

I-90 Interchange Study



I-90 Interchange Study Public Open House

October 10, 2019 – 6:30-9:00 PM
Blandford Town Hall
1 Russell Stage Road, Blandford

Meeting Summary

Purpose: The second Open House and Public Meeting of the I-90 Interchange Study focused on sharing the study's alternatives analysis and development, as well as draft findings. MassDOT invited participants to attend an Open House at 6:30 PM with the opportunity to review large scale maps and boards depicting information about the study. Participants could leave comments with their opinions on the alternatives or the study in general and speak to study team members during this time. A presentation was then given at 7:00 PM to detail study progress.

Present: Cassandra Gascon Bligh and Ethan Britland of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Office of Transportation Planning (OTP); David Derrig of AECOM; Joanne Haracz of McMahon Associates; and Nancy Farrell of Regina Villa Associates (RVA).

Introduction

MassDOT Project Manager Cassandra Gascon Bligh opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. She said the team would recap elements of the study, including goals, mission and evaluation criteria; the existing conditions analysis and future no-build analysis; present the alternatives development analysis; and present the draft study findings. Members of the public were invited to ask questions at the end of the meeting.

Recap of Progress

Ms. Gascon Bligh used a detailed PowerPoint presentation to share the study information. The presentation is posted on the project website, www.mass.gov/massdot/i90study, and presents more details than are available in this summary.

Ms. Gascon Bligh showed a map of the study area including Westfield on the east to Lee on the west, and north to Dalton. She reminded the attendees of the Study Goals:

- The primary goal is to improve access to and from I-90 for towns in the center of the regional study area;
- The secondary goal is to mitigate I-90 bound traffic to and from Lee and Westfield.

The Mission Statement includes identifying feasible potential locations for a new interchange. See slide 3 for the detailed statement.

Ms. Gascon Bligh listed evaluation criteria in four categories: socioeconomic effects, financial and regulatory, design and operations, and environmental resources. All were developed in coordination with the Working Group for the study to consider.

A series of existing conditions maps for the study area followed, including:

- Protected open space and recreational areas
- A map of wetlands and habitats
- Environmental Justice (EJ) populations (in West Lee, Becket and southern Westfield)
- Hazardous materials sites, which are scattered throughout the study area
- Zoning map, showing that the area is primarily zoned as residential
- Existing land use map, color coded to show the uses
- Locally identified Priority Development Areas showing areas designated for economic development by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Ms. Gascon Bligh showed a series of data graphics corresponding to the existing conditions. The slides summarized population by town and household income statewide and for Berkshire, Hampden and Hampshire County and the study area. The state figures are higher for 2017 estimated average household income and for 2017 estimated median household income. She showed a graphic of key study area workforce sectors by type. Study area commuting times are in a bar graphic for each study area community showing mean travel time to work in minutes. The lowest travel time is shown for Lee (17.7 minutes) and the highest for Otis (38.3 minutes).

The Statewide Travel Demand Model (slide 19) predicts daily volumes for the study area towns in 2040 for the No-Build conditions. The slide also presents projected population change from 2020-2040 for the Commonwealth (6.44%) and the surrounding study area counties (0.79% for the study area). Projected employment change for the same period is 2.33% for Massachusetts, and -1.17% for the study area. Employment change for the study area counties is negative.

Ms. Gascon Bligh summarized the seven alternative sites that were part of the original review and screening. Based on the screening process, three alternatives were chosen for further analysis:

- Alternative 1, Algeria Road, Otis
- Alternative 2, Blandford Maintenance Facility, Blandford
- Alternative 3, Blandford Service Center, Blandford

Maps of the alternatives are on slide 23.

Ms. Gascon Bligh showed maps with the original concept and revisions for each alternative. The revisions focused on minimizing impacts on Article 97 land and wetlands. Then she displayed a series of three-dimensional graphics for each alternative (see slides 24 through 29 for both sets of maps).

Ms. Gascon Bligh listed environmental considerations for the three alternatives. Slide 30 includes a table with the details. Alternative 1 presents steep slopes and open space impacts as well as Environmental Justice impacts. Alternative 2 presents fewer impacts on the listed criteria.

Conceptual construction costs presented do not include acquiring any necessary right-of-way, environmental permitting or engineering design. The total costs are listed below (slide 31):

- Alternative 1, Algeria Road: \$37.8 million
- Alternative 2, Blandford Maintenance Facility: \$29.5 million
- Alternative 3, Blandford Service Plaza: \$34.0 million

Estimated daily use predicted for a new interchange includes (trips per day):

- 5,771 for Alternative 1
- 6,412 for Alternative 2
- 5,922 for Alternative 3

Projected trips for each alternative are not new trips to the study area. Rather, they are trips that would already occur in future conditions, but whose routes would be diverted based on an interchange. Ms. Gascon Bligh reviewed three maps showing daily traffic diversions on local roads for each of the alternatives. Each map shows the increase or decrease in trips per day using color and listing the increases or reductions. Together with the trip diversion table on slide 33, the results show reduced travel time and miles traveled in the am and pm peak hours as drivers choose more direct routes to their destinations with an additional Interchange.

Additional Alternatives Analysis

Ms. Gascon Bligh presented new data on several topics that the team researched. The first topic was predicted daily use of the new interchange (slide 32). Alternative 2, Blandford Maintenance Facility, would see the largest use at 6,412 vehicles per day. The next slide presents trip diversion with a new interchange. Alternative 2 diverts the highest number of trips per day for Exit 2 and Alternative 3 the highest number of Exit 3 (slide 33). Slides 34, 35 and 36 depict the change by alternative in a map format for roads in the study area.

Ms. Gascon Bligh reviewed a summary of Level of Service (LOS) for daily traffic for 2040. LOS measures the efficiency of peak-hour traffic operating conditions at intersections. Roadway network operations are assigned a letter value from A to F, based on volume, geometrics, travel speeds, number of lanes and lane changes, or length of acceleration and deceleration lanes. The information was collected for the 2040 No-Build (no new interchange) and the Build scenarios. Many local roadways would see little to no volume change. Some future trips would shift to different roads, getting off local roads and on to I-90 sooner. This would result in mileage and travel time savings. For all alternatives, roads immediately connecting to alternatives would see increases, while Route 20 would see a significant decrease in overall volume study area wide. The decreases would be notable in some communities, including Middlefield, Chester, Huntington, Montgomery and Tyringham.

Continuing to address LOS, there is not a lot of change anticipated in network operations between 2040 No-Build and Build conditions. Slide 40 summarizes the LOS for new unsignalized intersections in 2040 during peak hours. Most intersections show a LOS of A or B. Ms. Gascon Bligh summarized the results of the LOS analysis:

- The network would operate at generally acceptable LOS

- Most intersections and turning movements would see no LOS change between 2040 Build and No-Build Conditions
- Several merge/diverge/turning movements see improvement in LOS
- One intersection sees an improvement: North Elm Street (Route 202/Route 10) at Notre Dame Street in Westfield, which would move from an E to a D level in Alternatives 2 and 3

One way to look at connectivity and mobility is to measure Travel Time Savings and reduced miles traveled. Slide 42 shows that Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) are decreased the most in Alternative 3, at 2.93 miles saved per trip. Vehicle Hours Traveled (VHT) is maximized in Alternative 3 as well, reaching 13.12 minutes per trip.

Maps provided in slides 43-45 show the potential changes in connectivity and mobility offered by a new interchange. The contours compare how far one could travel in 45 minutes with or without a new interchange. Alternative 2 provides the largest change overall with the furthest reach into NY State and Central Massachusetts. The table on slide 46 summarizes each alternative on a scale of access to opportunities, such as population and household growth, household income, employment and business sales. Ms. Gascon Bligh summarized the takeaways from the travel time savings as they would affect people and businesses, including:

- Enhanced prospects of study area residents finding jobs within a reasonable commuting time
- Reduced commute times impacting the amount of time spent in more pleasurable and/or more productive activities
- People can reach more businesses; businesses can reach more customers
- For goods movements, businesses can reduce costs of shipping

Public health impacts were also assessed. One consideration presented was noise. MassDOT used the number of peak hour trips at an interchange within ¼ mile proximity of residences as a conceptual indicator of the anticipated noise impacts of the interchange itself. Alternative 1 has the potential to impact the least number of residences (there are 7 within ¼ mile), while Alternative 2 has the potential to impact the highest number of residences (with 18 residents within ¼ mile). If an interchange project ever advanced, noise impacts on local roads would be analyzed.

Continuing with additional data, Ms. Gascon Bligh said that as they relate to safety, the three interchange concepts meet MassDOT design standards and require no design exceptions. Some of the local street systems would need modifications to accommodate bike and pedestrian facilities as a result of increased traffic volumes. MassDOT does not anticipate that a new interchange would impact existing transit, although it may present an opportunity to provide park and ride lots.

MassDOT does not anticipate that a new interchange would impact existing transit, which is currently limited to Lee and Westfield. There would, however, be potential for new Park and Ride opportunities.

Environmental quality is the next public health consideration. Air quality is an indicator of environmental quality, and reduced emissions and increased LOS can positively impact overall air quality within the study area. The table on slide 34 summarizes the average and annual weekday vehicle miles travelled, fuel savings, and greenhouse gas reductions for each alternative. Alternative 3 shows the greatest savings across the board. Looking at Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Vehicle Hours Traveled (VHT)

savings, Alternative 3 showed the greatest travel time savings (13.12 minutes per trip), as well as the best mileage savings.

Environmental Justice (EJ) impacts were discussed next. EJ groups are Census Blocks that meet specific criteria, including:

- Income: Households earn 65% or less of state median household income
- Minority population: 25% or more of residents identify as a race other than white
- English language isolation: 25% or more of households have no one over the age of 14 who speaks English only or very well

Alternative 1 at Algeria Road is adjacent to an EJ population. The study process considers the relative distribution of costs and benefits from interchange alternatives as they relate to EJ groups. There should be no disproportionate impact on disadvantaged populations, especially when other alternatives are present which provide similar benefits. The assessment shows that the Blandford alternatives do not have an impact on the EJ population.

Community impacts include looking at historical, sensitive or recreational resources. Alternative 1 in particular is close to several receptors, including the Girl Scout Camp, Indian Lake and Jacob's Pillow. Since this is a conceptual planning study, no specific impacts were identified, save for proximity.

Ms. Gascon Bligh addressed land use, which is reflected in zoning (see the map on slide 54). The study area is largely identified as residential, so regulation changes or zoning exceptions would be needed for other land uses. Future changes would be guided by the municipalities with assistance from their MPOs.

The next slide (55) summarizes impacts on land parcels for each alternative, and a second table compares the volume of traffic for the proposed alternatives with four other exits for perspective.

Slide 56 presents an Alternatives Analysis summary matrix for the additional research and elements.

Draft Study Findings

Ms. Gascon Bligh reiterated the principal task of the study, which is to examine the feasibility of establishing an interchange on interstate highway 90 between the existing exchanges located in Westfield and Lee. She said the team has concluded that the three presented alternatives are feasible from an engineering perspective; however, each would require environmental permitting due to the impacts that have been identified and would require substantial support from local stakeholders to move forward.

Should a project advance, MassDOT looked beyond feasibility to develop recommendations given that there are variations in cost, impacts, benefits and public support and opposition. Of the three alternatives, Alternatives 2 and 3 are more favorable. They are less expensive, present fewer impacts and offer more benefits. Alternative 1, Algeria Road in Otis, is the most expensive, presents the most complex terrain, offers fewer benefits on a comparative scale, has the highest potential negative impacts, including Open Space/Article 97 impacts, the presence of an EJ population and has strong public opposition. MassDOT recommends that Alternative 1 be dismissed, a suggestion supported by members of the Working Group at the October 2, 2019 meeting.

To explain how a project might move forward, MassDOT presented potential funding options. These include federal funding, use of toll revenue, and state funding.

Ms. Gascon Bligh detailed the federal funding opportunities, including grants, which would have to meet specific criteria, compete against other projects and be ready to construct in a short timeframe. Since this is a conceptual planning study, no interchange alternatives are ready to construct as a result of this study. MPO programming could be considered based on a formula of funds, and the study area regional planning agencies would have to allocate such funds through the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs). In this case, the interchange would compete with regional projects and it would also require a substantial portion of available funds. In addition, using federal funds would require bringing the entire Western Turnpike up to federal standards (it was built before the current standards existed).

The team also looked at using Western Turnpike toll revenue. Competition with other projects, and the large proportion of project costs needed for a new interchange comprised the challenges of using this funding source. Funding an interchange with toll revenue generated solely by a new interchange was examined as well. It was found that for all alternatives, the toll revenue would not generate enough money to pay for the new interchange. It could however pay for the operations and maintenance of an interchange.

Additionally, the Commonwealth funds many projects and programs through bond proceeds. As with federal funding, the interchange would compete with projects, both existing and new. Slides 64 through 70 provide details on the funding options and the challenging toll revenue forecast.

Ms. Gascon Bligh reiterates that MassDOT has determined that a new interchange is feasible, but the hurdles include funding and permitting requirements. Action at the local level would also be required to advance the project. MassDOT recommends that Alternative 1 be dismissed from consideration and suggests that Alternatives 2 and 3 are more favorable.

Ms. Gascon Bligh shared a typical schedule of a MassDOT Project Development. From needs identification, through planning, design, programming, procurement and construction can typically be around 12 years. The I-90 Interchange Study comprises only the planning part of this process and stakeholder support and funding would need to be identified to continue with next steps.

The project schedule includes the following activities:

- Meeting materials will be posted online
- Study website: www.mass.gov/i-90-interchange-study
- An email notice will be sent when they are available
- Completion of draft report and release for 30-day public comment period, which will be available on the study website (email notices will be sent when it's available)
- Finalize report, publish online, and deliver to the Legislature

Ms. Gascon Bligh thanked the participants for their attention and opened the discussion and comment period. She asked speakers to introduce themselves before making their remarks.

Discussion

Steven Hart, Chester

Mr. Hart opposes the addition of a new interchange. There is a reason there has been no new exit in 65 years. The City of Westfield supports vehicle traffic and Hilltown main roads can't handle heavy traffic. Safety should demand nothing bigger than a mini car. There are hills and consider the sharp turn to Route 20; he recently saw a tractor trailer hung up on the bridge. A new interchange introducing heavy traffic would not benefit the towns at all.

Margery Wilkie, Otis

Ms. Wilkie is thrilled by the idea of an exit. She said many people in Hilltowns work in bigger towns and cities and it's hard to get there. She appreciates learning about the time saved on the alternatives.

Neil Toomey, Becket

At the Working Group meeting on October 2, the group heard loud and clear the opposition to an interchange. Mr. Toomey said a new interchange would add 6,000 trips per day, air pollution and noise pollution. While he is happy to hear that Algeria Road is off the list, he suggested that the Blandford alternatives should be scrapped for all the same reasons. The local roads and sharp curves on Route 20 can't handle the traffic. The rural landscape wants to be preserved. In any case, the analysis should move beyond ¼ mile impact. Emissions are not reduced by putting more cars on narrow roads and 10-13 minute savings in travel time are not worth the other costs of an interchange. Westfield has brought its own traffic problem on itself. He suggested that "big money and real estate" are behind the proposal. The elected officials have a duty to represent all of the communities and the no-build option is well warranted. This study has served to divide residents of our towns when they should all be working together. Elected leaders should speak out against a new interchange.

Jeanne LeClair

Ms. LeClair is the Economic Development Director for the Gateway Hilltown Collaborative. She thanked everyone who participated in the meeting and noted the importance of participatory democracy in the towns. She suggested that the alternatives be viewed in the context of the economy of the gateway Hilltowns. The economy is declining, and the average age of residents is increasing. She said the towns need to be home to young families and growing businesses. She appreciates that Broadband is opening the economy and helping, but the Hilltowns can't rebuild just on working from home. Ms. LeClair said as the region's Economic Director, she is working on the need for new ideas and welcoming new families. Trades are important and help people to build lives in the region. But those jobs need customers and projects. Some towns encourage second homes for their economies, but the end result could be losing part of a community's identity and history. It's hard now for people to build their lives here. Ms. LeClair said there is a lot of work to be done. Adding Broadband and a train would be good strategies, and the interchange would add value to our mission.

Bill and Jane Missimer

Mr. Missimer told the story of being a widow and remarrying eight years ago. He and his wife tried city life but like beauty and history of Hilltowns, their rural charm and breathtaking natural beauty. The couple restored a family property that was the Boise Tavern 200 years ago, and added blueberry fields. At some point, they look forward to transitioning the property to family members. He believes that will all come to an end if an interchange is located on North St. near the farm. Adding so many cars and trucks would have a terrible effect on our local roads. He suggested citizens of Blandford would face pollution from 5,000-6000 cars a day on local roads. He asked for a no to any exit in the hill towns.

Jane Kosniky Kingsley

Ms. Kingsley said the human element was lacking from the presentation. Politicians should speak for the vulnerable and personal safety. She said the premise of the entire study is out of date as the automobile is beginning to lose its significance.

Michael, East Otis

The speaker fails to see a reason for an interchange. The projects and assumptions are totally unrealistic. He feels that if the Commonwealth builds a road people will come. The interchange will dump traffic on country roads that go nowhere – and still more will come. There will be a gas station, fast food restaurant, strip mall, and a Blandford outlet mall.

Mary Babcock, Becket

Applaud those who help to serve communities. Infrastructure is needed that revolves around individuals. Mass transit such as rails – that's the future. Don't knowingly support and expand a thing that contributes to climate change. Demand an alternative. Some things are easier and faster. Choose what's easy or what nourishes and enriches us as a community. Protect what is scenic, wild and unique.

Pat Story, North Tolland

The speaker lives on Otis Reservoir, where he retired and finds it is a nice way of life. He supports putting an exit in this area because of the aging population. Homes won't sell unless they are accessible to buyers. While Broadband will help, young people are not moving into the Hilltowns. People will still have to get to their offices. The region has to get property values up, or our towns will die on the vine. He suggested putting some park and ride lots at selected exits and running express buses. It would be great to get a train, but how long will that take? He noted that the only Level 1 trauma in the region is Baystate Medical Center, the best in the western part of the state. Speedier access to medical care is another reason for an interchange.

Debbie Lendren, Blandford

Ms. Lendren said that when it's determined that an interchange decreases time spent on the road and decreases pollution – traffic tends to increase, more people will travel as time goes down. She referenced the statewide model and wondered if 2040 includes growth from today. Took her a lifetime to find Blandford. In Ohio, an interchange was built by a small town – it turned into a suburban place with congestion. How much will public sentiment factor into a decision? Ms. Gascon Bligh said that

MassDOT is not going to recommend whether or not an interchange should advance; its charge was to look at feasibility.

Jeff Penn, Huntington

Mr. Penn stated that he was born and raised in Paradise. He enjoys living in a black dagger of darkness. He is unhappy that this process even took place and thinks it should have happened before money was spent. Mr. Penn told the audience he is planning a transportation symposium for protecting the Western Highlands 413. He says his kids probably can't afford to live in his town but let it keep its character. The time savings are fictitious. If people need convenience they should move. This area is fragile— we are caretakers and curators. The area is vulnerable and we don't want to be heavy handed.

A speaker from West Springfield

The speaker lived 200 yards from a turnpike. He heard truck traffic all night long. He observed that an interchange will encourage more crime because it provides easy on/easy off access.

Jerri Hamel, Blandford

The speaker gave Ms. Gascon Bligh a letter. She read from her letter [transcribed below]:

Dear Cassandra Gascon,

Blandford is not a destination! Traffic passes through mainly on route 23, to the recreational area of East Otis. An exit here would not be a convenience for most our inhabitants.

Let me illustrate some real examples of that impact: Gore Road is a mile of hilly, winding, narrow road ending across from the Service Plaza on North Street. On October 3rd at 9:00 AM my husband and I followed a large gasoline tanker on Gore road, going toward the Turnpike. There was no room for an oncoming car – or truck. So I wondered “where could a gas tanker be coming from?” The only answer would be East Otis, where there are 2 gas stations. The truck could have used route 23 from there, so why take North Blandford Road (which is a mess) and Gore Road – unless the driver knew it was closer to the plaza. Or, as anyone who uses GPS knows – the GPS just chose that route. How many others will make that mistake? Will Gore Road become a “feeder” to the entrance? And can you make it safe for traffic? I doubt it.

That brings me to a second example: The intersection at North Street and route 23 is dangerous because one must make the turn uphill, or in winter, descend a treacherous slope. The town's Historical Society Building is on one side and the White Church, on the National Register of Historic Building is on the other side. How will the state deface the very essence of our town to modify this intersection for traffic?

We did not move here for convenience. What benefit could a Pike entrance bring us? To shop in Westfield, downtown, or at the Plazas on route 20, we would not use it. Exit 3 puts one on the North Side of Westfield. By the time you fight the traffic and congestion from one side of town to the other, you could have been there!

And how about the hospital? Again, routes 23 and 20 are closer and quicker than the circuitous route across town.

Frankly, an exit on route 20 in Russell or Westfield would better relieve the congestion at exit 3 because of all the University traffic. So what if it places 2 exits close in proximity? That's not unusual, but it will be needed as WSU expands, and should be planned.

Most people in Blandford would not mind some population growth. An exit here would not be an enticement. Be aware that much land here is owned by the state and city of Springfield (watershed). High speed Internet would be an incentive, especially for those who work at home.

Please consider saving the taxpayers' money and the character of our town. Look at where an exit is needed instead of mileage between exits.

*Sincerely,
Jeri Hamel*

T. Cousineau, Chester Road, Blandford

The gentleman said that there are three abandoned homes in the vicinity and three more on Chester Road and the owner can't sell them. He wants the towns to think to the future. A lot of residents are aging and it is important to attract young families. He loves Blandford and doesn't want to see it die. He wants someone to buy his home when he is ready to let it go. He would like to see the town prosper. Property values will go down if the town doesn't grow and taxes will go up. School enrollment is shrinking. He suggested that the town shouldn't be permitted to die because some people want a pristine thing. Blandford can control growth using bylaws. He suggested working with the planning agencies to avoid going bankrupt and having the town taken over by the state. He thinks Blandford can control its growth and encourage new residents as people need to move west for affordable housing. The Hilltowns can offer factory space, housing and access, and high tech industry could move to our communities. We have to take control and keep the good qualities of our towns while planning to grow.

Bruce Anderson

Mr. Anderson has lived in the area since 1966. He said that of Russell, Blandford, Otis, Chester, Becket and Huntington, two towns saw a decreased population and four had growth. Most have no major industries. No homes are going on the shores of any of the bodies of water. In the northwest corner of Westfield he counted 21 cargo freight warehouses. He counted more than 1,150 trailers and 310 trucking companies have permits in Westfield. These trucks are coming on to substandard roads. The Hilltowns need new bridges. He suggested a bumper sticker: everything is downhill from Blandford. Hilltown residents would like to keep it this way. Who wants this exit? Who asked for it? The town should have a vote.

Ann Crowley, Becket

Ms. Crowley used to live in New York State where her small town got built out. She was hit by the noise generated by increased traffic. She said the ¼ mile standard is not sufficient for looking at nearby residents. She is a voice of experience. People from Blandford are myopic. She has more than 70 signatures from local people in Becket who are opposed to an interchange due to traffic, poor quality of roads, and tax increases.

A study area resident

A speaker said he came not expecting to speak. The Hilltowns need economic development and many more people will be working from home. Things will change drastically. It's important to keep Hilltowns alive. Keep the area wildly scenic and do economic development.

Eric McVeigh, Blandford

Mr. McVeigh said that in 2014, Blandford passed a home rule petition saying the town wants to gain access to the Mass Pike. 2/3 of town voters asked for economic development and see an interchange as a way to achieve that. A simple majority still wants it; leadership has canvassed our town twice. The interchange dovetails with the issues Ms. LeClaire brought up. 1/3 of Blandford is owned by Springfield. Losing a tax base, the Town needs growth to manage crumbling infrastructure. Attendance is declining in the school district. The Town can't sustain a lot of the things that residents once took for granted. Mr. McVeigh grew up in Iowa – a few miles off a 4-lane highway. While change will be an effort for everyone, we keep looking to Ms. LeClaire and ways to foster development. We think Hilltown life is for everybody, and we can gain access and control the potential for growth.

Susanne Smiley – Girl Scouts of Central and Western MA

Ms. Smiley asked who has the decision making authority; will the study go to the Legislature? Ms. Gascon Bligh said the study requires no vote from Legislature, though it will be delivered. The study needs to be looked at on a regional level. Local communities and the regional MPOs would need to decide if the project should be moved forward, and then funding would need to be secured.

Rona Knight, Otis

The decision making process has been reversed. The state should have asked people in Hilltowns what they wanted before putting it on the Hilltowns. Her commute would be a half hour shorter, but she doesn't want to give up the beautiful, pristine and historic Hilltowns, including clean water, fresh air, and safety for our children. She is on the Planning Board in Otis and suggested there are other ways to get economic development into the towns (she gave an example of a Marijuana factory permitted in Otis).

A resident at 33 North Street, Blandford

The speaker moved to the Hilltowns, which are beautiful and quiet. She commutes to Wilbraham. She doesn't like the potential impact of an interchange. Her husband grew up on farm, it was then zoned industrial and after rezoning it failed. She asked what might happen to small farms around here.

Richard Halsey, Chester

The speaker wasn't born in Paradise but came to the Hilltowns when he was 32 and now he is a school superintendent. When he first came to the school there were more students – about 1,500 – now there are about 800 students. His heart tells him to protect paradise; his head tells him we need to be open to change. Any change requires a certain amount of adjustment. We already have things such as solar power and cell towers. The residents are advanced in age, and all towns need successive populations. There are good points on both sides, but he suggested that people should be open to thinking that a certain amount of sacrifice will benefit more people in the long term. He suggested celebrating leaders

who are trying to make good things happen with real control over what we do. He also suggested being friendly and open to newcomers.

Sarah Simpson, Blandford

Ms. Simpson abuts the turnpike but she still welcomes the exit. Service jobs can't telecommute. Hospital access is important. Some people say they are upset that they don't have a voice. She suggested that they join their local Conservation Commission, Planning Board, or Selectboard, participate and have a say in what goes on. She said it's easy to clap or grumble. Do the hard thing, control and save by getting involved.

Margo, Blandford

She is a kindergarten teacher and suggested that there should be a residence pass to get on the highway. There should be a way to get on and off the highway without all of this increased traffic. Ms. Gascon Bligh explained that the Federal Highway Administration does not allow that kind of permit.

Gloria Farrell, Russell Zoning Board Constable Library Trustee

Ms. Farrell has lived in the area for 38 years and raised three children here. She suggested Route 23 in Russell where it goes over the turnpike as an alternative. She said it is not congested, and there would be some land taking – which might help Blandford and Russell. Russell has 3 of 4 empty industries and it is close to the college. Blandford has locations and the land. She suggested reconsidering that location. She asked the audience if Blandford would go for that.

Tanya Hutchins, Blandford

Ms. Hutchins suggested that declining enrollment is due to people having fewer children, a trend across the nation. There are predictions the trend will last until 2028. She agrees that the communities have to find ways to develop the area, but she is not sure an interchange is the way.

Judy Slotnick, Becket

Ms. Slotnick said, paraphrasing Plato, that democracy is the lowest form of government but it works. She is proud to be part of the Hilltowns.

Public Attendees:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Janis Kelley | Brittany Yvonne |
| Richard Holzman | Robin Stevens |
| Colleen Doyle | Kim Berland |
| Francisca Heming | Adele Levine |
| Peter J Curro | Howard Lerner |
| Scott Lemme | Edna Wilander |
| Bonnie Lemme | Tracy Lyon |
| Paul Martin | Joan Martin |
| Laura Gregory | Gil Gregory |
| James Kelley | Jon Gould |

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Barb Boulay | Dan Boulay |
| John Fisher | Denise Fisher |
| Linda Benton | Will Freedberg |
| Sarah Freedberg | Joan Preson |
| Bob Gross | Rick Igel |
| Barbara Wacholder | Mike Spencer |
| Heather Anello | Robert Cheroach |
| Gordon Avery | Donna Avery |
| Bruce Cooley | Barbara Mandler |
| Jane Rohman | Phoebe Booth |
| Lucia Sullivan | Laura Marx |
| Meredyth Babcock | Chris Swindlehurst |
| Robert Maxant | Mary Turner |
| Peter Frien | Ann Krawet |
| Dick Hamel | Mary Kronholm |
| Harry Sanner | Bruce Anderson |
| Joan Anderson | Deborah Dion |
| Bea Goodman | Jon Elliot |
| Roberta Orsi | Eleanor Tillinghast |
| Henry Frey | Judy Slotwick |
| Elliot Slotwick | Ann Wendell |
| Jim Wendell | Peter Langmare |
| Bentley Garden | Larry Abrams |
| Opaljeanne Poteat | Stephen Poteat |
| Roma Knight | Michelle Knight |
| Joyce LaBonte | James Higby |
| Amanda LaBrecque | Dawn Schile |
| Noreen Williams | Gloria Farrell |
| Dave Donahue | Jeanne Donahue |
| Jeff [illegible] | Marjorie Wilke |
| Donald Moretz | Sarah Desilels |
| Ryan Benge | Tom Piper |
| Gina Piper | Jeanne Leclair |
| Bill Missimer | Jane Missimer |
| Susan Racine | Rich Paxson |
| Dave Pickhardt | Robert Cohen |
| Eve Queler | Allan Bilodeau |
| Sonja Hutchins | Mike Hutchins |
| Doris Jemiola | Jennifer Hamel |
| Justin Hamel | Sarah Simpson |
| Dlorah Calkins | Barbara Linden |
| Debbie Lundgren | Kerala Snyder |
| Richard Snyder | Jon Mikesh |
| Stephen Hart | Rudolph [illegible] |
| Douglas Emo | Joshua Garcia |
| Stephen Sullivan | Kathe Warden |

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| David Warden | Valerie George |
| Janet Burdick | Pamela Rideout |
| Summer Robbins | Liz Queler |
| Bill Holland Jr | Aaron LaBrecque |
| Nicole Sanford | Sandra Lortsher |
| Ted Cousineau | Kathy Murray |
| Pat Stoney | Jeff Stokowski |
| Aaron Poteat | Mary Brandt |
| Donald Brandt | Justin Kepacz |
| Shannon Kepacz | Ron Racine |
| Cathy Smelcer | Doug Smelcer |
| Hazel Holmer | Malcolm Richardson |
| Paula Bilodeau | Cynthia Carr |
| Linda Barnard | James Bolduc |
| Don Calkins | Rich Gallup |
| Clete Kus | Kevin Green |
| Chris Mikesh | Ted Ginsburg |
| Barbara Ginsburg | Barbara Glinizk |
| Randy Gilman | Richard Meczyon |
| Marjorie Meczyon | Janice Buss |
| Carl Buss | Rick Barnard |
| Kayla Brady | Suzan Bolduc |
| Theresa Mitas | Paul La Prise |
| Ruth La Prise | Louis Daviau |
| Patricia Daviau | Nicole Dawall |
| Anthony Flamio | Lloyd Martin |
| Mary Martin | Jeanne Morano |
| Julia Maynard | Logan Malyk |
| Carl Goodman | Margo Georgantas |
| Illyd Fernandez | Neil Toomey |
| Eileen Fitzgerald | June Feigenblatt |
| Stu Feigenblatt | Susan Dworkin |
| Beverly Bridges | Jane Winn |
| Stephen Hofer | Michael Delnero |
| Stephen Nelson | George Mengel |
| Jeri Hamel | Robert Twyman |
| Joan Anderson | Matt Gamelli |
| Keith Cortis | Carolee Perry |
| Thamas Ryan | Greg Girard |
| Jennifer Girard | Gary Roux |
| Margit Mikuski | William Mikuski |
| Barbara Langmore | David Chaffe |
| Russel Taylor | Mary Olesak |
| Amy Porter | Ann Jon |
| Craig Drenga | Krista Kraynick |
| Jerry Toomey | Bob Alarie |

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Linda Smith | Rita Furlong |
| Peter Langmore | |