7
Products of Public Participation

The public participation component of this study was a cornerstone of the overall study process. Public involvement was initiated during the study's early stages with the formation of the Advisory Committee and was encouraged throughout the study through various outreach initiatives. The continuous involvement of the Advisory Committee, local municipalities and the general public, among others, provided the study team with intimate knowledge of the I-95 corridor, and helped identify specific deficiencies and develop solutions to address these deficiencies. In this capacity, public participation played an integral role in the development of the final corridor recommendations.

7.1 Outreach Program

The public outreach program developed for this study can essentially be divided into two components. One component of the program consisted of outreach to key transportation stakeholders in the southeast Connecticut region. The other component consisted of outreach to the general public. Input was solicited from both constituents at critical project milestones in the form of meetings, and throughout the study by way of the project website and toll-free hotline.

7.1.1 Key Stakeholders

A *stakeholder* in the region was defined for the purposes of this study as a representative from a municipality, government agency, business or other group with interest in the I-95 southeast corridor. The Advisory Committee (AC), which was established during the initial stages of the project and guided the study process, consisted of 30 such *stakeholders*.

Outreach to the key stakeholders was carried out in six AC meetings and 34 formal local outreach meetings. AC meetings were used as a forum for AC members to review and provide comments on technical documents and recommendations presented by the study team at critical decision points during the process. Local outreach meetings were used to solicit specific information from local municipalities and other key entities in the study area regarding existing deficiencies, current and future development plans and other critical issues along the I-95 corridor.

Several of the AC and local outreach meetings provided a hands-on opportunity for attendees to explore and develop potential improvement concepts together while arriving at a consensus for the most effective solution to an identified transportation-related problem. In addition, stakeholders at these meetings were encouraged to voice their opinions about which direction the study should take and about what issues should be emphasized. Such participation resulted in the comprehensive *Transit Service Enhancements Analysis* and the *Managed-Lane Feasibility Analysis* that are discussed in Chapter 5.

7.1.2 General Public

The daily lives and travel patterns of so many people who live in the southeast Connecticut region are affected by the operations of the I-95 corridor. For this reason, it was critical for the study team to develop a means of on-going communication with the general public so that the findings and recommendations of this study could be reviewed by the people who are most affected. Outreach to the general public was established and carried out in several capacities in an effort to maximize the availability of study information and provide an opportunity for people to share their insight and freely express their opinions on the subject.

A project website (http://www.i95southeastct.org) was established early in the study to serve as the primary means of communication between the study team and the general public. Content on the website was periodically updated throughout the study to provide current project information including schedules, meeting minutes, and report text and graphics. The website made it possible for the public to submit comments directly to the study team at any time. A toll-free hotline (800-236-0794) was also established allowing the public to conveniently obtain study information and provide comments. Calls were received throughout the course of the study giving callers an opportunity to communicate their concerns directly to key project personnel.

In addition to providing report information on the project website, report text and graphics were published in the corridor libraries at two critical milestones in the development of the study recommendations. The first publication introduced the existing and future transportation and environmental conditions analysis. The second, which was published in both the corridor libraries and town halls, made the *Draft Final Report* available for public review and comment prior to the finalization of the improvement recommendations.

Public information meetings were another important source of project information for the general public. In total, two rounds of meetings consisting of three meetings each were conducted to coincide with the completion of both the existing and future conditions analysis and the *Draft Final Report.* One public information meeting was conducted in each of the three geographic areas (the three main geographic areas of the corridor are defined in Section 5.3.3) during each round. These meetings were informal open-house meetings where the study team presented the preliminary findings and corridor recommendations and then solicited input from the public for consideration in the development of the final recommendations. The public was encouraged to discuss their concerns one-on-one with members of the study team as well as provide written comments on postage-paid comment forms available at these meetings.

The public information meetings were publicized extensively and well in advance to provide early notice to the public and encourage attendance. The first round of meetings was advertised in two major daily newspapers as well as locally on flyers posted at the corridor town halls. In response to mediocre attendance at the first round of meetings, publicity for the second round of meetings followed a much more aggressive advertising campaign. The meetings were advertised in 11 weekly shoreline papers in addition to two major daily newspapers. A Department of Transportation press release and direct contact with several reporters led to wide media coverage of the publication of the *Draft Final Report* and the subsequent public information meetings. A public access television program was also taped and aired along the corridor to publicize the meetings.

7.2 Sources of Feedback

As discussed briefly in the previous section, several readily-accessible means of contacting the study team and providing feedback were available to the general public. The majority of feedback was received during open discussion and one-on-one conversations with concerned citizens during public information meetings. The study team noted numerous concerns and suggestions during these discussions that ultimately influenced the final improvement recommendations.

In addition, dozens of comment forms made available at the public information meetings were returned to the study team. Each comment was reviewed and incorporated into the final recommendations where appropriate. Several letters and phone calls, as well as numerous website comments were also received and given consideration in the development of the study recommendations. Written comments received by the study team are included in the appendix of this report.

7.3 Public Recommendations and Concerns

The final improvement recommendations that were presented in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report are indicative of the success of the extensive public outreach program employed throughout the study. In working with key stakeholders and listening to feedback from the general public, the study team was able to incorporate numerous recommendations that were direct products of the public outreach program. Some of these recommendations, which range from basic signing improvements to complete interchange improvements, are highlighted below.

7.3.1 Long-Term Improvement Recommendations

Several key recommendations of the long-term improvement program presented in Section 5.4 of this report were products of the public participation process. The following examples illustrate the role that public involvement played in the development of these recommendations:

- **Exit 60, Madison** – This is an existing half-diamond interchange consisting of a northbound on-ramp and southbound off-ramp that provide partial access to Mungertown Road. The original long-term improvement concept at this location was limited to providing standard acceleration and deceleration lanes at the existing ramps. However, at the request of Guilford town officials, a series of local outreach meetings was scheduled with Madison town officials to discuss additional improvements at this interchange aimed at relieving congestion at Exit 59 in Guilford. The final recommendation at Exit 60,

which completes the existing interchange by providing a northbound off-ramp and southbound on-ramp at Wildwood Avenue, was developed in these meetings.

- **Exit 63, Clinton** – Numerous concepts were developed at this location to both eliminate the successive double left turning movements from the northbound off-ramp and improve traffic operations along Route 81. One recommendation, which caused minimal property impacts and required provisions for a cul-de-sac at the north end of North High Street, relocated the northbound off-ramp to directly intersect Route 81 opposite the northbound on-ramp. It was noted in a local outreach meeting with town officials that North High Street provides a critical bypass for local traffic around the heavily congested US Route 1 and Route 81 intersection. A cul-de-sac would consequently divert a significant volume of traffic through this intersection exacerbating the existing congestion. As a result of discussions at this meeting, the concept was abandoned in favor of the recommended improvement concept that maintains the North High Street connection to Route 81.

- **Exit 67, Old Saybrook** – This is an existing split interchange consisting of a northbound on-ramp and southbound off-ramp at Elm Street, and a northbound off-ramp and two southbound on-ramps at Route 154. The original improvement concept reconfigured the interchange at Route 154 to provide full access and maintained the existing ramp configuration at Elm Street. Based on a request from a town selectman, the study team developed a concept that provides a full-service interchange at Elm Street. The final recommendation provides a southbound on-ramp from Elm Street and a northbound off-ramp to Ingham Hill Road in addition to the existing ramps.

- **Exit 69, Old Saybrook** – The existing ramps to and from Route 9 at this interchange provide relatively low speed, indirect connections to I-95 hampering traffic flow and affecting operations within the interchange. To address these issues, the study team developed a concept to reconfigure the ramps and provide a high-speed, freeway-to-freeway interchange. However, this concept was subsequently rejected by town officials due to noise and aesthetic concerns associated with the recommended improvements.

- **Exits 71 and 72, Old Lyme/East Lyme** – The close proximity of these two interchanges is a safety concern in the I-95 corridor. Originally, the study team considered the closure of Exit 71 at Four Mile River Road to effectively eliminate these safety concerns. Subsequent local outreach meetings with the towns of Old Lyme and East Lyme revealed that this closure would be infeasible considering the restrictions it would impose on local emergency access and local truck access to an industrial development in this area. As a result, the final recommendation incorporates a reconfiguration of the two interchanges that both eliminates the major safety concerns and maintains full access at these locations.

- **Exit 73, East Lyme** – The initial recommendation called for the closure of this interchange in conjunction with the implementation of the long-term improvements. However, town officials rejected this recommendation indicating that, although this is one of the lowest volume interchanges in the I-95 corridor, it is vital to the future development plans of the town. As a result, the final recommendation maintains full access to Society Road despite site constraints that required the relocation of the northbound off-ramp.

- **Exits 81-82A, Waterford/New London** – Several local outreach meetings were conducted with officials from the Town of Waterford and the City of New London to gain a consensus for the final improvement recommendation in this area. The original concept developed by the study team, which focused on extending the existing frontage road system south (west) to meet Parkway North and South, evolved into a concept that all parties agreed would both provide the needed transportation-related improvements and maintain consistency with future development plans in Waterford and New London. As an example of this evolution, the notion of extending the south frontage road to Parkway South was abandoned in favor

of maintaining the existing Parkway South facility. This was done to accommodate the request of Waterford officials to avoid impacting an area marked for development.

7.3.2 Near-Term Improvement Recommendations

Several key recommendations of the near-term improvement program presented in Section 6.2 of this report were also products of the public participation process. The following examples illustrate the role that public involvement played in the development of these recommendations:

- **Exit 64, Westbrook** – In response to a one-on-one discussion with a citizen during a public information meeting, the near-term intersection improvement recommendation to signalize the ramp intersections with Route 145 was changed from a low priority to a high priority designation. The citizen identified a sightline restriction for traffic entering Route 145 that creates a safety concern at these intersections.
- **Exit 74, East Lyme** – The existing southbound on-ramp acceleration lane is deficient by approximately 1245 feet and was initially categorized a low priority improvement recommendation. However, during a local outreach meeting, East Lyme officials noted that existing operating conditions experienced at this location warrant immediate attention to improve both operations and safety. As a result, the near-term acceleration lane improvement recommendation was changed from a low priority to a high priority designation.
- **Exit 82, Waterford** – Although the recommended improvements at this interchange do not generally meet the criteria established by the study team for near-term improvement project candidates, the recommendations are included in the near-term improvement program as a result of public involvement. The immediate need to improve operations at the intersection of the northbound ramps and Route 85 by relocating the northbound ramps was identified during an AC meeting. Consequently, and despite the right-of-way and environmental impacts associated with the improvements, the near-term recommendation is designated a high priority. In addition, the study recommends a review of the existing signing in this area in response to concerns expressed by a citizen at a public information meeting that poor signing could be contributing to the existing intersection deficiencies.
- **Exit 89, Groton –** At a public information meeting held in May 2003, a concerned citizen requested the erection of a yield sign on the northbound on-ramp to replace a sign that had previously been damaged and removed. ConnDOT maintenance forces responded promptly to the request and implemented the first near-term improvement resulting from this study.
- **Exit 90, Stonington** – The existing southbound on-ramp acceleration lane is deficient by approximately 570 feet and was initially categorized a low priority improvement recommendation. However, during a local outreach meeting, Stonington officials noted that existing operating conditions experienced at this location warrant immediate attention to improve both operations and safety. As a result, the near-term acceleration lane improvement recommendation was changed from a low priority to a high priority designation.
- **Exits 92-93, North Stonington** – A review of the existing guide signage at these interchanges was included as a near-term recommendation based on feedback received from a concerned citizen at a public information meeting held in September 2004. This citizen noted that signing for southbound traffic from Rhode Island does not effectively direct traffic destined for Foxwoods Casino south along I-95 to Exit 92.

7.3.3 Common Concerns

As illustrated in the previous sections, many of the comments the study team received throughout the public participation process influenced the development of the near and long-term recommendations of this study. An additional number of comments also highlighted several common concerns among the general public that deserve particular attention and further clarification. A summary of these common concerns with additional explanation is provided below:

- **Exit 75 Northbound On-Ramp** – Geometric deficiencies in this area are creating an existing safety concern as indicated by a number of concerned citizens. In particular, the northbound on-ramp from US Route 1 is closely followed by a left exit to I-395. The short distance between these ramps requires motorists destined for I-395 who enter I-95 on the right from US Route 1 to immediately cross two lanes of northbound traffic to exit on the left to I-395. The abruptness of this weaving maneuver adversely affects through-traffic operations and creates a safety concern for the traveling public.

  Because this weave is eliminated under the planned Route 11 project, which for the purposes of this study is assumed to be in place prior to the implementation of the long-term improvement program, no long-term improvement recommendations were developed to address these identified deficiencies. However, in response to public comments, the study team assessed the near-term feasibility of closing the Exit 75 ramps to improve conditions along I-95 in this area.

  It is anticipated that under existing traffic conditions, closure of the Exit 75 northbound on-ramp from US Route 1 would redistribute approximately 350 vehicles to Exit 74 at Route 161 in the design hour. Another 50 vehicles would be redistributed to the Exit 80 northbound on-ramp from Gurley Road. The redistribution of 350 vehicles to the northbound on-ramp at Exit 74 would result in approximately 430 vehicles making a southbound left turn from Route 161 to the northbound on-ramp in the design hour.

  A signalized double left-turn lane would be required at this location to accommodate this increased traffic volume. Currently, Route 161 in the vicinity of Exit 74 consists of two northbound and two southbound travel lanes. The addition of two southbound turn lanes would require widening of Route 161 beneath the existing I-95 overpass. In order to provide sufficient lateral clearance for the widened roadway, this overpass would need to be lengthened a minimum of 22 feet. Because reconstruction of the existing structure would be necessary, this alternative does not meet the criteria for a near-term improvement project.

  Although closure of the Exit 75 northbound on-ramp is not a feasible option in the near-term, the geometric deficiencies and resulting operational and safety concerns at this location will be eliminated under the planned Route 11 project.

- **Noise Abatement** – The noise evaluation of the future build condition performed as part of this study was limited to identifying potential noise-sensitive areas. These areas are shown in Figure 5-2 (Sheets 1 to 124) and are generally defined as residential dwellings located within 300 feet of the widened roadway. During the preliminary design stages of the long-term improvement projects, Federal and State environmental documentation requirements under NEPA and CEPA will require the completion of a detailed noise analysis in any area identified as potentially noise-sensitive. This noise analysis will determine which areas meet the criteria for noise abatement measures to mitigate the potential noise level increases associated with the improvements. Several factors are considered in this determination

including proximity of a receptor to the highway, noise levels at the receptor, potential noise reduction at the receptor, and cost effectiveness of a barrier system.

- **Truck Traffic** – Upon implementation of the third travel lane, truck and bus traffic will generally be prohibited from utilizing the left lane. This will provide a consistent opportunity for passenger cars to pass heavy vehicles and will help alleviate the effects of variable truck speeds on traffic operations in rolling terrain and throughout the corridor.

- **Toll Collection** – Current Federal legislation does not permit states to collect tolls along interstate highways that are maintained with Federal funds. Therefore, the use of tolls to either fund potential improvements or help reduce traffic demand on I-95 is not a feasible alternative at this time without forfeiting Federal aid. It is possible that with the reauthorization of TEA-21, which at the time of this publication is pending approval in Congress, the restriction on interstate toll collection will be lifted. At such time, toll collection on I-95 could be a legitimate consideration for State officials.

- **Transit Enhancements** – ConnDOT is continually undertaking various transit initiatives to enhance and improve transit services in southeastern Connecticut and throughout the State. Recently, Amtrak introduced high-speed *ACELA Express* passenger rail service between Boston and Washington, D.C and the level of Amtrak inter-city train service in Connecticut has been increased by over 30%. In addition, Shore Line East (SLE) commuter rail service, Commuter Connection and Paratransit bus systems, and Rideshare opportunities represent a significant State transit funding investment and form a vital part of the regional transportation system. The State's transit funding for SLE alone represents approximately $6 million in operating subsidy per year, plus capital expenditures. In addition, a recent investment of $600,000 created 200 additional parking spaces at the Old Saybrook, Madison and Branford SLE stations.

  Currently, more than $30 million in transit improvements are programmed or planned for implementation in the southeast corridor. These projects include constructing 500 new parking spaces for SLE by 2006, as well as upgrading stations with high-level platforms. The Transportation Strategy Board (TSB) is also considering several new candidate transit projects in the southeast corridor that could include the purchase of additional rail cars for Shore Line East and buses for the Norwich-New London area. In addition, the TSB is sponsoring the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Government's (SCCOG) Intermodal Connections Study. The SCCOG study will seek to define the transit needs and opportunities for system revisions to guide regional and local transit development.

- **Wetland Mitigation** – The impacts to existing wetlands associated with the near and long-term improvement recommendations will total approximately 67 acres. In order to obtain wetland permits through the environmental regulatory agencies, the State will be required to mitigate these impacts by creating wetland areas to replace those lost during construction.

- **Schedule** – The long-term improvement plan presented in Chapter 6 reflects the relative amount of time required to complete the necessary steps leading up to the construction of the improvement recommendations, given the availability of adequate funds. These steps include environmental documentation, technical design, and environmental permitting. Considering the magnitude and complexity of the long-term improvement recommendations, it is unlikely that any long-term projects will be scheduled for completion before 2012.

- **Obsolete Improvements** – For the purposes of this study, improvement recommendations were developed to meet year 2025 traffic demands. The selection of this design year was based on federal design guidelines that recommend the design year for a project be set 20 years beyond the estimated time

of completion (ETC) of the project. With the anticipated ETC for this study being 2005, the design year was set at 2025. As individual long-term improvement projects move into preliminary design phases, the design year of each project will be updated to reflect the anticipated ETC of that project. The improvement recommendations will be revised accordingly to meet the projected traffic demands of the updated design year. This will ensure that these improvements will not become obsolete soon after construction.

7.4 Continued Involvement

Although this study specifically detailed the needs, impacts and costs associated with the implementation of both the near-term and long-term improvement recommendations, it is important to emphasize to the public the overall intent of this study. The final study report is intended to serve as a "road map" from which State and local officials and Department of Transportation personnel can make informed decisions regarding the future prioritization and programming of transportation improvements in the I-95 southeast corridor. It is not intended to be a set of construction plans from which to begin building improvements.

As such, there will be many opportunities for continued public involvement as the study recommendations progress into the preliminary and final stages of implementation. Public hearings and public information meetings will accompany the environmental permitting and technical design phases of all projects that result from the proposed recommendations. Much like the public outreach program was a cornerstone of this study and was instrumental in defining the I-95 southeast corridor improvement recommendations, it is anticipated that active public participation will play an instrumental role in the successful completion of these future projects.