



## MEMO

**TO:** Aleksey Belov, MassDOT Project Manager  
**FROM:** Nathaniel Cabral-Curtis, WSP Assistant Vice President  
**RE:** Chicopee Chamber of Commerce Targeted Briefing  
**DATE:** June 9, 2025

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## OVERVIEW

On Monday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, members of MassDOT’s project team associated with the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Bridge Replacement were guests of the Chicopee Chamber of Commerce at a briefing for members of the City’s business community. The meeting was held at the Days Inn on Memorial Drive in Chicopee, a regular meeting place for the Chamber.

The Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Bridge carries I-391 over Chicopee Street (State Route 116) in the Willimansett neighborhood of Chicopee. I-391 grew out of a 1953 plan which would have expanded Chicopee Street into an interstate highway with the bridge itself opening to traffic in 1979. The left lanes were closed to traffic in 2019 due to structural deterioration and remain closed today. In 2022, MassDOT determined that the bridge should be fully replaced, launching the current design effort in 2024.

The purpose of the briefing was to provide members of Chicopee’s business community with an overview of the project and to answer specific questions about it gathered by Chicopee Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Melissa Breor. Questions touched on the movement of freight and employee commuting patterns during construction, anticipated detour routes, impacts to the parking under the bridge both during and after construction, and construction period communication. The meeting’s tone was generally positive and was summed up by a comment by one attendee who stated “I guess thinking ahead to construction open communication is just the biggest thing. We can work with almost anything, we just need to be able to plan.” Significant points raised include the fact that Callaway Golf operates a 24-hour production schedule at their facility on Meadow Street and the low clearance railroad bridge, 11-feet, 9-inches, which provides access for Prospect Street under the Connecticut Valley Railroad just south of where the Willimansett Bridge crosses the Connecticut River into Chicopee. Given the anticipated use of the Willimansett Street as part of the detour for trucks when work is taking place directly above Chicopee Street, it will be important to adequately warn potentially unfamiliar truckers from attempting to divert around construction period traffic and becoming trapped under the railroad overpass.



## PRESENTATION<sup>1</sup>

C: Nathaniel Cabral-Curtis (NCC): Good afternoon; I'm Nate Curtis with WSP. This is our lead designer and project manager, Andy Bankert also from WSP. It's just the two of us on this one today. We do not have MassDOT representation. There are certain things that have been publicly stated previously in this presentation: for example, that we will strive to keep Chicopee Street open as much as possible and that we will build the bridge in halves so that we can keep traffic moving on I-391. Those promises are already made on the record.

If there are other commitments that folks are looking for, we would be in a position of having to take those things back to DOT and to get back to you. We will answer your questions the best we can. We got some great information this morning from the Valley Opportunity Council at their briefing and we're looking forward to getting as much good information from you folks as we can. Sir, [nodding to Blake Bryan, the owner of O'Connell's Irish Pub which is located immediately next to the bridge] we do have some stuff for you in this presentation about the parking, so, I'm glad you're here. Andy's team has been working on that, and we are in a position to be able to talk about that as well.

Without any further delay, this is our agenda today, with the Easter egg I put into the presentation: here's the bridge with my car sitting in front of it. I think we've covered welcome and introductions. We'll go through why we started this project, what's the status of keeping you open while we're doing what we need to do, what our construction approach is because it is a little bit different, how we'll keep you informed and have plenty of time for questions. As we're a small enough group, if you want to stick your hand up as we're going through, feel free, but the presentation covers a bit, and we had some gun jumping this morning. So, you may want to just hang on and see what comes in the presentation.

How do we get here? One of the things I found in my research that was really interesting to me was the situation that we're in dates all the way back to 1953 when the Commonwealth was looking at ways to construct its first highways. At the time there was originally a thought that Chicopee Street or Route 116 could be scaled up and turned into the Interstate. Ultimately, they chose not to do that. They chose to build the 391 that we have today. 391 got built in two stages and the bridge that we have was built in the second one. It opened traffic in 1979, and things motored along until 2019 when the left lanes on the bridge were closed due to deterioration. That's when what should be a six-lane bridge became a four-lane bridge. In 2022 there was a routine inspection which determined that deterioration was continuing apace, and in 2024 MassDOT initiated the design for the replacement. In 2025 we had some initial outreach to city leadership and the state delegation. Back in April, we had the first public meeting where we had some contact with a few of you folks, some of your businesses got flyers in advance of that meeting. Now, here on June 9th we're out here with the Valley Opportunity Council this morning and you this afternoon. Next week we'll be back to speak with the veterans' group that is most closely associated with the Veterans' Memorial Park because we think we may have some minor impacts on the edge of it. Our landscape architect has looked at some potential improvements by way of making good on any damage we cause, so that's a conversation we need to have.

This slide provides an overview of our project area. Our bridge is just the one crossing Chicopee Street even though it connects to the one crossing the Connecticut River. That structure is not involved in this project even though they're both from the same era. The construction of the one over the Connecticut river was different. It's built differently and its structural nature allowed it to be rehabilitated, which it was recently. Here is the Veterans' park that I just mentioned. Here is Rivers Park, it is quite a bit bigger with the baseball diamonds and the pool, and the basketball court. Lastly, by way of orientation, going towards the top of the map is towards Holyoke, going towards the bottom is towards the rest of Chicopee and Springfield.

You are likely to hear some terms today that might not be familiar. The deck is where the vehicles are, the superstructure includes the deck, the beams below the roadway, the barrier that stops people from going off the edge of the road, the barrier between the lanes, anything that's kind of on the top. The substructure is any part of the

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<sup>1</sup> "C" stands for comment, "Q" for question and "A" for answer. All participants not identified as members of WSP are members of the Chicopee Chamber of Commerce. Meeting attendees are listed in Appendix One.



bridge that's supporting the superstructure. It holds everything up. That includes the piers, the abutments, and foundations. The piers, those are the support columns. The abutments are just special piers at either end of the bridge.

So why was this project initiated, and does it have something to do with the ugliness that you can see in the photograph on the screen right now? Hint: it does. First, some key facts about today's bridge: it's 840 feet long, it's 111 feet wide edge to edge. It is a concrete box girder superstructure. When I hand this off to Andy, he's going to talk a little bit more about that, but that's why it's kind of hard to do anything to this bridge. There are six piers and two abutments. We just wrapped up supplemental traffic counts last week, so these numbers on the screen could be subject to change. They could go up or down a little, but we'll know more the next time we're in front of the general public. It's three lanes in each direction or it should be, with those left lanes in both directions closed due to deterioration.

Things are in poor condition out there. There is spalled and delaminated concrete. There's exposed reinforcing steel. The expansion joints are damaged. The bridge is safe. There would not be traffic on it if it wasn't safe, but it has reached the end of its useful lifespan, and it does need to be replaced. So, what are our goals? We want to have the full six-lane cross section. We want to provide for current and future volumes, including heavy vehicles for all of you that operate a business that dispatches or receives trucks. We need to make sure that can happen efficiently. We want to have a type of bridge that we can construct in halves so that we can keep traffic moving during construction. Lastly, we want to have a 75-year design lifespan so that we can leave you alone for a while. That's enough from me for now, here's Andy.

**C: Andy Benkert (AB):** I'm the project manager for this with WSP. My job is to put the whole package together and we'll go through a little bit of where we stand with the project currently. So, the first step that we took with this project was the preliminary structures report, this is our first opportunity to get a hands-on look at the existing bridge. So, as Nate mentioned, it's kind of got this different construction of that bridge over the river. So even though the two structures are about the same age, the one over the Connecticut River could be repaired easily. The one over the Connecticut River, not so much. After doing our material sampling analysis we determined the bridge had to come out. A second step that we completed was the bridge type selection. That affords us the opportunity to look at the span arrangements, the type of superstructure it is and determine what's the best fit for our various parameters to replace the overall structure. We've completed some initial traffic data as Nate had mentioned and probably the biggest portion that we did this was last summer is the survey of the area. We have extensive survey around the bridge to both the north and south. For those of you with businesses near or at the bridge, you may have seen trucks with drilling equipment out at the site for about the past two months conducting geotechnical test borings. That gives us a profile of what the soil is underneath the bridge to help us figure out the best way to support a new structure. We are currently working on the 25% design.

This is our anticipated span arrangement. This is something that came out of that bridge type selection process and I'm just going to draw your attention to the image on the bottom of the screen. That's an elevation view of the structure. Picture yourself standing on Chicopee Street looking up at the bridge. There are some key differences here as compared to what you would see out there today. The existing span length is about 850 feet with seven spans. We're going to reduce the overall length of the bridge. We propose to do a four-span structure with the two outer spans at 180-feet in length and the two center spans at 165 feet. One key thing to note is what's happening here at the north end of the bridge. If you picture the north parking lot under the bridge today and look further to the north, there's a fair bit of vacant space under the structure. We propose to expand the northern abutment by about 150 feet to fill in a big piece of that vacant space. That's bridge structure we don't have to maintain any longer and it takes away some of the space that currently hosts nuisance activities.

One thing to keep in mind with this is Chicopee Street which is right here under span 3. We're not proposing to change anything about the alignment of that roadway. The only thing that we will do is a mill and overlay of the roadway at the end of the job. We want to minimize the disruption to the local businesses on Chicopee Street, but there will be times that we have to detour the road. Those will be limited to night-time closures and that would be to handle any work that's directly above Chicopee Street. So, if we're removing the existing superstructure or putting



up new beams, we can't have cars directly underneath that. I want to emphasize those are meant to be very short closure periods.

The other thing to keep in mind is the Margaret/Perrault Street Connector which is at the south end of our bridge. We'll keep that where it is. It does help us a bit. When we have a night-time closure of Chicopee Street, we would be able to let cars use take the Connector and then continue along Chicopee Street. This will have to be investigated a little further because while the Connector can readily handle car traffic, that's going to be a problem for trucks, so we need to figure out what to do with them.

The other thing to note and it's a little hard to see them in the image is the existing piers. When you're standing in the parking lots and you see those giant columns supporting the structure, our new piers will be in different locations. That's to avoid the foundations of the existing supports. During that bridge type study, we looked at several different superstructures; again, that's the upper part of the bridge. We looked at the steel plate girder, steel box girder and a spliced concrete bulb T-girder. That may not mean much to you, but it's just different ways of carrying the structure, different types of materials, and each of those sorts has their pluses and minuses such as different weights, different expense for the different types.

One thing to note from this slide is that they're all pretty much the same in terms of being able to achieve what the new bridge needs to accomplish. We just determined that of the three, the best option for us was the pre-stressed bulb T-girder. It's got a similar concrete appearance to the existing structure, relatively easy maintenance, it's less susceptible to roadway salt and has the lowest anticipated construction and life cycle cost.

So here you have just a quick look at what the new bridge is going to look like. This is Winter Street over I-95 in Waltham. It's a very similar type of barrier as to what would be on the proposed bridge. There will be a snow fence on top of the structure. There isn't one now. The snow fence would be there to protect users down below so that as the trucks are driving by plowing the highway, they don't push it over the edge onto unsuspecting people down below. In the image on the right side of the slide, pay attention to the pier. That's Belmont Street over I-295 in Worcester. That's an example of MassDOT's architectural pier and we're proposing something similar here. The existing bridge's piers, they're fairly thin right? These are a bit more massive, but the tradeoff is that these are a bit more decorative and lend themselves much better to future rehabilitation and maintenance. The current bridge really doesn't, which is why we're in the situation we are now.

So that's the beginning and overview part of the presentation. This next part is specific to you, and I want to thank Melissa who did the ring-round to get all the questions and Nate who gathered them. Your local input really helps to guide us: keeping parking during construction, making sure there is enough parking at the end, keeping Chicopee Street open, any of these other little you concerns that you may think might be little, but if you mention it, it could lead to a real change in the project, so please do ask us or tell us.

Employee commute / receipt of goods / dispatch of products. We're going to have a slide on this in a second. We'll have two lanes open in both directions on I-391 and Chicopee Street will operate as normal during commuting times. This is something we've been working through, but if you attended the public meeting in April, you saw a cross-section of I-391 with a single lane going towards Holyoke and two lanes coming towards Chicopee. That's sort of the bare minimum for us. We think we can make traffic work with that pattern, but we're trying to keep things as open as possible. We're currently drawing up our 25% design with four lanes open so that means we'll have two lanes on the northbound side and two lanes on the southbound, effectively, there's no impact to traffic on I-391. Basically, the bridge is two separate structures, you may not know that, but there's a joint right down the center. So, we have a northbound span and a southbound span. The goal for us is to shift all traffic over to one barrel and allow us to demolish the first barrel, without any constraints, build the first half of the new bridge, put the traffic on it, demolish the other half of the old bridge, and build the rest of the new structure. We mentioned that closures of Chicopee Street or the Connector would be off-peak only. The only time we'd close is when we're doing something directly above those roads, either demolition or lifting something big.

Loss of parking under I-391. So, the current plan is to eliminate the north parking lot. So, this is something that was discussed with the City of Chicopee. That was the recommendation that they had as part of reducing the space for



nuisance activities, but we would still maintain the south parking lot after construction. During construction the contractor would shift back and forth across both parking lots, only closing areas over which they were directly working. We were made aware at the Valley Opportunity Council earlier today that the local public does use that parking area during snow emergencies, so again, by having these briefings that allowed us to get that little piece of information. It helps guide us in the future. I don't know if that means changing what we are planning for the north parking lot.

Loss of foot traffic at local businesses. Chicopee, Street and the sidewalks are only closed during demolition and construction directly above the road. Our goal is to try to keep people flowing throughout the whole thing. So, it's not like they are going to say, for four years no traffic can get through this area, no pedestrians, we make accommodations for that throughout construction.

Construction period communication. This is the briefing that we're doing today is part of our design public outreach, but once we get into construction, outreach continues. We'll continue to let you know in advance what construction operations will be and there will be ways for you to reach out with concerns or if you find programs with the way things are going. MassDOT has standards for outreach for major construction and processes in place that they've developed on projects in the past.

So, we just discussed this, but currently we're looking at some design refinement for keeping four lanes open on I-391. Again, the bare minimum that we're going to do is the three that were shown at the public meeting in April. The traffic analysis shows that with a minimum you need two lanes southbound and one lane northbound as the southbound flow is just a little heavier, but we're hopeful we can continue with a four-lane profile so it effectively stays the same as today on I-391 during construction. The existing structure is demolished, and the new one is built a half a time so that lets us get in and out quickly rather than having the puzzle pieces of staged construction.

Keeping the Margaret/Perrault Street Connector and Chicopee Street open through construction is our goal. We'd only shut them down if work was taking place directly above one of them and we'd try to avoid closing them both at once. Parking would close for the same reason. That's if you have demolition or construction directly above and there's a risk of the crane falling or something heavy behind dropped. Under those conditions, you could also see rolling roadblocks on I-391 to keep traffic away from the operation. There are certain requirements to maximize public safety and minimize public impact.

As the contractor works to replace this structure, they may start on the south side or the north side, but they'll usually start in one spot and then work their way along the bridge. It's up to their means and methods, but it's our intention to write it into the contract that the contractor must maintain parking, so if he's occupying the entire south parking lot first because he is erecting beams and has a giant crane sitting there, then the north lot needs to remain open. If you look at the table on the screen, there's a note at the bottom indicating that there's no striping in the current lot now, we just came up with that number using the City of Chicopee's requirements for the size of a parking space. We allocated the space and sort laid out the existing lots to gauge roughly how many spots we have. So, right now, between the north and south lots, we have about 105 spaces with most of them north of Chicopee Street and a few on the Connector. In the proposed condition we would eliminate the spaces on the Connector, which is where people are doing the oil changes and stuff, and north of Chicopee Street and enlarge the south lot to handle the volume of traffic. This really came from your input. We still have flexibility, so if you find that you need 70 spaces, we can continue to tweak, but this is about reducing those nuisance activities and between enlarging that northern abutment and getting rid of the north parking lot, it's really going to take back some space from the shade tree oil changes and permanently parked cars so we can try to clean the area up a bit. Currently there is some lighting, which I think is privately owned. It's just a giant pole with a single head on it. We'll be proposing a bunch of pole-mounted lights throughout the area underneath the bridge to make it look brighter and more inviting, but not to bother the neighbors.

The construction outreach period is going to be very similar to what we're doing right now. We write outreach specifications into the contract, and the contractor has to follow them. The I-495 Andover-Lawrence Bridge Replacements is kind of a case study for what construction outreach would look like here. We have public meetings ahead of construction, we briefed neighborhood groups. There were flyer drops ahead of high impact operations,



there is a dedicated email address, a construction period hotline, and weekly progress reports. It might look a little different here, but we want to keep you informed.

So, what is our construction approach? This project is being procured using a unique contracting process called design-build. Typically, we do what's called design-bid-build. There, the same designer does a complete design from soup to nuts and complete contract documents go out to bid. The winning contractor immediately starts construction based on those documents. It takes a long time; the entire design process could be about two years. Then you tack on construction after that. Design-build, which is the process that we are using here for this project, is a little bit different. WSP, we're the owner's representative, we take the take bridge through what's called the 25% level, the Base Technical Concept and then that gets put out to bid by teams of combined engineers and contractors or design-build teams. So, we do the base portion of the design and then we hand it off to another team. The beauty of that is as the design is happening, construction is right behind it. The foundation gets designed, the foundations get installed, and the piers are being designed right behind that.

The duration can really be shortened by teaming the engineer with the general contractor. One of the things I mentioned on the slide earlier was the post-tensioned bulb T-girders. In our opinion, that's going to be the fastest construction, but what actually gets built may well depend on what the contractor teamed with their engineer thinks will be the fastest and cheapest way to get this built. MassDOT's contract will stipulate requirements for traffic control, so even though we're only taking this through 25%, the decisions that we make now will be baked into the contract specifications, so it's not like you'll have to revisit things like parking or keeping Chicopee Street open with a new team.

I sort of touched on this, but the alternative technical concept is really one of the key things that comes from that design-build process. Contractors will look at the Base Technical Concept, they will evaluate it, and then talk with their engineers. They'll say, "hey, you know, you said we could do X, but we think we can do Y, and we can do it six months faster, for half the cost." You might think we would just automatically go with that process, but it's not quite that way. MassDOT has a very specific process. The design-builder has to present their ideas to MassDOT, and we get to evaluate them against the original concept and the contract conditions to make sure the changes actually perform better, and they do keep Chicopee Street open. For our next steps, I am going to turn it back over to Nate.

**C: NCC:** This is where we are in June. As you know, we're right here on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Next week on the 19<sup>th</sup>, we'll be out to talk to the American Legion Post with Stephanie Shaw because we think that the very edge of the veteran's park may be in the path of the crane. We will have second public meeting sometime late this summer and the reason for having that is the next time we see you after that public meeting will be the 25% design public hearing in the fall. That's where we officially present the design and we state how long we think things will take, these are the detours that we would expect to put in place, and it officially sets the parameters of the job. That second public meeting is there to say, "OK, this is what we heard from you in the briefings. This is what we heard from in the first public meeting. This is all the information that we've hoovered up. Did we understand you correctly? Are we getting it right because the next thing that you see is going to be a bit more formal and it becomes a lot harder to back things off." That second meeting is our check in point to make sure that we don't go out to a design public hearing and have the public go "yuck, we hate this." There was a time, this was years ago when MassDOT was the Department of Public Works, that 25% design public hearings were the first time the public would see projects and the risk was real that they would say "yuck, we hate this," and a lot of hard work got thrown away.

So then after our hearing, assuming everything goes right, and we think that it will because we've had these meetings and we got good input from you folks, there would be the advertisement for design-builders that would come in the summer of 2026. In the fall there would be notice to proceed, what we call NTP to the winning design-builder, and then the anticipated start of construction would be in 2027. One thing that Andy did note in the first meeting this morning that I think is probably good to share is that to get ready to put potentially four lanes of traffic on one half of the existing bridge, there needs to be some repairs made. Those are short term repairs just to kind of get it over the finish line. They would not give you the 75 years of life that we are going get out of the new bridge. Those could happen in the interim between when the contractor gets NTP and the start of major construction.



How we'll keep you informed. Feel free to reach out. We have a dedicated e-mail address for this project. We have a website for this project; you can Google it. One of the first things I do when I start one of these projects is spend a couple of days just searching for it to bump up the SEO so that if people search for the project, it will come up right away. You can send an e-mail to us; you can visit the website and sign up to get emails. I'll take the sign-in sheet back with me so none of you need to sign up for emails because I'll enter you myself. Some of you are already on our list. And if you really want to send a letter, you can, there's the address though that is something we generally see more of that at the design public hearing.

So, if anybody has questions at this point, we would be happy to have them.

## DISCUSSION

**Q:** On the extent of how far it's going to reach, there's the train track back there. Is it going to impact on train traffic at all?

**A:** AB: On I-391, the traffic control for our bridge will get as far south as the bridge over the railroad, but we're not proposing to do any construction on that bridge. So, anything underneath should not be impacted. We're still working on whether we're replacing that median barrier on that railroad bridge, but again, that would all be above the deck. It wouldn't be below; that's the current plan. I take it you get some deliveries by train?

**A:** Yes, we get some rail cars.

**C:** That was a very thorough presentation. You answered all my questions that I would have for the design phase. I guess thinking ahead to construction, open communication is just the biggest thing. We can work with almost anything, we just need to be able to plan.

**A:** NCC: One thing we would definitely want to know from all of you is when you have third shifts going. We'd like to know what your major days of the week for receiving or dispatching trucks are so that adjustments could be made. If something happens on a Tuesday night now, maybe it happens on a Wednesday morning. When we started coordinating with the City of Chicopee and we started discussing the idea of needing to close Chicopee Street because of the need to ensure public safety during demolition, we suggested that closures would be at night. Their response was that they'd just finished night work, and it drove the residents crazy, and we should think about Saturdays during the day, but that's also a shopping day. Is that hard on the local businesses? If we close Chicopee Street on weekend days, is that a terrible impact? It's something we need to put out there for the design-builders because if we say "closures at night," and then they set up their schedule that way, but the first time they have a night closure everyone comes back and says "no, it has to be Saturdays during the day," that could be a real impact.

**C:** I mean, we're 24/7. Our third shift has to be there for 11:00PM and they leave at 7:00 o'clock in the morning. Our first deliveries come through probably about 6:30AM Monday through Friday.

**C:** AB: We'll put requirements in the contract, so if we decide to say "you're only closing between 10:00PM and 4:00AM," contractors being contractors, it's inevitable they're going to ask for more. They're going to come to us and say, "hey, can we take a whole weekend?" The more information that you give us the better we can inform MassDOT to make a good decision because what might happen is if the requirement is not stipulated in the contract and nobody's aware of it being a problem, that request to expand the closure window could get approved. So, if you're concerned, if you are concerned like 24/7 every day a week, again that's useful information for us.

**C:** We have 100 people leaving at 10:30 at night and 100 people coming in at that time. So that's the amount of traffic around for us on Meadow Street.<sup>2</sup>

**C:** AB - So all of those little pieces of information help because it may not impact what we're already planning and if the contractor comes with a change, it helps us to evaluate whether or not that change should be allowed.

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<sup>2</sup> The business on Meadow Street referenced here is the production facility for Callaway Golf.



**Q:** What does the shutdown look like on Chicopee Street? Is it just as far as the church, because if you close Chicopee Street at 10:00PM on a Saturday, that's really going to have an impact on us at O'Connell's depending on how much road the closure takes up.

**A:** AB: This is probably the best image we've got in this presentation, and I apologize that it's small, so please bear with me, but here's Margaret Street, here's your pub, here's Perrault Street, here's Whitman Street, and then St. Louis Avenue. Our project limits are right on the edge of Margaret Street and then there's the state right-of-way. The green area, all along the bridge, and then the whole parking area bounded by Margaret and Perrault streets that's the state right-of-way. That's a lot of space for the contractor to work. I generally expect the connection to be open. If you're working above Chicopee Street, let's say, I expect that it would really just be the section directly under the bridge that would be subject to the closure, so you go down Margaret Street to the Connector, to Perrault Street, and then just keep going on Chicopee Street. With that said, with cranes working, when they are actively lifting, there are requirements in the design code that you have to increase the space buffer around it for increased safety so that would expand the area of the shutdown. That could mean closing the Connector as well for around 15 minutes or so to actively set beams or something like that. If you look up the screen, you can see we have Chicopee Street with the red over it and then there's also the red over the Connector. The pub is right here and this is Margaret Street. We have laid out the anticipated crane locations and all occur right along the face of the bridge. They are all within the state right-of-way and they don't impact all of Margaret Street. There won't be a direct impact, but at that time Chicopee Street is open. The access to the parking lots is open so you shouldn't have any direct impacts. As we move north, we get even more space to work. The crane will be parked right inside the south parking lot, but at that time, the north parking lot would be open. People will still be able to go up Whitman Street and into the north lot, so for that short period of time that the crane is there, people can still get to you, they just need to cross the street.

**Q:** The bridge itself, how close is that to the train tracks?

**C:** AB: [pointing with a laser pointer] There train tracks are here, our bridge is here, and this is the south abutment. Our new south abutment would be built behind that, so we're going to be right about here, meaning that the overall limits of the bridge are about the same, they are just shifted south a little bit, between 20 and 50 feet. There's full depth reconstruction of the road about 50-100 feet behind the abutment, but by the time we're in the area of the railroad tracks, it's just traffic management with a mill and overlay of the pavement at the end of the project. We are currently proposing to keep the barrier between the directions of traffic on the bridge over the railroad, just avoid impacts to it, but one of the things we have to consider for design is bringing things up to current standards. This probably isn't something that gets onto your radar screens, but AASHTO has new crash standards for barriers, called the MASH requirements. MassDOT has implemented that new standard as well which means a lot of barrier out there is now substandard because it doesn't meet the new requirements and usually when you touch it, you have to bring it up to the new code. Think of it like putting a new outlet into your house: getting that outlet to meet the new code so the building inspector won't find a problem means you may have to chase the wiring back a little. Anyway, that's the current plan.

**Q:** Are you concerned about pedestrians crossing Chicopee Street?

**C:** NCC: Blake, I know this is something that's been on your mind. I recall you telling me about the issues with the road, people being hit crossing it, and the new crossings with the flashing lights, and that's good. During construction there will be all sorts of signs on Chicopee Street saying, "work zone ahead," and that will help to slow drivers down more. That said, I think this is something to take back to our project management to see what could be done during construction to make the crosswalks stand out even further, so pedestrians feel really confident using them, you know, "no driver's going miss seeing me."

**C:** AB: The crosswalk signals and the island do help draw attention to the area where the pedestrians are and we are proposing to leave that in the final condition as well as capacity in the south parking lot. There's just going to be a period where the access route for your patrons is going to be a little bit longer.

**Q:** When you close Chicopee Street, and you don't have traffic flowing on Chicopee Street or Meadow Street, what are you going to do with the adjacent intersections?



**C:** AB: One of the reasons for leaving the closures at night is because of lower traffic volumes. We definitely wouldn't want to do any of this during peak volumes. Doing our closures at night and keeping them short-term helps to minimize the impact to the smallest possible at the adjacent intersections. Will there be a build up of traffic, yes, but if the local public is well-informed, they will find their own alternate routes. Our goal with good communication and limiting the duration of the detours is to convince people to go away for the night and steer clear of the area until the next day when they can come right back. These are nighttime detours, if someone has no choice but to go through them, the impacts are going to be inconvenient for a few days, but typically, for cars at least, the detour for Chicopee Street would be the Margaret/Perrault Street Connector so cars could just jockey around the site while we're working above Chicopee Street.

**Q:** The road, and someone in the room will know the name,<sup>3</sup> as you come over from Holyoke, you take a left and go under the railroad, it's a low underpass, so it's important that it be marked as a low underpass because if a truck's coming over from Holyoke and they get stuck in traffic, they may try a left to get away from traffic and absolutely get stuck. The signage around that and the communication around that are absolutely essential because the trucks will take a quick look and think it's a good way around.

**A:** NCC: I have a public involvement rapid response contract with MassDOT and what it does is allow for quick turnaround outreach when a project emerges at the agency where they realize they need a meeting or something else for the public. I get a small assignment, come in, and do a quick job to help them fix it. Last July, I had a project in North Adams where they had to close Damon Road to rebuild the railroad crossing for that same Connecticut Valley line you're referring to with the underpass. The closure effectively cut Damon Road into two disconnected halves, with the section all dug up to put in sensors and all sorts of other safety stuff at the railroad crossing. There needed to be good outreach for that because there's one good detour route with enough height for a truck to get around this closure. What we did was to very specifically flyer at all the businesses, including the many car dealerships along Damon Road to let them know to bring their auto rack trucks along that one route and to please tell all their drivers as well. The other thing is that there is a trucking association in Massachusetts, you've likely heard of them, and we reached out to their leadership to ask them to their membership about the closure on Damon Road and to avoid the low bridge routes in Northampton that only cars could use. I know we mentioned Andover-Lawrence in the presentation, but if you look at that project website you can see where we publish the detour routes in both written and picture forms so we're not just throwing people to the mercy of Siri. Lastly, if there was to be a specific truck detour route that would be signed accordingly.

Prior to developing this presentation, I sat with our traffic engineers to map out a route for what a truck should do if they couldn't go under the bridge on Chicopee Street. What we came up with was to get onto I-391 at Grattan Street, go into Holyoke, and come back into Chicopee from the north over the Willimansett Bridge. Ideally, they'd never try that left turn in the first place, but I appreciate you sharing the issue.

**Q:** So, you said the north lot was not included in the final design, so what happens underneath the bridge, what does that entail?

**C:** NCC: Well, a portion of that area gets filled in by the enlarged abutment.

**C:** AB: And then, there's our landscape. As part of the changes, we're making to the Vietnam Veterans' Park, and I know it's not in this presentation, but we do have some impacts to this end of the park, just to facilitate getting the cranes in and out of the space along the structure. So, we were sort of reimagining how this this this path comes around the backside of the park and then we were taking advantage of the north parking lot area and we actually have a path that connects along the backside and up here to the north end of Saint Louis Avenue with the idea being that the city could eventually connect to the path that's along the bank of the Connecticut River. It's that's not part of this project, but by doing so, that sort of gives us a little bit better connection from Rivers Park: up the sidewalk, creating a seating area on this corner of the project, they would cross that same crosswalk to get to the north side,

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<sup>3</sup> The road in question is Prospect Street where it passes below the Connecticut Valley Railroad Line. The clearance below the railroad bridge is posted at 11'9".



but instead of having a parking area here we would have sort of like meandering path running underneath the bridge and again, that would be a lighted area.

C: It's just that there is still some space under there and I wonder what's to prevent someone from parking there.

C: AB: Well, the one thing you won't have is the curb cuts, so they have to drive over the curb to get back there to park. Could they? Absolutely. Will we make it easy? No. With the stuff that was brought up with the Valley Opportunity Council today, it's still in flux. The space is there, we were just trying to reimagine it to limit the amount of nuisance activities that can happen in the area. We're trying not to encourage too many people to come, but it does have uses, right? One thing they mentioned today was off-street parking. During winter storms, residents park vehicles under the bridge. That's something we weren't aware of, so we'll have to go back to the City to clarify that because they made the recommendation to us.

C: NCC: We're not totally removing the supply. Blake, you gave me the rundown about the lot. So I used the term in the PowerPoint "ware-truck," and my dad knew a guy growing up, everybody's dad knew a guy growing up, and he had been in the circus. He made his living selling T-shirts and promotions and in his backyard was a trailer from a long-haul truck. That was the ware-truck, all full of his junk, that's the origin of the term and you've got a ware-truck in the parking lots as they are today. You have cars that never move. If the parking supply is reduced a bit, right now those cars that never move are on 105 spaces, but if they're on 60 spaces, people pay attention. If a truck has been sitting for the last 18 months and taking up five spaces, people pay attention, they ask "who does that belong to? I want it moved." The idea is to create turnover and activity with the parking supply you do have and to make people pay attention to it. Hopefully lighting will help stop people from doing some of the less attractive things people do under bridges. If people just park their cars under the bridge when it snows so they won't have to shovel their cars out, that's a different story than if there's a legal mandate for them to get their cars off the road to let plows get through, but that's a conversation we'll have with the City.

Others? Or are we good for the moment? All right, well, don't be scared about reaching out in the future and we'll see you at our next public meeting.



## NEXT STEPS

The project's next public outreach step will be a meeting with the veterans' group most closely associated with the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Park at American Legion Post 452 on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025. This briefing will address potential impacts to the park from the anticipated path of travel for the crane working on the bridge's eastern edge and the proposed enhancements to the park to repair the impacts.

This will be followed in the late summer or early fall by a second public information meeting to check that the project team has correctly understood and integrated input from the general public and identified community groups in advance of the 25% design public hearing.



## APPENDIX 1: MEETING ATTENDEES

<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Andrew	Benkert	WSP
Blake	Bryan	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Nathaniel	Cabral-Curtis	WSP
Deb	Dart	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Stephen	Hurtley	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Marcel	Moniz	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Al	Picard	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Jason	Reed	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Stefany	Scliopou	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
David	Triffletti	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Bonita	Wilson	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce