



## **I-91 Viaduct Study Working Group Meeting #6**

**March 16, 2016 – 4:00 PM**

**UMass Center at Springfield, Tower Square, 1500 Main Street, Springfield, MA**

### **Summary**

**Purpose:** The sixth meeting of the I-91 Viaduct Study Working Group presented a refined set of alternatives for the I-91 viaduct.

**Handouts:** Copies of the alternatives maps

**Present:** Ethan Britland and Michael Clark of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Office of Transportation Planning (OTP); Mark Arigoni and Van Kacoyannakis of the project study team led by Milone & MacBroom (MMI); Sarah Paritsky and Emily Christin of Regina Villa Associates; and the following members of the Working Group:

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

**Jenny Catuogno**, Young Professional Networking Groups

**Michelle Chase**, City of Agawam

**Greg Chiecko**, Eastern States Expo

**Jeffrey Ciuffreda**, Affiliated Chambers of Commerce of Greater Springfield

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

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

**Rich Masse**, MassDOT District 2

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

**Jay Minkarah**, Develop Springfield

**Anna Nadler**, MassDOT District 2

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

**Hardy Patel**, MassDOT Highway Design

**Patrick Paul**, MassDOT District 2

**Catherine Ratté**, Live Well Springfield/PVPC

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

**Kathleen Szegda**, Partners for a Healthy Community/Baystate Health

**Laura Walsh**, Forest Park Civic Association

**Thomas Yarsley**

MMI Principal Mark Arigoni opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. He reviewed the agenda for the meeting and introduced key members of the project team. Mr. Arigoni led a round of introductions.

Mr. Arigoni provided an overview of the last Working Group meeting. He listed the alternatives that were removed from consideration at the last meeting (I-91 North & Southbound Split, New Route 5 Bridge Connection, I-91 Relocated to Route 5 Corridor, Tunnel Only, and At-Grade). He noted that the Sunken, Depressed or Tunnel alternative keeps a tunnel under consideration, to some degree.

Mr. Arigoni reviewed the alternatives that remained after the last meeting and asked participants to hold their comments until the end of the presentation portion of the meeting. The study team's goal is to move three alternatives forward for a comprehensive analysis and those would be discussed tonight. Mr. Arigoni said his team attempted to identify any "fatal flaws" that would prevent an alternative from receiving public support and moving towards construction. It was mentioned that MassDOT and the consultant team will want to focus their collective analysis efforts on those alternatives that have the most feasibility and potential to be implemented in the future, and remove those alternatives that do not.

Mr. Arigoni described the Relocated Rail Line & Relocated Highway (West Side) alternative, which is a combination of the I-91 on West Side and Relocated Rail alternatives based on feedback from previous Working Group meetings. He noted that the green highlighted sections represented on the alternatives maps designated parkland and neighborhoods, and that three to seven new bridges would need to be constructed to accommodate rail and vehicular traffic. Mr. Arigoni summarized the potential impacts and benefits that have previously been presented to the Working Group. With the relocation of the railroad, MMI developed and presented an additional list of more detailed potential impacts of the Relocated Rail Line & Relocated Highway (West Side) alternative:

- "Flip flop" rail and interstate in Longmeadow
- Skewed river crossing for interstate and rail, *increased impacts*
- Rail relocated design based on interstate design components, *may not be permissible*
- Vertical grade challenges at every interchange (rail clearance)
- Upwards of 50+ takings of homes and businesses in Agawam
- Major environmental impacts (river, wetlands, landfill, and parklands)
- Not allowed to provide an exit off an interstate for a private entity
  - Isolate Bondi's Island, Springfield Water & Sewer Commission, Landfill
- Replace Memorial Bridge, historic structure
- Upwards of 50+ takings of businesses and homes in West Springfield
- At least 7 new/reconstructed bridges for new interstate and rail
- Major impacts to Memorial Avenue, entrance to West Springfield
- Keep the controlling grades of Union Station and rail yard in West Springfield

Mr. Arigoni explained that due to these significant impacts, this alternative will be removed from the analysis going forward.

Mr. Arigoni described the Reconstructed Elevated Section alternative. Following the current alignment of I-91, this alternative would involve a super-elevated section of highway through downtown Springfield, or just to the east or west of the current alignment. He noted that modern construction techniques would allow for more light and air beneath the viaduct, and the design aesthetic could vary.

Mr. Arigoni showed photos of the I-91 parking garages underneath the viaduct, which he stated are as much a barrier to the waterfront as the viaduct itself. He noted that the ongoing deck removal has already opened up more light in the area. He presented examples of elevated viaducts in other cities, which create space for pedestrian and business use below. He explained that there is an opportunity to

blend the architecture of the viaduct with the existing built environment around it. Mr. Arigoni reviewed the potential benefits and impacts.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Arigoni next described the Sunken, Depressed, or Tunnel alternative. He provided photos of sunken highway examples, and explained that East and West Columbus Avenues could be raised above I-91. He showed an illustrative elevation of a tunneled section of I-91, which shifts I-91 to be adjacent to the railroad. Mr. Arigoni reviewed the potential benefits and impacts, and noted that if I-91 is kept in its existing corridor, some impacts would be mitigated.

Mr. Arigoni described the No Build – Enhance Existing alternative. He reviewed the list of potential impacts and benefits, such as limited construction impacts and the need for continued maintenance.

Mr. Arigoni presented the potential short-term recommendations. These included safety, aesthetic, accessibility, and connectivity improvements such as increased lighting under the viaduct and improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Mr. Arigoni explained that increasing the number of people in the area would help reduce crime. He also stated that the MGM project has promised to fund improvements to the waterfront, which could be used to upgrade the at-grade crossing in the riverfront park to an active crossing.

**Comment:** Gary Roux, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, said that the intersection of Converse and Laurel Street should be added to the signal improvements recommendation.

**Question:** Catherine Ratté, Live Well Springfield/PVPC, asked if the study team has discussed connecting Forest Park to the bikeway. Mr. Arigoni said no, but that is a good idea and something the team will consider.

Mr. Arigoni presented the potential mid-term recommendations. He explained that connecting Route 57, Sumner Ave and Route 5 at the South End Bridge was discussed at the last Working Group meeting. He presented a plan and profile of possible intersection and interchanges at this location, and clarified that the vertical scale of the profile is exaggerated to show the changes in elevation. The approximate elevations are 60 feet above sea level next to the Connecticut River, and 200 feet above sea level at the top of the cliff at Longhill Street.

**Comment:** Mr. Yarsley suggested an alternate Route 5/Route 57 interchange on the west side of the Connecticut River. Mr. Arigoni described efforts to reduce private property impacts and engineering limitations of crossing the river on a diagonal alignment.

**Comment:** Dave Gaby, Open Housing of Western MA, suggested a Columbus Avenue/Route 83 connection be included in this plan. Mr. Arigoni described potential challenges with a connection at that location.

**Question:** Mr. Yarsley asked if these mid-term recommendations are associated with the No Build alternative. Mr. Arigoni said no, and explained that study team is including mid-term recommendations that could be a separate improvement in addition to the recommend alternative.

Mr. Arigoni presented a proposed improvement to the I-291 and I-91 interchange as another mid-term recommendation.

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<sup>1</sup> See presentation, available on the study website at [www.mass.gov/massdot/i91viaductstudy](http://www.mass.gov/massdot/i91viaductstudy) for details.

Mr. Arigoni reviewed the three remaining alternatives that will be analyzed as potential long-term recommendations: Reconstructed Elevated, Sunken/Tunnel along the current I-91 alignment, and Sunken/Tunnel on a modified alignment. He noted that the length of the tunnel section is up for discussion.

Mr. Arigoni reviewed the modified project schedule, which plans for the Final Report to be released in June 2016. Mr. Britland noted that this schedule is aggressive, and the study team may not make these deadlines as they have to wait to incorporate the Department of Public Health's analysis.

Mr. Arigoni opened the floor for comments and questions.

**Comment:** Mr. Gaby expressed his concern for impacts to Forest Park and other neighborhoods that were bisected and affected by the current I-91 viaduct. He thinks the study should resolve these issues. Mr. Britland thanked Mr. Gaby for his comment.

**Comment:** Mr. Yarsley added that the study could consider methods to reunite the neighborhoods bisected by I-291, perhaps with a greenway. Mr. Britland said this area is well within the study area and could be considered.

**Question:** Mr. Roux asked if the study team is proposing to eliminate or consolidate the current I-291 ramps. Mr. Arigoni that is going to be a consideration but has not yet been proposed. He added that there is a Park and Ride Lot under I-291 that is underutilized and has potential for future development.

**Question:** Paul Nicolai, Nicolai Law Group, P.C., asked if removing both I-91 parking garages is in consideration when raising and realigning the viaduct. Mr. Arigoni stated that the team can look into removing and relocating the garages. Mr. Britland commented that the Springfield Parking Authority (SPA) would likely be opposed to their removal, but we will need to engage the SPA. Mr. Nicolai stated that the number of employees who use the parking garages has decreased significantly since the garages were built.

**Question:** Douglas Mattoon, City of West Springfield, asked if relocating the highway to be next to the railroad would be possible if the Reconstructed Elevated Section alternative is an option. Mr. Arigoni and Mr. Britland said that is a good idea, but not an option because of the potential significant impacts to the street network and rail line. Mr. Mattoon suggested placing the elevated highway over the railroad.

**Question:** Mr. Nicolai asked how it is possible to bring the highway and railroad together in the Sunken/Tunnel alternative without impacting properties, such as the Basketball Hall of Fame. Mr. Arigoni explained that the horizontal realignment will be closer to the Memorial Bridge, not at the Hall of Fame.

**Comment:** Rich Masse, MassDOT, said that the Basketball Hall of Fame would suffer with the rail tracks between it and Connecticut River. Mr. Arigoni stated that he believes it suffers more with an at-grade I-91 which isolates the Hall of Fame from the rest of the City. He pointed out the pedestrian connections that would be included with the Reconstructed Elevated alternative.

**Comment:** Mr. Nicolai believes there would be a grade issue with the Sunken/Tunnel alternative that pushes the highway and the railroad together, and that removing the rail from this location would solve this issue. Mr. Britland said he believes that splitting the rail and highway would just split the impacts.

**Question:** Mr. Yarsley asked Mr. Britland if he got an answer regarding the hazardous materials restrictions in tunnels (which he asked about in a previous working group meeting). Mr. Britland said that Massachusetts and the federal government each have their own standards, but as long as the tunnel is designed properly, there are no restrictions. A sunken alternative with some coverings would be treated on a case-by-case basis with regards to hazardous materials. The proper design would be incorporated into the cost analysis of the alternative, but Mr. Britland does not believe it would be a significant increase.

**Comment:** Jenny Catuogno, Young Professional Networking Groups, said that the 20-year timeframe seems short in relation to the viaduct currently undergoing rehabilitation, and asked if the public will mind that taxpayer money was spent on a viaduct that might be replaced soon. Mr. Britland clarified that 2040 is just the future year analysis used in the study to determine if the alternatives will be able to function in that year. He explained that this is not the first time a study is being done alongside a rehabilitation project, and the reality is the viaduct needs rehabilitation now. Mr. Masse explained that current work will not cost nearly as much as a full replacement. The useful life of the rehabilitated viaduct is about 20 years, so it is likely something new would not be finished until a few years before then. Mr. Britland gave an example of McGrath Highway in Somerville, a roadway project currently being rehabilitated while a transformative alternative which originated as a study alternative is now being designed.

**Question:** Laura Walsh, Forest Park Civic Association, asked if the Reconstructed Elevated Section alternative could have greenspace beneath, similar to an example in the presentation. Mr. Arigoni said yes, if I-291 and I-91 stay elevated, the areas below could include greenspace. Ms. Walsh said that the North Riverfront Park was recently renovated and connected to the bikeway. She noted that many cities are now constructing parks beneath highways. Ms. Walsh also noted that there is a Native American burial ground next to the proposed Route 5/Route 83 connection, and the majority of residents would be strongly opposed to this being constructed in their neighborhood. Ms. Walsh said there is an area by Exit 4 that could be looked at as alternative to this recommendation. Mr. Yarsley disagreed, and said that the neighborhood may be in favor of the smoother traffic flow with this improvement.

Mr. Britland said that the study team is cognizant of neighborhood and historic impacts.

Mr. Britland commented that all of these ideas will be worked into the further analysis of each alternative. He said the analysis will answer many of these questions and determine which options are feasible from a construction perspective.

There was some confusion about which alternatives would move forward for analysis. Mr. Arigoni and Mr. Britland clarified that, for discussion purposes, they placed three alternatives on the board to move forward: a Reconstructed Elevated Section; a Sunken, Depressed and/or Tunnel along current I-91 alignment; and a Sunken, Depressed, and/or Tunnel along modified I-91 alignment(s). A discussion followed regarding the I-91 and Rail Relocated to West Side alternative. Mr. Yarsley and Mr. Gaby felt that the alternative should not be removed at this point in the study and should be included in further analysis with the others selected. Mr. Yarsley and Mr. Gaby disputed the claim that the alternative would require up to 50 takings near the touchdown in Agawam or 50 takings in West Springfield. Further, Mr. Gaby and Mr. Yarsley felt that the engineering obstacles associated with this alternative could be addressed.

Mr. Yarsley and Mr. Gaby requested that MassDOT and its consultant team conduct the full analysis for the I-91 and Rail Relocated to West Side alternative (a total of four alternatives). Mr. Britland explained that only three alternatives can move forward due to the project scope and budget. He and Mr. Arigoni reiterated their findings of potential significant impacts resulting from the alternative. Mr. Britland explained that property impacts in particular could compromise the success of a project receiving funding and undergoing an environmental permitting process. Mr. Yarsley and Mr. Gaby asked to review specific property impacts with the study team.

Mr. Gaby and Mr. Nicolai believe that this alternative would have the highest long-term economic benefit for the region and a full economic analysis should be done. They contended that the study would preclude the ability to achieve key project goals, such as reconnecting downtown Springfield with the Connecticut River, by removing the West Side alternative at this point.

**Comment:** Jim Czach, City of West Springfield, Mr. Magoon, and Michelle Chase, City of Agawam, expressed their concerns for impacts on their communities, particularly in the residential neighborhood south of the South End Rotary in Agawam and the Memorial Avenue business district in West Springfield. All three stated that the communities of Agawam and West Springfield are adamantly opposed to a West Side alternative. Mr. Britland and the participants agreed that a follow-up meeting is necessary for further discussion of this alternative.

**Comment:** Mr. Nicolai voiced his concern over removing the West Side option from consideration at this time as potentially not a good idea. He would like to learn more about the economic potential of the alternatives before the alternative is eliminated.

Mr. Britland and Mr. Arigoni thanked everyone for attending.