
From: Janis Fox < >
Sent: Friday, July 01, 2016 9:42 PM
To: DOT Environmental Planning
Cc:
Subject: Saugatuck Bridge RSR
Attachments: DOT Letter.docx

July 1, 2016

Via Email

Mark W. Alexander
Transportation Assistant Planning Director
CTDOT, Bureau of Policy Planning
2800 Berlin Turnpike
New ingrown, CT 06131

RE: Rehabilitation Study Report
Bridge No. 01349
Issued June 2016
State Project No. 0158-212

Dear Mr. Alexander,

We are writing in response to the public meeting in Westport on June 15, 2016 at which the CTDOT presented its Rehabilitation Study Report (RSR) regarding the Saugatuck Bridge. During the meeting, numerous state and local officials and Westport citizens addressed the options stated in the RSR and virtually all of them were strongly opposed to the options proposed by the CTDOT. We support opposition to any modification of the bridge.

Our family has lived at Imperial Landing in Westport for 23 years. Our property abuts Bridge street and would be directly, materially and adversely affected by enlarging, raising, moving or replacing the bridge. Our immediate neighborhood and the surrounding neighborhoods bordered by Bridge Street, Greens Farm Road, Compo Road and Imperial Avenue would also be materially and adversely affected by the the CTDOT's proposed options. Enlargement of the bridge would likely require that the families living in the homes on properties that abut the bridge lose at least a portion of their property to the state via eminent domain. The noise levels in our quiet neighborhoods would be significantly increased due to the increased traffic traveling on those local roads feeding into the bridge. Traffic patterns would be materially altered. CTDOT's plan to modify the bridge would require many years of air and noise pollution from construction. All of these by-products of bridge modification would have a devastating effect on the surrounding communities and make enjoyment of our properties virtually impossible.

As for its alleged concern for "stakeholders' rights, CTDOT appears to be manufacturing additional "stakeholders" to justify its decision. Bicyclists and pleasure boat owners are not true or meaningful "stakeholders" in this matter simply because they ride their bicycles on the bridge or navigate their boats underneath it. CTDOT is absolutely wrong on this point. The true "stakeholders" are the property owners immediately abutting the bridge and in the surrounding neighborhoods. Recreational pursuits should hold absolutely no weight in this matter which so vitally impacts the health and well-being of the people who live in the neighborhoods surrounding the bridge and the community at large.

The CTDOT has not presented a compelling reason for enlarging the bridge to open it to large

commercial vehicles, such as 18-wheeler trucks, which would outweigh the clear and present harm to the health and safety of the neighborhood residents. While there are many new businesses that have sprung up in the Saugatuck area over the past five years, those businesses can be sufficiently served by commercial trucks via I-95 and Route 1. If there is a back-up on 95, vehicles often exit and attempt to take Greens Farm Road and Bridge Street to bypass the back-up and get to their destinations more quickly. However, this strategy does not work and an enlarged bridge would not aid traffic flow because when I-95 backs up and grinds to a crawl or stop, so does the traffic feeding onto the bridge from Greens Farm Road and Bridge Street. The same situation arises when traffic on the Post Road comes to a crawl or stop with the result being that traffic on Imperial Avenue and Riverside Drive, which both feed onto the bridge, are also similarly slowed or stopped. We know this to be true because we have observed traffic in our neighborhood for the past 23 years. The traffic congestion is not the result of the width of the bridge, it is a by-product of the huge numbers of cars traveling I-95 every day.

Due to its width, navigating the bridge requires care and attention by all drivers, and this care and attention benefits the surrounding neighborhoods. Drivers slowing down to navigate the bridge make a safer environment for the residents, especially the many school-age and younger children as well as the numerous elementary, middle and high school bus stops in the surrounding neighborhoods. Undoubtedly, the recognized need for drivers to slow down and pay attention when crossing the bridge has led to the very low incidence of automobile accidents on the bridge. We have not been detoured once in 23 years due to a vehicle accident occurring on the bridge. However, the CTDOT's proposed modifications will clearly result in higher vehicle speeds crossing the bridge in addition to increased traffic volumes. It is only a matter of time until drivers and the even more vulnerable pedestrian bridge users will suffer serious injuries or loss of life.

In addition to safety and enjoyment of property, Westporters recognize that the Saugatuck Bridge is an historic and special structure that is inextricably woven into the heart and soul of our town. The bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places. It was built in 1884 and is the last movable iron bridge in the United States. Over the past 130 years the residents of Westport have on multiple occasions banded together to preserve this part of our community's heritage and resist attempts by the State of Connecticut to do away with it. It is landmarks like this bridge that make Westport the unique place that it is.

Finally, the CTDOT must be required to provide justification for spending the projected \$19,000,000 to \$35,000,000 on modifications to the Saugatuck Bridge which the DOT acknowledges is safe and not in any way structurally deficient. There are doubtless many more pressing infrastructure problems in the state that could better use these funds. Considering that General Electric is leaving CT with it millions of tax dollars, wasting huge sums of taxpayer money on a satisfactorily functioning and structurally safe bridge borders on malfeasance. One can't help but wonder what self-interested parties may be lobbying the CTDOT to push the unnecessary modification of the Saugatuck Bridge forward.

CTDOT should be required to consider a broader set of values, principles and priorities than those addressed in the RSR. In doing so, we are convinced that the bridge should be preserved in

its current dimensions. Any minor and essential repairs should be made and the Saugatuck Bridge should not be enlarged, raised, moved or replaced.

Sincerely,

Eugene Fox III
Janis P. Fox

Whatever minor, truly essential repairs need to be made should of course be made, but the bridge should be preserved in its current dimensions – not enlarged, raised, moved or replaced

State Senator Toni Boucher pointed out at the June 15th meeting, Westport serves to prop up the economy of Connecticut as a whole (even more so in these economically trying times when a certain large corporation has just left for Massachusetts). We need a broader set of values, principles and priorities applied here than those in the RSR.