



## MEMO

**TO:** Aleksey Belov, MassDOT Project Manager  
**FROM:** Nathaniel Cabral-Curtis, WSP Assistant Vice President  
**RE:** Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Bridge Replacement Public Information Meeting 2  
**DATE:** October 8, 2025

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## OVERVIEW

On October 8, 2025, representatives from MassDOT and WSP held the second Public Information Meeting for the Veterans’ Memorial Bridge replacement project over Route 116 and Chicopee Street in Willimansett. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an update on the design’s progress and outline the next steps leading up to the 25% Design Public Hearing. The existing bridge, built in 1979, has deteriorated over time, resulting in lane closures and the need for a full replacement. MassDOT initiated the project in 2024 and conducted outreach to local organizations and the community, distributing flyers and holding briefings to build stakeholder awareness. The main objective is to replace the bridge in full, restoring I-391 to its full six-lane capacity using modern design standards and construction techniques that will minimize disruption and permanent impacts on nearby properties. The design keeps the bridge’s current alignment and elevation, avoids impacts to adjacent structures, and aims to maintain traffic flow during construction with only short-term detours for specific activities. Parking for local businesses will be managed throughout the process, with changes surface parking lots north and south of Chicopee Street planned.

It is anticipated that the new bridge will use an I-Girder superstructure with a concrete deck and asphalt surface, chosen for durability and ease of future maintenance. MassDOT’s aesthetic pier design will help the bridge fit into the neighborhood. The amount of empty space under the bridge will be reduced through an expansion of the structure’s northern abutment and new pedestrian-scale lighting will help make the space below the bridge more inviting at night. The project area includes homes, businesses, and two parks, River Park and Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Park. Veterans’ Memorial Park, which contains memorial plaques for Chicopee residents who lost their lives in that war, will be restored and enhanced after construction. MassDOT is working with American Legion Post 452 and other stakeholders to preserve the park’s dignity and accessibility during construction. Planned improvements include new trees, planting beds, paths for better plaque visibility, and QR codes that link to veterans’ stories. There are also plans to connect the park to River Park and add new seating areas.

The Right-of-Way Bureau described the process for acquiring necessary rights in private and public land, following state and federal regulations. MassDOT is using a design-build approach to speed up delivery and encourage innovation, allowing contractors some flexibility in construction methods while maintaining oversight and approval of any changes. After this meeting, the next milestone is the Design Public Hearing later in the late fall, followed by project advertisement in the spring and the start of construction in 2027.

During the question-and-answer session, community members raised concerns about the bridge’s length, parking, under-bridge activity, and the preservation of memorial elements in Veterans’ Park. The project team explained the



reasons for design choices and assured attendees that community input would guide the final design and construction process. Specific topics such as the arrangement of memorial columns, flag placement, and park accessibility during construction were discussed, with promises that the dignity and function of the park would be maintained. The meeting ended with a commitment from MassDOT to keep communication open and respect the needs of the community throughout the project.

## PRESENTATION<sup>1</sup>

**C: Aleksey Belov (AB1):** Good evening, everyone. Thank you for joining us tonight for our second Public Information Meeting for Veterans' Memorial Bridge over Route 116 and Chicopee Street in Willimansett, Project Number 612187. Tonight, we are going to provide you with an update of how our design has advanced over the summer. This meeting is a preview of the 25% Design Public Hearing, which we will hold later this fall.

We have some housekeeping slides to begin with before we get to the main portion of our presentation. How to participate?

Tonight, we have a presentation that will take about 40 minutes. You can ask us a question or provide a comment during the Question & Answer portion of the meeting after the presentation, or you can leave a comment at the sign-in table. Any members of the media can direct their inquiries to the MassDOT Communications Director, Jacque Goddard, her information is there on the screen.

Tonight, we will be taking a set of meeting minutes so we can keep track of all the questions and comments we receive that will help guide the design. All parts of this meeting are considered public record, and the presentation and minutes will be posted to the project website. There will be plenty of time for Q&A at the end of the presentation.

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Here is our agenda for tonight. We are covering item one right now and after that, we will go over why this project was initiated, what we would like to accomplish, how our design has progressed so far, and how roadway users will be impacted as well as the impacts to the surrounding community, and how we plan to build our new bridge, and how we plan to keep you informed moving forward. After that, there will be time for questions and answers.

This is an overview of who will be speaking tonight. You already heard from me. My name is Aleksey Belov and I am the Project Manager. I work out of MassDOT Headquarters at 10 Park Plaza, Boston. Now, I would like to give a chance to the rest of our speakers to introduce themselves.

**C: Andy Benkert (AB2):** I'm Andy Benkert with WSP, Project Manager for this project.

**C: Brenda Codella (BC):** Brenda Codella, Right-of-Way Agent for the project.

**C: Kaye Lynn Johson (KJ):** Kaye Lynn Johnson, Landscape Architect with The Collaborative.

**C: Nathaniel Cabral-Curtis (NCC):** And I am Nathaniel Curtis. I am the public involvement person.

**C: AB1:** Very good, thank you all. How did we get here?

This bridge opened to traffic in 1979. In 2019, the left lanes on each side were close due to structural deterioration, which is how the bridge remains today. In 2022, a routine inspection discovered that the deterioration had spread to the superstructure and substructure which led MassDOT to initiate this project.

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<sup>1</sup> "C" stands for comment, "Q" for question and "A" for answer.



The project was initiated in 2024, and the purpose of the project is to replace this bridge. Earlier this year, we started our outreach to civic leaders and the community. That resulted in our first Public Information Meeting, which introduced the project back on April 3, 2025. Over the summer, we had three targeted briefings. First, with the Valley Opportunity Council, which operates programs from their site on Saint Louis Avenue. Second was for the Chicopee Chamber of Commerce, which represents the local business community. Third was for American Legion Post 452, which is associated with Veterans' Memorial Park that is situated between the bridge and Saint Louis Avenue. That brings us up to today's meeting. At this point, I will turn it over to our capable outreach specialist, Nate Curtis, and he is going to talk about the outreach efforts.

**C: NCC:** Thank you very much, Aleksey. So, this is just to give you an overview of how we reached out to folks to get you into the room tonight. If you have not been to one of these meetings before, it is important that all of you sign in at the sign-in table at the back of the room. That is where we collect your email addresses and merge them into the stakeholder database for this project. Ultimately, when this thing goes into construction, we will be able to send you bulletins about how the progress of the project is going, if there are going to be any lane closures, and if there are going to be any traffic impacts.

MassDOT email blasts came out on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup>, and the 6<sup>th</sup>, and again this morning. This is when the mass media ran. We thank the public access cable TV channels. We had staffed tables at the Price Right Marketplace and the Fairview Branch Library. There were 25 locations where flyers were dropped. I went around and did those last week and I was lucky enough to be at the Fairview Branch around 3:00pm last week so I got to have some conversations with the parents doing pickup at Fairview Elementary.

This is where we had all of our flyer drop locations. The little icon is our bridge up in Willimansett. You can see the spread of where we have all of our flyer drops. All the way down here with the library and City Hall, working our way up the corner through Chicopee Street, 116, coming up Meadow Street and kind of converging around the bridge and then heading up to the Good Dog Spot, Roger's Place, the diner and then working our way up towards Fairview.

One thing that we learned, we are about to lose spot number 2. Price Right Shopping has banned marketing of all kind, right down to Girl Scouts, so if you live up that way, you are welcome to see me after the meeting and tell me what we can do for our 25% Design Public Hearing.

We want to thank everyone who shared our flyers. The state delegation was very helpful in getting this out. The municipal governments in all three comments that straddle along I-391 – Chicopee, Springfield, and Holyoke. Chicopee's municipal departments, the Disability Commission, Senior Services, and Veterans. We have a range of community organizations and particularly the city staff and the mayor's office gave us access to this space tonight, which is really quite nice. With that, I am going to bring Aleksey back up to talk about why this project was initiated.

**C: ABI:** Thank you, Nate. So, why was this project initiated? I will provide some project background. Here is our project area. There bridge we are replacing runs North to South, carrying Interstate 391 over Route 116, which runs roughly East to West. We will only be replacing the bridge in the middle, which is the Veterans' Memorial Bridge over Route 116 and Chicopee Street. We will not be structurally involving the adjacent bridges over the Connecticut River up North and over the railroad tracks in the South from our bridge, but there will be some work involving the median barrier and the pavement of those structures, which we will discuss a little bit later.

We know that we are working in an area with homes and businesses quite close to the bridge along with two community resources, of which we are quite aware. Two parks. Rivers Park, which is in the lower part of the project limits and provides open area and recreation space to the area residents and Veterans' Park, which includes plaques displaying the names of Chicopee residents that lost their lives during the [Vietnam] war.

Here are the key parts of the bridge. You are going to hear us put out some words during this meeting and we want to make sure that you understand them. The deck of the bridge is where the vehicles travel. The superstructure includes the deck, the beams underneath the road, and the barriers in between lanes or at the outsides of the bridge. The substructure is anything that supports the superstructure like piers or the foundations. Piers transfer the weight



from the bridge to the foundations and you can think of the abutments as a special sort of pier, which is at either end of the bridge.

Here are some key facts about the bridge we are replacing. Today's bridge is 840 feet long and 11 feet wide. It is a concrete structure resting on two abutments, one at either end and six piers in between them. Interstate 391 carries an average of 32,000 vehicles every 24 hours and a little under 5% of those vehicles are heavy vehicles like commercial trucks and buses including the 21E Express Bus of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority. The bridge is supposed to be six lanes wide, three in each direction, but the north and southbound left lanes have been closed due to structural deterioration.

This bridge is safe for all users, but it is in poor condition. As you can see, this is underneath the bridge. Here is what we have accomplished to this date. Since we last met with the public, we have continued our design efforts. We have completed the Bridge Type Selection Worksheet which has given us a sense of which type of bridge we are going to replace this structure with. We have collected our first round of traffic data. We have completed a structure report, and we have completed our survey. There have been additional field visits, and we have coordinated with the railroad about working over their tracks, and the city about parking underneath the bridge. More importantly, MassDOT received 25% design submission from WSP and that design has been reviewed. At this time, I am going to turn it over to Andy Benkert, our lead designer, to discuss what we are going to do with the new bridge.

**C: AB2:** Thanks, Aleksey. Again, my name is Andy Benkert. I am the Project Manager with WSP, we are working with MassDOT to develop the Base Technical Concept for this project. So, what do we want to accomplish with this project?

There are several different user groups that we need to consider. With regard to the roadway user, we want to have a new bridge that restores I-391 to its full six-lane capacity. That is three lanes in the Northbound direction and three lanes in the Southbound direction. This will allow us to handle both current and future traffic volumes including the PVTa bus that travels over the bridge. Now, most importantly, we need a bridge that can be constructed in halves and I will get into that a little later on. We also want to use the latest design standards with a structure that will last for at least 75 years so we are not back out here doing this again anytime soon. We realize that we are in a neighborhood and we are seeking to avoid permanent property impacts to the extent feasible. We want our bridge to be able to use accelerated construction techniques for the sub or superstructure, which allows the contractor to hopefully get in and get out. We want to avoid impacts to the abutting sections of I-391, so what that means is we are not proposing any changes to the horizontal or vertical alignment. For the horizontal alignment, picture yourself looking down on google maps at an image of the bridge and that alignment is going to stay the same as it is now. Vertical alignment is really just the elevation of the structure, so we are not proposing a change in elevation to the bridge or the roadway on either side.

We want to minimize demolition and construction impact to Chicopee Street and maintain the Margaret/Perrault Street Connector and of course we want to maintain parking for local businesses throughout construction. For other considerations, we want our new piers to avoid the ones that are already there. When you go to remove an existing foundation, it can be difficult to pull out the piles from the original foundation so we want to make sure that our new piers are located offset from those. That is going to help us mitigate some schedule risk during construction. This also offers us the ability to adjust span configuration and address some concerns raised by city officials such as reducing some of the vacant under bridge space and also the introduction of some lighting under the bridge to deter nuisance activities.

So how has our bridge design progressed? This is an elevation view of the proposed bridge. For those of you not used to looking at drawings like this one, picture yourself sitting out on Chicopee Street looking up at the existing bridge. What you are looking at is the elevation of the structure. This represents an idea of what the arrangement will be in the final condition. Just to orient you a bit, on the left side of the screen, we have the south abutment. We are going to have approximately 690 feet of total bridge length and that is less total length than original bridge. We will be filling in a northern portion of that original span. We will also maintain the existing Margaret/Perrault Street Connector on the south side of the project and of course, maintain Route 116. Chicopee Street is not going anywhere. We are not trying to realign it or move it. Another thing to point out here are the parking areas. Today,



there are parking lots to the north and south of Chicopee Street. Those parking areas will be impacted during construction so we will be flip-flopping back-and-forth to make sure we maintain a minimum amount of capacity during construction and then ultimately when we are done with construction, the south parking lot will be reconstructed but the north parking lot will be eliminated.

So, our anticipated structure type, we are going with an I-Girder superstructure with a concrete deck and asphalt surface. One of the focuses from MassDOT is to eliminate joints on the bridge. This is beneficial because it is low-maintenance structure that is resistant to damage from water, deicing salt and more importantly, it allows for future rehabilitation. So, 40 or 50 years in the future, if they ever had to replace the concrete deck, that is much more achievable with this proposed structure than it is with the existing structure. One more thing that I want to point out is the location being in a neighborhood, we will be using MassDOT's aesthetic pier. If you were at the April meeting, we did show a couple images of the older style of that architectural pier. This one here was constructed in 2025 so it gives you a better representation of what the pier might look like. Another one of the changes from the April 3 Public Information Meeting is at that time, we were proposing maintaining one lane in the northbound direction and two lanes in the southbound direction. As of now, we are proposing keeping two lanes going in each direction during construction. So, really, when you are up on I-391 during construction, while you will be going through construction work zones, the capacity will remain the same as it has been for the last couple of years.

How will roadway users be impacted? There are really two different user groups. We have the users up on I-391 that's cars, trucks, buses, the PVRTA express bus. Down below the bridge, we still have cars, trucks, buses, and PVRTA, but then you add in the other users – pedestrians, bicyclists. Our goal is to maintain the northbound and southbound travel on I-391 throughout construction and also on Chicopee Street throughout construction, so there are no long-term detours being proposed. Any detours that we do propose will be short-term detours like rolling roadblocks or nightly detours to achieve certain construction activities.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, one of the key features of this bridge is that we have to build it in halves, so we need to get all of the traffic from the northbound side over to the southbound side of the bridge to allow us to do construction on the northbound side of the bridge and then transition traffic back once we get to the other side of the roadway. What you are seeing here is the image on the lower portion of the bridge shows the project area and the orange dashed line represents where we will be removing existing portions of the median and what that will do is facilitate us doing lane shifts and the median crossovers. On the south side, we are removing that section there and on the north side, we are removing that section there [pointing with the laser]. All of this will be done in a safe fashion so users can easily traverse back-and-forth between the two sides of the roadway. All barrier that is being removed will be replaced at the end of the project. We'll now walk through the stages of the project.

Pre-Stage 1, if you notice, the two inside lanes are closed on the northbound and southbound sides. There are some temporary repairs that we have to do to increase the bridge's capacity prior to construction. So, in Pre Stage 1, we will perform those repairs to the closed southbound lanes so we can begin closing the northbound lanes first and shift all the traffic over to the southbound side of the bridge. That will happen between Spring and Fall of 2027. In Stage 1, we will demolish the northbound side of the existing bridge and then work to complete construction of the northbound side of the new bridge. That is roughly Winter of 2027 to Spring of 2030.

Stage 2, so now we have completed the northbound side and we are going to shift all traffic to the northbound side and sort of reverse that process, which allows us to finish the southbound side of the bridge. Now, Stage 3. So, the superstructure has been completed and in this phase, we will be opening the bridge back up to its full six-lane cross-section and we will be replacing that barrier that was removed in Phase 1.

One key thing that we wanted to mention is that there are PVRTA buses that travel over the bridge on I-391 and under the bridge on Chicopee Street. We do have two PVRTA bus stops below the bridge and prior to construction we are going to be working with the PVRTA to move those loading areas a safe distance away from the bridge. Then, we will use the public information process so that the public knows what to expect and when to expect it. For maintenance and local traffic, the image on the slide currently on screen shows two colors. The blue color represents the construction area of the bridge, which will not impact traffic. It will impact parking a little bit, but no impact to Chicopee Street or the surrounding streets. The two red areas will impact local traffic is when we are



doing work directly overhead. So, when we are demolishing the bridge, we will have a nighttime shutdown. As much work as can get done in that night will happen. It will be demobilized and then traffic will be opened back up during the day the next day and they will repeat this process until they have completed the demolition or construction at that location. That is the same thing with the parking lot under the bridge. We have the north parking lot and the south parking lot. We will be using those spaces provide parking while we are doing construction, so if we are on the southbound side of the bridge, parking will be on the north side and vice-versa.

So, the anticipated detours. Again, these are short-term detours, not long-term detours. Nightly closures not closures for days or weeks at a time. For local cars, we could simply use the Margaret/Perrault Street Connector to get around the project site and that will allow us to work above Chicopee Street without a big impact. Obviously for larger trucks that may not be able to make these turns, we will be using Grafton Street from I-391 to Exit 5, Main Street to Cabot Street and then over the bridge back to Chicopee Street. We anticipate the operations that would affect Chicopee Street shouldn't impact that last bus from PVRTA which is usually around 9:00pm.

So, parking is a big deal. Beneath this bridge, there are two parking lots. There are approximately 56 spaces on the northside and about 39 spaces on the south side. There are about 10 spaces on the Margaret/Perrault Street Connector. I say about because none of them are striped, we're just going by the City of Chicopee's dimensions for a parking space. In the proposed condition, we will have 60. Between all the spaces we have currently, we'll need to jockey the parking area back and forth during construction, but the point being that parking will remain open for businesses throughout construction. We are not shutting down all access and forcing people to park on city streets.

What are the environmental and cultural resources, and community impacts associated with the projects? To start that I will introduce Brenda from MassDOT and Brenda is going to go over some Right-of-Way impacts.

**C: BC:** Thank you, Andy. My name is Brenda Codella, I represent the Right-of-Way Bureau of Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway Division. The Right-of-Way Bureau is responsible for acquiring all the necessary rights in private and public land for the design, construction, and implementation of this project. Affected property owners will be contacted by a representative from the Bureau or a consultant representing the Department of Transportation's Highway Division. The procedures used must comply with state and federal regulations governing the acquisition process. Fee-taking and permanent easements may be required where other areas may require, or will require temporary easements. Affected property owners' rights are protected under our Massachusetts General Laws, primarily, Chapter 79. If a project is receiving federal funds, the property owners' rights are further defined under Title 3 of the Real Property Act of 1970, as amended. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the Right-of-Way process during the question-and-answer portion of the meeting.

**C: AB2:** Thanks, Brenda. So, some of the project impacts. As we mentioned, we are maintaining the horizontal and vertical alignment of the structure, so this is considered a footprint replacement project. Now, the design is not finalized at this point. This is a design-build project, which Aleksey will touch on in a few minutes. We are seeking to minimize Right-of-Way impacts associated with the project. Here is Chicopee Street going this way, and I-391, so this corner of the bridge is Margaret Street, and we do have some temporary impacts on Margaret Street. That is going to be some sidewalk reconstruction for ADA-compliance. We do have a taking proposed here on the corner of Chicopee and Perrault. That is a small taking that is part of the existing sidewalk that is there now. That sidewalk has to be reconstructed in order to be ADA-compliant. We also have impacts to the Vietnam Memorial Park, which I am going to get into in a little bit.

The park is important to us. MassDOT takes the presence of the park very seriously. We have been coordinating with Veterans' Services since November of 2024. We have Kaye Lynn Johnson from The Collaborative here. She is our Landscape Architect, and we plan specifically for these issues where we are impacting landscaping on a project, we want to make sure that it is put back and put back correctly. The main takeaway here is that any construction impact to the park will be fully restored at the end of the project.

These are our ideas for how to fix the park after we touch it. We are trying to get the right people involved to make sure that we make the right decisions. We had a briefing in June 2025 with American Legion Post 452, who I believe have some members here in the audience. We were able to share an overview of the project and our plans to



enhance the park after construction and we got some information that came out of that meeting and our commitment is really to keep that park accessible during construction. We want to make sure that columns stay in their specific order that they are placed to honor the veterans. We want to make sure that our activities are done in close coordination with American Legion Post 452 and others through design and construction.

What we know is there will be some impact to Vietnam Veterans' Park. It is inevitable. In order to reconstruct the bridge on the east side of the structure, we anticipate a crane path running along the side of structure. As you can see here when we are on the east side of the bridge, we will be on the corner of Veterans' Park. With that, I am going to hand it over to Kaye Lynn Johnson and she is going to speak more about our plan to rehabilitate the park.

**C: KJ:** Thank you, Andy. The goal here is to reduce the construction impact to the park. In doing that, there are obvious recommendations but also an opportunity to bring more eyes to this area. What you have in the public realm where there are more people around, it is cleaner, and it is better for everyone. What we see in terms of the existing conditions, we see a nice flag staff with the flag here. On the upper right, the bridge is very much present in the park. What you see in the bottom left is there were street trees along Chicopee Street, but they did not live, which often happens with street trees because they are not given enough food. We are going to talk about how we can help remedy that. What you see are the four trees, there may be five, I am not sure. The one closest to us will remain but the others will need to be taken out because of the crane needed to build the bridge.

With all that said, one of the goals is to keep the basic layout of the park and to do two other main things. One is to create a screen between the park and bridge with grasses and trees so you are looking at the trees and have something to look at other than the bridge. The other is a planting bed. To expand the new planting bed here that comes out to column area that is there right now. What that will do is give more of a presence to the park on Chicopee Street and it will soften it up because right now it is all paved without the street trees that were originally planted there. We can put in new trees and supply a root zone so that these trees will live. We also plan to put a path on the backside of the columns because the plaques for the veterans face in a direction that is difficult to see them and the installation of this path will make that easier to actually read the plaques.

This is just a rendering image of another design idea that included a fence around the area and you see right here how the planted area would come out and make a soft area right there. Another rendered image showing what it would look like to be in the park and look over, you will obviously see the bridge but you will see the trees first and how lovely they can be in the different seasons.

Another addition is to put QR codes on the plaques and this goes to a website called the virtualwall.com or it might be virtualwall.org, and it gives quite a lot of information about these Vietnam Veterans and these quite amazing stories. It is also a way to encourage people to understand more about the park because QR codes are so accessible. The other design move is to bring a path to connect to the River path and bring the path through the park and connect to Rivers Park. Again, it brings more people to the park and puts more eyes on the park and the whole area. Also, developing a seating area so if people want to bring their food outside, this becomes a little bit of a seating area for this general area that is a link between the two parks.

**C: AB1:** Thank you so much. I am going to talk a little about the construction methodology and approach. MassDOT is using a design-build method for this bridge replacement. That means that the team you see here tonight will generate a 25% design and then Base Technical Concepts and those will be used for Design-Builders to bid on the project. Those teams are comprised of designers on one side and contractors on the other. MassDOT structures it this way because it tends to cut down on overall time it takes to construct the projects because you do not need to wait while the 100% plans and you can begin some construction activity while the design is taking place. This approach promotes innovation by teaming up the designer and the contractor. MassDOT will give the contractor our plans which they have to incorporate around things like noise and traffic, but at the same time give them flexibility around things like construction methods.

Our Alternative Technical Concept (ATC) process is something where design-builders can deviate from Base Technical Concept. This can include construction staging or techniques, the material used during construction, and



traffic management decisions. This is not to say that they can totally abandon the plans as MassDOT must approve everything prior to implementation and MassDOT must be satisfied with the alternative.

Here's our next steps. After tonight, you will see us next up at our Design Public Hearing. It will be a little more refined than what you have seen tonight, but you can consider what you have just seen to be a preview of the hearing content. The hearing will be sometime later this fall and after the hearing, we will be responding to comments on the 25% design with our goal to advertise the design in the spring. The winning bidder will receive Notice to Proceed sometime in the late fall of 2026 and construction is planned to begin sometime in 2027. Now, I will turn this over to Nate for our path forward.

**C: NCC:** Thanks, Aleksey. So how are we going to keep you informed? As Aleksey mentioned, the next big milestone for us is that Design Public Hearing coming up later this fall. If there are things that you think of, obviously we want to hear from you tonight. If there are existing issues we can address with the new bridge, let us know. We briefed three community groups that we identified through our own efforts but if you are here representing a group and would like to see us and have some specific concerns, we are happy to answer those. If you have thoughts about construction, we are happy to respond to those.

If you want to write to us, you can send the written comment to the address on the screen behind me. This project has its own distinct email address that goes to me, it goes to Aleksey, it goes to the MassDOT Government Affairs Liaison. We also have a project website where you can go to access all the project documents and sign up for the emails. I am going to leave this up even though we have the nice picture of the reservoir on the next slide. We kind of have a pattern of going into Q&A on this so I am going to start by asking if anyone here is an elected official. You get first bite at the Q&A apple because you may have somewhere else you need to go. Is anyone here an elected official? Is anyone here a representative of an elected official? Hearing none, I will open it up to the room. I will walk around with a microphone and ask that you speak into the microphone and because according to our interpreter, we have a number of people listening in Spanish and Russian so to make that work for them, we do need the amplification. Hands, go for it.

## DISCUSSION

**Q: Audience Member 1:** I have been looking into this project myself and figure that on the north side we can eliminate 380 feet of the bridge, and on the south side, eliminate 320 feet. Then fill the median with 150,000 yards [of soil] and just have a little bridge over Chicopee Street and a little bridge down by the park. Underneath the bridge is just homeless people and drug addicts, and to me it is just a waste of money. What is this project going to cost?

**A: AB1:** It is \$150 million.

**Q: Audience Member 1:** Filling would be about half of that, right? So why do we have to have a bridge? Just stick the bridge over Chicopee Street. Veterans' Park should be moved to the center of Chicopee where the Christmas Tree is so everyone that drives through Chicopee can see a nice park rather than a place drug addicts hang out and this thing that is tucked away in the corner.

**A: AB2:** One thing you have to consider with I-391 is it does split the community in half so the existing bridge being 840 feet really allows people to see through from one side of the roadway to the other so one thing we wanted to really avoid was closing off the community by adding additional embankment. We are shortening the bridge. We did look at shortening it even further but again, anytime you close the roadway off, you tend to block one side of the community from the other. So, with the 640- foot proposed span, you still maintain some of that connection.

**A: NCC:** What I think I hear you saying is there is a visual blockage so people can only see along the road. Plus, one of the things that we have heard from a lot of businesses is that the parking that is under there is important for them. One of the reasons we are reducing the parking is exactly to your point: people use it to do drugs, people use it to dump couches, so we are reducing the open space under the bridge, but some businesses do depend on that parking, so fewer spaces will make it more active and create more turnover.



**C: Audience Member 1:** Yeah, but you can build a wall. It is a retaining wall; it is not that high.

**A: NCC:** We are shrinking the bridge.

**C: Audience Member 1:** I am just trying to save money. I know the state doesn't care because if we didn't dump all the salt and calcium on these bridges, they'd still be good. But you guys are still dumping salt and calcium when it is 50 degrees out. It is ridiculous.

**Q: NCC:** Andy, do you want to say a little more about the way the new bridge will be a better structure.

**A: AB2:** Yeah, so the existing bridge is subject to, and every bridge in the state is subject to regular de-icing salts. We live in a northern climate. There really isn't a better option. If you have a better option, I'd be happy to hear it. To keep things safe and to maintain traffic, things have to be salted. That does lead to deterioration of structures. Maintenance can help to alleviate this. You know, washing the bridge on a routine basis can help minimize the impact and extend the life of the structure.

Just to go back to your point about closing off the bridge with additional embankments, we are reducing about 150 feet or so from the northern side of the bridge and then still maintaining an open atmosphere under the bridge. Because there is additional parking in this area that is used by local businesses, if you take that away, that parking all goes onto the local streets and I am not sure how that would be accommodated.

**Q: Audience Member 1:** How many times have you sat down there for like a week and seen how many cars park there?

**A: AB2:** We do have outreach with all the local businesses.

**C: Audience Member 1:** I am down there all the time and there's drug deals going on. Nobody really parks there. Half the cars that are there are there for months at a time.

**A: AB2:** Yes, that is partially why we are reducing the number of spaces in the future condition.

**Q: Audience Member 1:** Can you just eliminate it? Eliminate the whole problem. That is my opinion.

**A: AB2:** Understood.

**Q: Property owner at 5266 Perrault Street:** Good evening, everyone. My name is Phil and I own property at 5266 Perrault Street. I just want to have it on record that if any of the designers, builders, or contractors are in need of staging area or shop area that maybe we can make this work for everybody. It will be a pretty big disruption obviously, but it is what it is. Please reach out to me if I can be of help to you all.

**A: NCC:** Thank you. I believe you have submitted something to that effect as well.

**Q: Audience Member 2:** The question that I have at this point in time is, the last time we got together, we talked about two columns at the southern end of the park. What happened to those columns? We will also have Memorial Day celebrations at the park so thinking about how that will be accommodated. Those columns obviously have names at each end of the column so what would happen with the replacement of those columns over the time period you are doing construction on the bridge? That is part of my main concern is how will what we do be impacted during the short period of time because we know you are going to be dealing with changes but those are two important things to us. The columns and how we conduct the Memorial Day service. These are 15 young men that died. Sacrificed their lives for our country and we are not removing the park obviously, but we want to make sure that we maintain that dignity and respect that they deserve.

**A: NCC:** We did give the briefing on the 19<sup>th</sup> and I want to be sure I understood the feedback I was given that day. The columns that are on the south side do not leave the site and the order in which they are on the site does not change. The ceremony doesn't get done without the columns on the site, so I think it is up to us to figure out how we accommodate that. Within those constraints, I am going to walk this back to Kaye Lynn so she can give you some thoughts on how we make that happen because I know she has been thinking about it.



**C: KJ:** You are leading us to the next step here, which is to figure out what do those temporary columns look like and to figure out the right order. Also, a design that is respectful and will hold up for the duration of the construction. So, absolutely. It is part of making sure that you all have the park to have your ceremony. Do I know what it looks like right now? I don't, but we will figure it out.

**C: NCC:** And I think, Aleksey, you are welcome to come over here and grab me by the necktie, but I think our goal is to tell you folks that we are not going anywhere. As we finish design process, we are not going anywhere. As we get into construction, we will be here. I believe several members of your group have my direct phone number and you're encouraged to reach out. As we work through 25% design and beyond, one thing that is important about design-build is that the design-builder has parameters in which they have to operate but there are things that get written into the document that they get that say "thou shalt" and they have to do those things.

**C: AB1:** MassDOT will maintain a presence. The MassDOT Resident Engineer will always be on site. The Construction Manager will be on site. This way we have someone to direct your concerns to.

**C: Audience Member 2:** With regard to the columns, we have to make sure that the bronze plaques are there and that they are used. Nothing will be replaced. I understand things will be a little bit different during construction and there is not much we can do about that, but just certain things. I know you are aware of this because at the last meeting we had, make sure that those plaques are there. They have to be there. Otherwise, it will change that part of the ceremony and that part of the remembrance of these young men that gave their lives. I had a thought that if you are taking two columns out, perhaps that they could come in and face the park with the plaques still on them.

**Q: Audience Member 3:** When we talked at Post 452, we talked about the columns that are on Saint Louis Street as well. I understand we are talking about the ones on Chicopee Street. Is that going to continue? Because there are trees there and I fear that their roots may be impacted if you are considering putting that walk on Saint Louis also.

**A: KJ:** I was thinking about that today as I drove by it. You have one column there that will likely be impacted but we will have an area where you can walk around it.

**Q: Audience Member 3:** Somebody said that there are a number of flags there now and you are going to take down the number of flags. Is that the case?

**A: KJ1:** There is going to be some regrading, but the design intent is to keep the flags in the similar place where they are now, and we can have the grading so that they are on the mound. I do not know what the grading is going to look like, but we can make sure that they are on the mound.

**Q: NCC:** Do we have any questions from the interpretation channels?

**A: Interpreter:** No. No questions.

**C: NCC:** Okay. Other hands? I will hand the microphone back to Aleksey to close us out.

**C: AB1:** Thank you for all the questions. This meeting is closed. Thank you, everyone, for attending.

**Meeting Ends**



## NEXT STEPS

The next steps for the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Bridge project include holding the Design Public Hearing later this fall, responding to public comments on the 25% design, and advertising the project in the spring. Construction is planned to begin in 2027, with ongoing communication and updates provided to the community throughout the process.



## APPENDIX 1: MEETING ATTENDEES

<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Mark	Antunes	Resident
Aleksey	Belov	MassDOT
Andy	Benkert	WSP
Melissa	Breor	Chicopee Chamber of Commerce
Blake	Bryan	Owner of O'Connell's Pub & Grill
Nathaniel	Cabral-Curtis	WSP
David	Chia	The Collaborative
Brenda	Codella	MassDOT
Darren	Conboy	Jacobs
Mary Beth	Costello	Ward 9 City Councilor
Bill	Courchesne	Ward 7 City Councilor
Shawn	Dumont	Resident
Doug	Ellis	DPW, Engineering
Tyler	Garnet	Provider
Laura	Hanson	MassDOT
Kevin	Harp	Resident
Bill	Heyn	Resident, Property Owner
Ashna	Jaiswal	The Collaborative
Erik	Kristensen	MassDOT
Don	Lamothe	Ward 7 School Committee Member
Doug	Lombury	Chicopee Police
Nicholas	Parmentier	Resident
Michael	Pise	Chief of Staff, Chicopee Mayor's Office
Joseph	Pisete	Resident
Dan	Racicot	MassDOT
Gary	Roux	PVPC
Paula	Simmons	MassDOT
Lawrence	Walden	Resident