



I-91 Viaduct Study Working Group Meeting #1

November 6, 2014, One Financial Plaza, Springfield MA

Summary

Purpose: The first meeting of the I-91 Viaduct Study Working Group

Handouts: The meeting agenda and copy of the meeting PowerPoint presentation

Present: See the attached attendance list; 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

Allan W. Blair, Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council

Timothy W. Brennan, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Ann Burke, Western Mass. Economic Development Council

Jennifer Carrier, Capital Region Council of Governments

Jenny Catuogno, Young Professional Networking Groups

Michelle Chase, Agawam

Chris Cignoli, DPW Springfield

Jeffrey Ciuffreda, Affiliated Chambers of Commerce of Greater Springfield

William Cochrane, SPD

Robert Colson, City of West Springfield DPW

Stephen J. Crane, Town of Longmeadow

Chris Crean, Peter Pan Bus Lines

Tim Doherty, MassDOT Rail & Transit Division

John Doleva, Basketball Hall of Fame

Melvin Edwards, Maple-High/Six Corners Neighborhood Council

Nicholas Fyntrilakas, MassMutual Financial Group

William C. Loiselle, Massachusetts State Police

Mary L. MacInnes, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority

Minerva Marrero, Office of Mayor Domenic Sarno

Rich Masse, MassDOT District 2

Douglas Mattoon, City of West Springfield

Jay Minkarah, Develop Springfield

Anna Nadler, MassDOT District 2

Paul Nicolai, Nicolai Law Group, P.C.

William Powers, Office of Congressman Richard E Neal

Margaret M. Round, Massachusetts
Department of Public Health
Gary M. Roux, Pioneer Valley Planning
Commission
Chris Russell, Springfield Business
Improvement District
Don Senecal, Naismith Memorial Basketball
Hall of Fame
Paula Simmons, MassDOT Rail & Transit
Division
Matthew J. Sokop, Holyoke DPW

Albert Stegemann, MassDOT District 2
David J. Stein, Connecticut River Watershed
Council
MA Representative **Aaron Vega**
Ken Vincunas, Development Associates
Mary Kay Wydra, Greater Springfield
Convention and Visitor's Bureau
Stephen Wyszynski, Springfield Police
Department
Thomas Yarsley

MassDOT Project Manager Ethan Britland opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. Mr. Britland reviewed the agenda for the meeting and asked members of the consulting team to introduce themselves (see the attachments). He noted that all of the team members are present to meet the Working Group; going forward, he will call on the specialists for the topics under review.

Mr. Britland outlined the membership and intent of the Working Group. MassDOT invited representatives of local, regional and federal organizations to participate, with a strong focus on neighborhood and community groups; business and local advocacy groups; planning organizations in the Pioneer Valley; and transit agencies (Amtrak, CSX Railroad, PVRTA, and Peter Pan Bus). The role of the group is to provide input and ideas on the study process and highway alternatives, and to bring information back to the organizations the members represent. Members should serve as a conduit to their communities of interest. Mr. Britland said the group will potentially have to meet the challenge of balancing a wide array of wants and needs, and communication is essential to the process.

Mr. Britland asked the participants to introduce themselves.

Mr. Britland outlined the purpose of the study: to develop a conceptual planning study which produces short, medium and long term recommendations that will ultimately result in an actual project. The highway alternatives should move traffic efficiently on I-91; enhance the Viaduct's presence in the community; improve overall safety for all modes of travel; and increase multimodal connections and access between the downtown urban core and the riverfront. Mr. Britland noted other projects underway in the study area, including replacing the I-91 Viaduct deck; I-91 Corridor Planning Study (by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, PVPC); a Springfield Riverwalk and Bikeway Survey Report; and work underway by the Urban Land Institute.

MMI Project Manager Gary Fontanella introduced Task 1, which will outline the Study Area, goals and objectives, evaluation criteria and public involvement plan. Van Kacoyannakis of MMI then introduced the draft regional transportation impact area (Regional Study Area), with the following boundaries:

- The Southerly portion is bounded by the South End Bridge , the west being U.S. Route 5 and the east being Interstate 91
- On the eastern side of the Regional Study Area map, the boundary consists of Interstate 91 up to Interstate 291 Interchange and continues along Interstate 291 up to the Mass Pike – Interstate 90
- Northerly, the region is bounded by the Mass Pike in Chicopee up to Interstate 391, where the boundary runs easterly
- Easterly it is bounded by Interstate 391 into Holyoke which is then bounded northerly by High and South Streets
- The Western side of the Regional Study Area is bound by Interstate 91 southerly to the Interchange with U.S. Route 5
- At that point its western boundary is Route 5 along the CT River where it meets with the South End Bridge.

Mr. Kacoyannakis then described the draft Primary Study Area, which includes the I-91 Viaduct structure from State Street to I-291; West and East Columbus Avenues; and portions of Main, Dwight, East Columbus, West Columbus and Chestnut Streets. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) is conducting a study of the area south of this Primary Study Area (marked in red on the map provided in the presentation).

Mark Arigoni, Principal in Charge for MMI, said the team will be looking at all aspects of the project, including bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Two particular goals have been drafted to set the framework for the study:

- Maintain or improve the safe and efficient function of I-91 Interstate and local street network within the project study area, while significantly improving the connection between the downtown urban core and the riverfront
- Improve the quality of life for city residents (surrounding neighborhoods), existing/future business owners, daily commuting workforce, and visitors to the City of Springfield and surrounding communities

The objectives are the details and the elements of the project that can help meet the project and the community's goals. Mr. Arigoni reviewed the objectives at a high level and asked the Working Group members to review and comment on them. The objectives are multimodal and include safety, access, coordination with other efforts, a focus on public health and awareness and environmental justice, environmental benefits and access to the waterfront, among others.

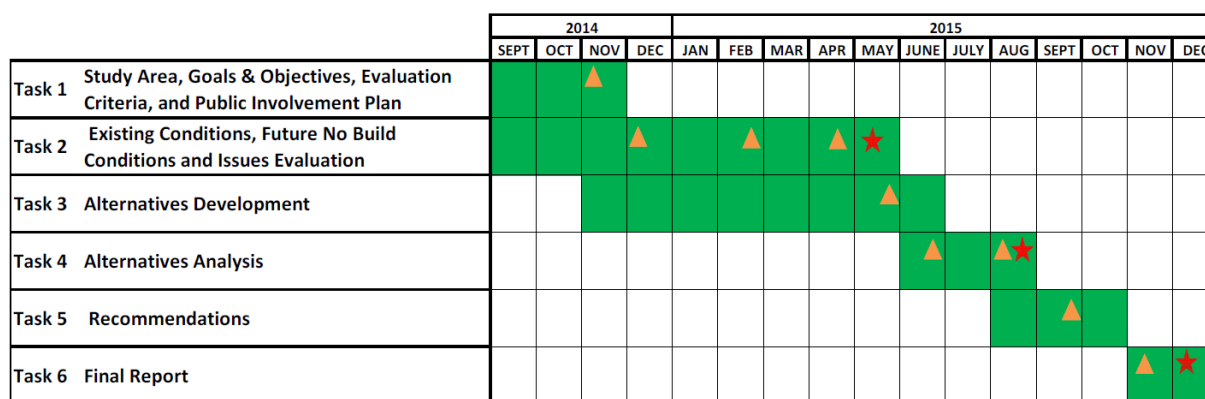
Mr. Fontanella turned to the draft evaluation criteria for the project. He listed criteria and measures of effectiveness for mobility, safety, health and environmental effects, connectivity/accessibility, land use and economic development, community effects, freight and passenger rail impacts and cost. These criteria form the basis for evaluating proposals or alternatives. He asked the Working Group members to review the evaluation criteria and

provide comments on them and suggest any additional criteria that might be appropriate to consider.

Sarah Paritsky, Regina Villa Associates, outlined the public involvement plan for the project. MassDOT and the team aim to be responsive to the Working Group and look forward to working with everyone. Ms. Paritsky said the team anticipated nine Working Group meetings between fall 2014 and fall 2015. MassDOT is developing a project website, which will go live this fall. Site visitors will be able to sign up for project emails, which will include updates to the website and meeting notices. MassDOT also uses social media to share project information.

MassDOT currently anticipates holding three public meetings for the project: in Spring 2015, Summer 2015 and Fall 2015.

Mr. Fontanella returned to review the ongoing work, which includes completing Task 1 and beginning work on Task 2. Task 2 will establish existing conditions and future no build conditions, and evaluate issues as well. Mr. Fontanella shared a bar chart study schedule:



Working Group Meeting ▲

Public Meeting ★

While some of the dates are estimates, the schedule provides a general outline of the work and milestones for review by the Working Group members.

Mr. Britland said that the Working Group members will get a copy of the presentation and he encouraged them to provide comments and reactions to the goals, objectives and evaluation criteria. He welcomed comments and questions.

The following summarizes the comments from the discussion period:

Stephen Crane, Longmeadow Town Manager, expressed concern about the Study Area. He suggested it should extend south to the Connecticut border and incorporate examining the curve at Longmeadow (i.e., the Longmeadow Curve). He felt that any realignment of the viaduct cannot be considered without impacting the Longmeadow Curve. Mr. Britland explained that

the Longmeadow Curve issue is an operational one as opposed to the safety issue associated with a failing viaduct infrastructure (hence the need for a short term deck repair project). He also indicated that there were not sufficient funds presently available to MassDOT to extend the current study that far to the south of the Viaduct Study area. In addition, he noted that PVPC is completing a corridor study that does extend further south and is shown on the Draft Primary Study Area slide outlined in red. PVPC will be looking at many of the same issues – traffic, safety, congestion – and depending on the alternative chosen, MassDOT may have to extend its work to the south. Mr. Crane asked if some level of alignment shift is likely as a long-term option? Mr. Britland said there are no conceptual constraints on the alternatives and their alignment at this point. Mr. Crane said he thinks it will be important to address the curve in this study as it's the worst segment operationally and from a safety viewpoint on I-91. Mr. Britland acknowledged this concern and said the Existing Conditions stage is underway and may reflect that.

State Representative Benjamin Swan asked if MassDOT is talking to the railroad operators as the right-of-way is adjacent to the Viaduct. Mr. Britland said that the parties have been invited to participate in the Working Group and will remain on the mailing list, even if they don't attend. Mr. Fontanella said the team understands the constraints and will continue to learn more about them and share that information with the Working Group.

Mr. Britland was asked about the study timing, and what the implications are of completing the study about six months into the deck repair project. Mr. Britland said the study will result in short, medium and long term recommendations. The medium and longer term concepts will require additional design, perhaps property acquisitions, permitting and budget development to advance. He noted that the reason to replace the deck now is that the work is needed immediately and funds were made available. The longer term options that could come out of the current study could take 10 years to develop and implement, and the deck replacement could not wait that long. Mr. Fontanella added that the deck repair project includes a comprehensive traffic management plan, and the data collected is likely to provide some insight into this study as well. There was a follow-up question asking if the I-91 Study indicated short term improvements, could contractors bidding on the deck repair project have the opportunity to connect with or bid on these short term study recommendations. Mr. Britland said there couldn't be a connection since there wouldn't be a design or permits ready for bidding within the deck repair project time frame.

Tom Yarsley said he is extremely disappointed in the scope of the project, indicating it hardly seems worth doing when there is no attempt to replace the Longmeadow Curve. Since PVPC is not going to build a highway, and if the project does not consider the entire corridor, it will be a waste of time and money. The corridor under consideration should stretch from Longmeadow to the Chicopee curve. He urged MassDOT to "get it right" and make the expenditure worthwhile. Mr. Britland said Mr. Yarsley is not alone in expressing that judgment. Mr. Crane

interjected that he might feel better about the scope if PVPC were a direct subcontractor on the project, part of the team, and working in tandem on the corridor.

Allan Blair, Western MA Economic Development Council, said he hopes the group will consider out-of-the-box plans, such as splitting the highway, use of Route 5, and other ideas. Springfield bears the burden of 100,000 vehicles a day, and this problem won't be solved just by addressing the viaduct structure; MassDOT needs to look at the larger burden.

Mr. Britland said that he hears these concerns and will bring them back to his office, namely that there are two study areas – MassDOT's and PVPC's – and the final products should help capture the issues.

In response to a question from Matthew Sokop, Holyoke Department of Public Works about why I-291 and 90 are included in the Study Area, Mr. Britland said the intent is to gauge the impact of any changes in I-91 on those highways as well.

A speaker encouraged MassDOT and the Working Group members to develop a plan that is bold and visionary, improves quality of life and enhances economic development.

Nick Fyntrilakis, Mass Mutual, questioned how the current study area proposal could accommodate a plan, for example, to place the highway below grade, without considering the curve and implications for connecting a limited segment to the rest of I-91. Mr. Britland said that is a challenge, and the engineers will know how far that grade changes needs to go and this team will coordinate with PVPC. Mr. Fyntrilakis suggested that the study area is too arbitrary for a comprehensive analysis.

Tim Brennan, PVPC, said his organization has pressed for a corridor study for a decade. He encouraged Mr. Britland and MassDOT to consider including the more generous length in the study. Mr. Brennan said he concurred with the suggestion that the study should be bold. If MassDOT is unable to expand the scope, he thinks making PVPC a formal subcontractor is more likely to result in a seamless study. If the study is not expanded, to make progress, the region will need to employ all of the political capital of Western MA to get the work done. He noted that the study is anticipated to take one year, and noted the need to take the casino into account in future planning.

Representative Aaron Vega asked if Mr. Britland is confident that the two studies can be married? He doesn't want to see another flawed process that results in disruption and no progress. The long-term goal of the study should be to make the city a greater place. In his view, the railroad is the elephant in the room.

Another member said that the message Mr. Britland should take back to MassDOT is that there is consensus on the study area and it includes I-91 from the CT border to Holyoke. Mr. Britland said he will carry the message back to MassDOT.

Other speakers agreed and noted the importance of figuring out how to handle the railroad. Another speaker suggested that the study will be more embraced if it incorporates urban planning, accounts for the Viaduct and the railroad and can be executed.

Mr. Yarsley said he would like to see the goals further defined and fleshed out. Mr. Britland said some people argue for broader goals to fit different alternatives within the goals. Mr. Yarsley said if the goals are ambiguous, they won't be achieved. They should include access to the river and improving the views; pedestrian access; and other details. Representative Swan suggested that there are other issues to be addressed that will improve the area for local residents, such as the location of the railroad in the area of the viaduct structure.

Ms. Jennifer Carrier, Capitol Region Council of Governments, made a comparison to the I-84 viaduct structure project in Hartford, CT.

Mr. Britland was asked about including the Army Corps of Engineers in the project. He said they can be invited, but are not necessarily needed at this point in time. A speaker suggested that there is likely to be a significant water table issue with any construction around the Viaduct based on what the Sheraton Hotel went through. Mr. Britland said MassDOT does not normally engage the Corps this early, but ACOE may well be involved in the permitting.

Rich Masse, District 2, had some comments on the draft evaluation criteria suggesting that river access be moved to a different evaluation criteria. Mr. Britland asked him and all of the members of the Working Group to send him comments in writing so the material presented at the meeting can be reviewed and finalized. He said the presentation will be emailed to the group and the information will be included on the project website as soon as it is live. Mr. Britland thanked all of the participants for coming to the meeting.