or omissions, please contact the writer within 10 days of the issuance date above. If no comments are received, concurrence will be assumed.