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Meeting Notes

Attendees: Study Team and General Public

Date/Time: July 18, 2012
7:00 – 9:00 PM

Project No.: 52196.00

Place: Manchester Community College

Re: I-293 Exits 6 and 7
Manchester #16099
Public Informational Meeting #1

Notes taken by: Dale Abbott

Mr. Keith Cota opened the meeting by introducing himself as the New Hampshire Department of Transportation's (NHDOT) Project Manager for the study. Mr. Cota also introduced members of the study team, which consists of Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc (VHB), who is the lead consultant for the project, Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC), and RKG Associates.

Mr. Cota discussed the makeup of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and described the project process consisting of three (3) parts. The project is currently in Part A (Planning Study), which Mr. Cota indicated is expected to take approximately 18 months to complete. Once Part A is completed, Part B (Environmental Documentation & Preliminary Engineering), and Part C (Final Design) will need to be completed before any construction can take place. Currently, funding is available for Part A only. Additional funding will need to be secured for Parts B & C. The estimated timeframe to complete all three parts of the project's design is 5 to 7 years.

Mr. Cota then introduced Mr. Marty Kennedy - the Study Manager for the consultant team. Using a PowerPoint Presentation (to be posted to the project website) Mr. Kennedy reviewed the Study Purpose, described the extent of the Study Corridor, reviewed the Study Scope and Schedule, discussed some of the existing deficiencies and constraints, and reviewed some of the data that has been collected including traffic volumes and a description of the traffic model, crash data, and some of the environmental and cultural resources. Mr. Kennedy also stressed the importance of our Public Outreach effort including a review of project website (www.293planningstudy.com) and urged attendees to stay involved and continue to attend future meetings.

In addition to the formal presentation attendees were encouraged to provide comments and suggestions, and ask questions.

Attendee Comments and Questions:

Mayor Ted Gatsas noted that the results of the operational analyses show the Granite/Commercial Street intersection as operating at a poor Level of Service (LOS) despite the City having spent a substantial sum of money to upgrade the intersection.

Mr. Kennedy responded that urban signalized intersections within a downtown area typically do not show good levels of service during the peak hours of the day. However, the new nearby Granite Street interchange does operate well.

A member of the public asked how the current traffic volumes compare to the previous five (5) years and what level of growth is anticipated in the future. The gentleman followed-up by stating that he appreciates the process and funding prioritization from Concord.

Mr. Cota stated that the funding to complete the Planning Study has been secured, but no other funding is currently available. Additional funding is needed to carry the project forward. However, the first step is to arrive at a sound consensus-driven plan through this planning study. Securing additional funding will require getting the next phases of the project into the State's 10 Year Plan. The Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission will lead this effort with local support from the City of Manchester and the Towns of Hooksett and Goffstown.

As to the question relating to the recent traffic growth trends, Mr. Kennedy suggested that the economic recession has had an impact on traffic volumes within the study corridor. From 2004 to 2008 the volume of traffic on I-293 had increased by approximately 14%. However, between 2008 and 2012 traffic volumes have actually dropped by approximately 4%. Mr. Kennedy stated that we will be discussing the future year traffic volume projections at the next meeting.

Senator David Boutin noted his concern regarding the possible encroachment of the highway on a condominium complex near Exit 6. The Senator stated that there is very little room between the highway and the residences and that he would be keeping a close eye on this area to ensure minimal impacts to these residents.

Senator Boutin also asked if he could be added to the TAC as a member.

Mr. Cota stated that he would add Senator Boutin to the TAC.

Mr. Cota noted that Executive Councilor Raymond Wieczorek was not able to attend tonight's meeting, but that he had expressed support for the study and the need for action to address existing deficiencies.

A member of the public asked for clarification on what is meant by a full interchange at Exit 7.

In response, Mr. Kennedy stated that if Exit 7 was relocated and reconstructed it would likely provide access/egress to and from the north and south on I-293. The existing interchange only provides access/egress to and from the south.

A member of the public noted that the NHDOT had previously held a public meeting to discuss the replacement of the I-293 bridges over Black Brook. She asked what the current status of that project was.

Mr. Cota responded that the bridge project at Black Brook had been put on hold pending the results of this Planning Study. Mr. Cota explained that at the time the Black Brook Bridge Project was ready to go out to bid, however former NHDOT Commissioner Campbell questioned how the Black Brook bridge improvement would fit into the long range plan for the corridor. To ensure that the bridge project would be consistent with the long-term plan it was determined that it would be best to wait until the Planning Study is complete. Mr. Cota also stated that NHDOT will be looking closely at the proposed alignments from the Planning Study in the vicinity of Black Brook. If the Planning Study shows that the corridor can support a six lane facility, than NHDOT will look to advance the Black Brook Bridge Project.

A member of the public raised a question on the crash data for the study area, specifically asking how many of the accidents were due to median crossovers.

Mr. Kennedy stated that he didn't believe there we any, but wasn't sure. He stated that he would check the crash data and get back to everyone with the answer.

Former Representative and Alderman Keith Hirschmann noted that two of his desires for the project were for improved access to the Manchester Community College from the turnpike and to better separate local traffic including emergency vehicles (such as along Eddy Road) from the Exit 6 interchange traffic. Currently north/south local traffic on the surface streets needs to pass through the interchange.

Alderman Hirschmann also asked if the Planning Study would identify interim safety improvements along the corridor or ways to improve interchanges in the short-term.

Mr. Kennedy replied the corridor system will be evaluated for interim improvements and that some interim improvements could be identified before the completion of the Planning Study.

Kevin Sheppard explained that the Manchester Community College has hired HTA to develop alternatives to improve the safety of their Front Street driveway. Also, the City is working with the NHDOT to gain an emergency access to the Turnpike for their new fire station.

Susan Huard, President of Manchester Community College, confirmed that the college is working with HTA on the intersection safety at their Front Street driveway. She also noted that the college is educating a younger student population in comparison to years past.

It was also suggested that maintaining good avenues of communication, such as the project website, will be important and will minimize calls to Alderman/Representatives.

Mr. Cota noted that the study team has developed input/comment page on the project website, where answers to questions will be posted and the public has the opportunity to post comments and feedback. Mr. Cota also noted that the Planning Study process will be as transparent as possible.

Mr. David Pierce, Goffstown Selectman, explained that ending the proposed Exit 7 connector at Dunbarton Road would change commuter routes and the character of the road. He suggested that we may want to include officials from Dunbarton and Bow on the TAC.

Mr. Cota responded that the traffic model will be used to evaluate changes/impacts on the local roadway network resulting from the various project alternatives. Mr. Cota also noted that the outlying towns can participate in the project through their Regional Planning Commission.

Mr. Kennedy added that the study team will be able identify changes in traffic patterns on area roads and that if needed/requested, he would be glad to meet with Dunbarton or Bow to discuss the project.

Mr. Brian Rose, Goffstown Planner asked if the Manchester Landfill would be a design constraint.

Mr. Cota answered that it is definitely a design constraint and that there are very stringent rules and regulations regarding work within a landfill.

It was suggested that comments and questions that come to us through the website be posted.

Mr. Kennedy indicated that we'll do that, but we need to do it in a way that doesn't discourage the public from providing their suggestions.

A member of the public commented on the safety of the road when trying to enter the highway at Exit 6 southbound and whether or not additional signage could be added to the highway to alert drivers of entering traffic or to encourage through traffic to use the left lane.

Mr. Cota noted that these types of suggestions from the community are very helpful and will be considered as we evaluate potential short-term actions.

Before closing the meeting, Mr. Cota reiterated that the current funding covers only the Planning Study part of the project and that the regional planning process will be used to get additional funding for the project into the State's Ten Year Plan.

Mr. Cota encouraged members of the public to visit the project website and he thanked them for taking the time to attend the meeting.