



## **I-91 Viaduct Study Working Group Meeting #5**

**January 28, 2016 – 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM**

**Community Room A, One Financial Place, 1350 Main Street, Springfield MA**

### **Summary**

**Purpose:** The fifth meeting of the I-91 Viaduct Study Working Group provided a summary of work completed to date as well as a presentation of a refined set of alternatives for the I-91 viaduct.

**Handouts:** Copies of the preliminary alternatives maps

**Present:** Representatives of Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Office of Transportation Planning (OTP) and MassDOT District 2; the project study team led by Milone & MacBroom (MMI); and the following members of the Working Group:

**Rana Al-Jammal**, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

**Carolyn Ariori**, Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Bureau of Environmental Health

**Ann Burke**, Western MA Economic Development Council

**Michelle Chase**, City of Agawam

**Greg Chiecko**, Eastern States Expo

**Jim Czach**, City of West Springfield, Department of Public Works

**Donna Feng**, MassDOT

**Dave Gaby**, Open Housing of Western MA

**Jeanne Galloway**, West Springfield Board of Health

**Adam Gomez**, Springfield City Council

**Sgt. M. K. Kwatowski**, Springfield Police

**Jenny Mackay**, Young Professionals of Springfield

**Rich Masse**, MassDOT District 2

**Douglas Mattoon**, City of West Springfield, Director of Planning & Development

**Kiah McAndrew-Davis**, Springfield Department of Health and Human Services

**Anna Nadler**, MassDOT District 2

**Paul Nicolai**, Nicolai Law Group, P.C.

**Gary M. Roux**, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

**Paula Simmons**, MassDOT Rail & Transit Division

**Jim Vinick**, Moors + Cabot

**Marcus Williams**, Springfield City Council

**Ben Wood**, DPH

**Thomas Yarsley**

MassDOT Project Manager Ethan Britland opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. He reviewed the agenda for the meeting and introduced key members of the project team. Mr. Britland led

a round of introductions. He provided a quick overview of the first public information meeting, held in December 2015, which introduced the study to the public.

Mark Arigoni, Milone & MacBroom, reviewed the work the team members completed since the last Working Group meeting, when they presented an initial set of 12 alternatives. For example, using micro-simulations, the team used the 2040 future year information to examine impacts at approximately 50 intersections throughout the study area.

Mr. Arigoni said that MassDOT and DPH have collaborated to supplement the evaluation criteria with health pathways, including mobility and accessibility, and environmental and community effects.

Mr. Arigoni announced that the team has narrowed the list of alternatives down to six options. He explained why some of the alternatives (North & Southbound Split, Route 5 Realignment, I-91 on West Side, and Tunnel Only Section) were removed from consideration. Typically, they had more significant impacts and limited potential benefits.

Mr. Arigoni described the At-Grade Section alternative, which would remove an overhead structure and reduce the need for MassDOT to maintain an elevated viaduct. However, this would bring the highway and related noise to the street-level and would not improve connections to the Connecticut River.

The Relocated Railroad / I-91 on Former Rail Right-of-Way alternative would involve tunneling I-91 in the current location of the railroad, with an access road in the current location of I-91. The railroad would be relocated to the west side of the Connecticut River. Mr. Arigoni explained that this would remove the visual impediment of the viaduct structure and provide a direct connection to the river, with the potential for green development. The railroad would need two new bridges to provide access between the west side and the new Union Station.

#### **Several participants offered questions and comments:**

- **Gary Roux**, PVPC, asked, since the CSX, the railroad owner, is not represented at this meeting, how can this alternative advance? Mr. Arigoni said the railroad representatives were invited to attend and acknowledged the need to engage CSX in alternatives involving the railroad alignment.
- **Springfield City Councilor Adam Gomez** noted that some small projects are planned that could impact these alternatives. He described congestion issues on local roads in the North End, which he represents, since there is only one way to enter and leave the neighborhood. Mr. Arigoni thanked Mr. Gomez for his comments and said he is welcome to share additional information after the meeting. Ben Wood, DPH, later confirmed with Mr. Gomez that he was referencing the Gerena School Health Impact Assessment.
- **David Gaby**, Open Housing of Western MA, said the southernmost railroad bridge over the river seems longer than it needs to be. Mr. Arigoni explained that his team is trying to mitigate potential impacts to bordering park lands.

Mr. Arigoni described the I-91 on West Side alternative, which now includes three new bridges – two for the highway and one for the railroad. This, too, would remove the visual and physical barrier between downtown Springfield and the Connecticut River.

#### **Several participants shared their questions and comments:**

- **Thomas Yarsley** shared his idea, which is similar to the I-91 on West Side alternative. He suggested crossing I-91 over the river between the Memorial Avenue Rotary and the I-291 interchange. Route 5 would terminate at the Memorial Bridge. A new ramp would provide seasonal access from I-91 to the Big E (Eastern States Expo).
- **Paul Nicolai** agreed and expressed his support for the alternative that provides the maximum benefit and moves the train and the highway to the west side, as this would alleviate issues with the Longmeadow Curve and could include restoration of park land.
- **Doug Mattoon**, Town of West Springfield, said if the highway and railroad are relocated to West Springfield and Agawam, it must be a solution that preserves economic development and river access for those communities, too.
- **Mr. Gaby** said he thinks the I-91 on West Side alternative has the greatest positive economic development effects. Mr. Arigoni explained that there are always impacts to private property and environmental considerations that must be accounted for.
- **Jenny Mackay**, Young Professionals of Springfield, asked how the team expects to handle the new I-291/I-91 interchange. Mr. Arigoni explained the yellow boxes on the map identify areas that require modified highway or roadway infrastructure and the alternatives development has not advanced enough to provide that kind of detail at this point.
- **Jim Vinick**, Moors + Cabot, and **Mr. Yarsley** said they do not think this alternative would negatively impact West Springfield. **Mr. Mattoon** explained that the area near the power plant was damaged from the tornado and is highly desirable for future developments.

Mr. Arigoni described the Reconstructed Elevated Section alternative, which could be constructed at heights similar to the I-91 span over the Memorial Bridge (an elevation of 13'10") or as high as 50 feet using modern construction techniques. There would be fewer ramps to downtown and local access at the street level.

**Several participants provided comments and asked questions:**

- **Mr. Vinick** provided an opinion on the aesthetics of the bridge shown in the examples slide. He added that it is important to have the Springfield business community represented at Working Group meetings. Mr. Britland explained that the Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation were invited to attend, and the team hosted a public meeting in December for interested residents, business owners, and other community members. He added that there are many perspectives on aesthetics, which is why it is important to involve as many people as possible.
- **Mr. Vinick** asked when construction would begin on any alternatives. Mr. Britland said the timing of construction would depend on the recommendations of this study, which will be released in mid-2016. If something advances to the project development process, it would take approximately six to eight years for environmental permitting and design, plus a few years to secure funding, and then begin construction.
- **Mr. Vinick** asked if there would be any encroachment on the Basketball Hall of Fame's property with the Reconstructed Elevated Section alternative. Mr. Arigoni responded that he anticipates the property would be impacted but he is unsure of exactly how at this time. He added that an alternative could positively or negatively impact the Hall of Fame.
- **Kiah McAndrew-Davis**, Springfield Department of Health and Human Services, said that she likes the visual idea of a super elevated viaduct, and the improved connection for pedestrians to

access the riverfront. In reality, Ms. McAndrew-Davis thinks walking under a large structure is not pleasant. She added that she has several reports from a safety audit under I-91 and is happy to share the information and recommendations. Mr. Arigoni thanked her for her comments.

- **Jeanne Galloway**, West Springfield Board of Health, suggested choosing a design for a structure that would not be a bird roost.
- **Springfield City Councilor Marcus Williams** asked if the team has considered how traffic will be impacted by the MGM Casino. Mr. Arigoni said during the data collection phase, the team incorporated traffic studies prepared for MGM into its travel demand models to examine 50 intersections. Councilor Williams asked if the study team has collaborated with MGM on its health risk assessment. Mr. Wood responded that DPH has the health impact assessment prepared by Partners for a Healthier Community.
- **Mr. Gaby** said he anticipates that a traditional architectural style, rather than something modern like the Zakim Bridge in Boston, would be better suited for Springfield. **Mr. Vinick** expressed interest in a new icon based on historical elements. Mr. Arigoni clarified that the new bridge would not need to be in a modern design style.
- **Ann Burke**, Western MA Economic Development Council, said the key to a successful elevated viaduct is increasing light and providing space. **Mr. Gaby** added that a plaza below the elevated structure would need an activity source to bring people in.

Mr. Arigoni presented a map and illustrative elevations of the Sunken, Depressed, or Tunnel alternative. The study team is considering different levels of depressing a section of I-91 in its existing alignment. A drawback of this alternative is the need for bridges for local streets over I-91, but there is potential for filled in sections with greenspace or development rights to enhance the connection to the riverfront. Mr. Arigoni encouraged Working Group members to share their ideas in drawing form.

#### Several participants offered comments and asked questions:

- **Mr. Nicolai** asked how long a tunnel can be before there are hazardous materials concerns for trucks. Mr. Arigoni said his initial findings show 20 feet is the minimum length, but he will investigate this further as it may depend on other factors. Mr. Nicolai encouraged the team to consider dropping both the highway and railroad below grade.
- **Mr. Roux** asked if an eight lane section would be more appropriate to consider future population growth. Mr. Arigoni explained that the 2040 data shows only three lanes are needed in each direction, totaling six lanes.
- **Mr. Mattoon** said he likes that this alternative eliminates the visual impact and provides an attractive east-west movement. He thinks it is best to locate the railroad and highway next to one another.

Mr. Arigoni described the Enhance Existing alternative, which would have more limited construction impacts. The study team began looking at the southern area of I-91 near the Longmeadow Curve and explored some changes to the Route 5 interchange to take city traffic off I-91. He explained there is an 80 foot grade change from the Longhill Street and Sumner Avenue intersection and I-91 near the South End Bridge, and shared ideas of using single point and diverging diamond configurations at this location. Mr. Arigoni described some ideas for modifying the Rotary to better connect Route 5 and Route 57. He also shared an idea for improving the merge from I-291 West to I-91 South, but adding a ramp that splits off to the Memorial Bridge or I-91 South.

**Comments:** Mr. Gaby said he thinks the single point intersection configuration should not be studied further because the private property impacts would outweigh the traffic efficiency. He suggested relocating the bridge to connect to Route 5. Mr. Yarsley said the Sumner and Longhill Street area is bad and needs fixing. Mr. Arigoni explained the team is looking at the feasibility of these options for now and will consider cost in the next phase.

**Comment:** Mr. Mattoon expressed interest in splitting local and regional traffic before entering Springfield.

**Question:** Greg Chiecko, Eastern States Expo, asked if an alternative could either move the railroad and highway to the west side or bury them in a tunnel. Mr. Arigoni said his team will look into the feasibility and cost of these ideas.

Mr. Arigoni shared a list of potential short- and medium-term recommendations, which he referred to as low hanging fruit. For example, enhancing lighting below the viaduct could be done relatively quickly and with a low cost.

Mr. Arigoni said there are three more Working Group meetings, with the next in March, and two more public meetings. The study will wrap up in June 2016. The study team will define the final three alternatives and finalize the public health evaluation with DPH. He encouraged participants to email the study team with any additional comments as soon as possible. Mr. Arigoni thanked participants for attending and closed the meeting.