Connecticut Department of Transportation
2800 Berlin Turnpike, P.O. Box 317546
Newington, CT 06111

Report of Meeting

STATE PROJECT NOs: 0079-0240 (Southbound Improvements) and 0079-0246 (Northbound Improvements)
DATE/TIME OF MEETING: July 7, 2022 at 7pm
LOCATION OF MEETING: Virtual Meeting
SUBJECT OF MEETING: Public Informational Meeting

IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Organization	Email
Sebastian Cannamela	CTDOT – Highway Design	Sebastian.Cannamela@ct.gov
Meredith Andrews	CTDOT – Highway Design	Meredith.Andrews@ct.gov
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Mike Dion	BL Companies	Mdion@blcompanies.com
Leah Moore	Terracon	Leah.moore@terracon.com
34 Attendees Via YouTube	Public	-
12 Attendees Via Teams	Public	-
10 Attendees Via Phone	Public	-

PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING FORMAT:

The project team presented the two proposed interchange improvement projects for I-91, I-691, and Route 15 in the cities of Meriden and Middletown (State Project No. 0079-0240 and 0079-0246) to the public and stakeholders on July 7th, 2022 at 7:00pm. This presentation is included with this report of meeting as an attachment. Attendees had the option of attending the meeting via YouTube, Microsoft Teams live streams, or by calling in and listening by phone.

Following the presentation, a live question and answer session was held. Members of the public and stakeholders submitted questions via email, phone, and through the MS Teams Live Event Q&A window. The project team and the Department addressed the comments and questions verbally or via Teams chat.

It was noted and reiterated throughout the live Q&A session that project information and plans can be found on the project websites, and that questions could also be sent by calling the phone number or email addresses listed below. Attendees were also encouraged to fill out a survey, and were notified that comments are welcome until July 21st, 2022.

Project	Southbound Improvements	Northbound Improvements
Websites	https://portal.ct.gov/DOTMeriden79-240	https://portal.ct.gov/DOTMeriden79-246
Emails	DOTProject79-240@ct.gov	DOTProject79-246@ct.gov
Phone	(860) 944-1111	
Survey	https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/8f49e1ad5d3946d083f71825ee49f67f	

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION:

The public and stakeholders submitted questions and comments via e-mail, telephone, and through the MS Teams Live Q&A window and these questions and comments were addressed verbally using the presentation slides and Google Earth as visual aids. The following are the questions and comments with their respective responses, organized into subject matter categories for ease of understanding.

Environmental / Construction:

Question from Anonymous: Will trees be removed on Route 15 SB to accommodate the new lane? Also, please elaborate on the retaining wall in that area, will it make the highway higher?

> Response: The proposed roadway widening is within the CTDOT's right of way. As necessitated by this widening, removing some of the trees may be considered, but no trees will be removed beyond the right of way. Regarding whether Route 15 SB profile will be raised higher, the intention is not to make any substantial changes to this alignment. There might be minor adjustments as the profile and super elevations for the roadway are adjusted, but no significant changes or increase in the overall vertical profile for the Route 15 corridor are proposed.

Question from Anonymous: Without trees, there is absolutely no buffer for the exhaust fumes. Will you do any study to measure the exhaust fumes impacting the homes along the highway with tree removal?

> Response: As the level of service improves and the traffic congestion is relieved on these highways, the air quality is anticipated to improve

Question from Hollis: Concerning wetland mitigation, can you give more detail on what is happening at the Wetland Mitigation Zone #2, especially for the wetland area within the loop ramp from East Main Street to I-91 NB? I've seen a great blue Heron there and wouldn't want anything to happen to it.

> Response: The proposed improvements will enhance that area. The project will create up to one acre of additional wetlands, adding some additional water courses through that area, and additional planting to enhance the habitat for various species. The project design will be coordinated with CTDEEP-Fisheries, NDDB, which is a national database, EPA, and other regulatory agencies.

Question from Anonymous: Will there be any temporary construction areas or material laydown areas utilized during construction that are outside of the permanent impact areas or DOT right of way? If so, will these areas involve removal of existing trees and will those disturbed areas be restored with landscaping after construction?

> Response: The requirements for temporary material laydown areas for construction will be identified by the contractor. As part of the design process, the design team will coordinate with the cities and CTDOT to confirm feasible staging and material lay down areas. Then the contractor will continue that coordination as part of the construction phase. We anticipate laydown areas to be within the CTDOT's right of way, outside of the regulated areas. Any disturbed areas will be restored to existing conditions.

Question from Anonymous: How do you define nighttime work and what hours will that be?

> Response: The contractor will be bound by limitations of operations. Typically, nighttime work is defined as from 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM. At 8:00 PM the contractor will be allowed to close one lane of I-91. At 10:00 PM the contractor will be allowed to close up to two lanes of I-91, but by 6:00 AM the contractor must have all lanes back open. That's typical lane closures, however for this corridor the contractor will likely be working from 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM for those full lane closures as noted.

Traffic / Highway:

Question from Anonymous: Please explain how there won't be additional congestion issues by adding a third lane on Route 15 SB and then returning to two lanes before the Miller Ave Bridge. If you expect an increase in traffic over the next 20 or 30 years and you were unable to expand the bridge due to the historic nature, will there not be future issues with merging lanes in that area?

> Response: Extensive traffic simulation models have been developed for this project for the current and future traffic conditions, and the design team is confident that the proposed number of lanes are adequate to meet the traffic needs. In general, the two-lane corridor for Route 15 meets the requirements for the future traffic volumes. The traffic congestion on these corridors stems primarily from the weaving and merging of traffic due to the large number of on/off ramps. On Route 15 SB, additional lanes north of Miller Ave. will allow safe merging of ramp and mainline traffic, and after the merge the existing two lanes are adequate to meet the traffic needs.

Question from Anonymous: Will the widening of the bridges and building of a new bridge make it easier for tractor trailers to use Route 15? They sneak through the southbound section to Wallingford all the time, which contributes to the noise and the fumes.

> Response: This project includes new signs throughout this corridor (overhead signs/side-mounted signs) that will make it clear that tractor trailers are restricted from Route 15. The current interchange configuration is complex and tractor trailers can accidentally get on Route 15. With the new configuration, that confusion will be reduced and they will stay on I-91. The new signing and the reduced complexity of the new configuration will minimize or eliminate tractor trailers that accidentally access Route 15.

Question from Anonymous: Will there be a new exit to Miller Ave or will that remain as the DOT exit?
Question from Anonymous: Will the exit for Miller Ave going southbound be changed?

> Response: The ramp connection of this exit from Route 15 NB will not be changed as part of this project. The exit to Miller Ave from Route 15 SB, which is primarily intended for the CTDOT's maintenance facility, is outside the project limit and will not be modified under these projects.

Question from Anonymous: Will the walking trail going along Route 15 SB between Miller Ave and Overlook Rd be safe to use once the highway is expanded? School children use this path, and it seems odd that the highway will be even closer to the path.
Question from Anonymous: What would be the impact on the wetland on the Prann Ct. area?

> Response: The improvements on Route 15 will not impact the walkway, and the roadway widening is primarily in the median. The highway will not be widened towards to the pedestrian path and will not have any negative impact.

Property Impacts:

Question from Peter: Will 119 David Dr in Meriden be involved with taking of land?
Question from Chris: Will I-691 west from North Wall Street to Broad Street be involved with taking of land?
Question from Helen: Will there be any impact to the end of Horseshoe Dr or the wooded area at the end of Horseshoe Dr?
Question from Brian: Will the DOT acquire any properties along I-91 NB from Murdock Ave to East Main Street?
Question from Anonymous: Will there be any property acquisition near East Main Street and Route 15 SB?
Question from Anonymous: What would be the impact on I-91 NB from Murdock Ave to East Main Street?
Question from Anonymous: I-91 from Murdock Ave bridge to East Main Street, will any properties be taken on the right-hand side of I-91 or not?

> Response: The property acquisitions are anticipated to be south of East Main Street. No other right of way acquisitions are planned along I-91 or Route 15.
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> 1. Property owned by Community Economic Development (965 East Main Street, Meriden, CT 06450). New ramp from Route 15 SB to I-91 SB, and associated new culverts and stream realignment, require partial acquisition (approx. 6,300 sq.ft.).

2. Wetland Mitigation Site #1 requires total acquisition of approximately 185,000 sq.ft. property owned by the City of Meriden, and partial acquisition of approximately. 19,200 sq.ft. of Mr. Andres F. Quintero's property (120 Barr Road, Meriden, CT 06450).

Question from Don Baur: The presentation stated there will be no adverse effects to the cemetery under the Connecticut Ancient Burial Ground law. The law prohibits any action to alienate or appropriate any ancient burial place. It appears the highway design will avoid taking any land from the cemetery, but I believe adverse impacts will go beyond the use of the land. Will adverse impacts to the cemetery go beyond the use of the land and cover impacts such as noise and safety?

Response: The design team is taking all steps possible to avoid any impacts to the cemetery as pointed out in the presentation. There will be no right of way impacts to the cemetery, and the congestion related noises are anticipated to be reduced. Currently, this segment of the corridor has one of the highest crash frequency locations in the State. Traffic flow is anticipated to improve significantly after the whole project is completed, resulting in a safer highway segment. Minimizing the crashes and associated traffic congestion and access of emergency vehicles to this location would also reduce traffic noise.

Traffic noise impacts are being studied as part of the project noise study. Based on the finding of that study, the design team will determine whether noise barrier at this location meets CTDOT's design criteria.

Schedule:

Question from Anonymous: What would be the duration of the project? Will the northbound and southbound projects be constructed simultaneously?
Question from Counselman Dan Brunet: Concerning the duration of the project, I have gotten a lot of complaints from the people about I-691. How would you phase construction? Is it going to be Northbound first and Southbound after that, or will both the projects be built simultaneously?

Response: The two projects are staggered by one year. The Northbound project (Project No. 0079-0246) is anticipated to go into construction following the notice to proceed (NTP) in Spring of 2024. The Southbound project (Project No. 0079-0240) is planned for NTP in Spring of 2025. The construction duration for both projects is anticipated to be four to five years, so there will be a period where both projects will be in construction at the same time.

Noise:

Question from Anonymous: For the I-691/I-91 expansion, eastbound Exit 10, will there be a sound wall barrier?
Question from Anonymous: Will sound barriers be constructed to reduce noise to the residents of Lori Lane?
Question from Chris: For I-691 West will there be sound barriers from North Wall Street to Broad Street?
Question from Anonymous: We've been told this study was being done for quite a while now. We would like to know exactly when it will be done and how to get the study.
Question from Cheryl: As a resident of Horseshoe Dr, I-691 is in my backyard. The noise level is so bad my house shakes, and walls are cracking. Can someone check the noise level there? Also, will there be a noise wall provided?
Question from Anonymous: Where were the noise readings for northbound taken?

Response: The noise study is currently underway and will determine if noise abatement is warranted. This noise study is being conducted as per the Federal Highway Administration Regulations 23 CFR 772 and the Department's Highway Traffic Noise Abatement Policy for Projects Funded by FHWA. Very comprehensive noise models have been developed for this noise study (with over 2,000 modeled locations, and the location, height and length will be based on the results of this noise study if warranted. The noise models are currently being analyzed to determine the noise reduction the barriers will provide. The noise study is still ongoing and the configuration of the proposed noise barriers. If any, has not been finalized yet.

The noise study is being done in three parts. The first one was for Project No. 0079-0245, the I-691 Eastbound to I-91 Northbound project, the second one for Project No. 0079-0246 (Northbound), and the third one for Project No. 0079-0240 (Southbound).

It is anticipated that the noise study will be completed in four to six months, and the proposed location of barriers, if any, will be finalized. If the study determines that a noise barrier is warranted, feasible, and reasonable, then a survey will be mailed out. The survey will collect public's views on the construction of the proposed barrier and will also allow for additional comments. The noise study will be available to the public upon request. The noise study may be requested through the project email in four to six months.

Question from Diane: Is it possible for sound barriers to be put in earlier than later as the noise level is quite loud already? I expect it will only get worse with the construction that's coming.
Question from Anonymous: Please verify if a sound barrier is approved then will it be installed during construction?

Response: The construction of noise barriers is included in the overall construction contract. The contractor might construct the noise barriers in advance of the other construction works, but there's no separate construction contract specifically for noise barriers.

Question from Anonymous: Will you measure the potential increase in noise? In 2020, many huge trees were removed along Route 15 SB, which already significantly increased the noise. Will that be considered?
Question from Anonymous: The noise level has increased significantly since trees were removed. Neighbors up the street hear the highway more than they did before the trees were removed.
Question from Chris: I hope this sound study takes into account that the noise level of I-691 EB and WB between North Wall Street and Broad Street significantly increased with the expansion of Yale Acres housing making our backyard useless.

Response: The noise study takes into account the existing noise levels before the project starts and the projected noise levels of the 2051 projected traffic. The proposed design will include noise barriers wherever FHWA and CTDOT criteria are met.

Question from Don: Are there standards or guidelines that define how the determination is made, whether noise abatement would be reasonable and feasible? What are the examples of the factors taken into account for this determination?

Response: The noise study is being conducted in accordance with Federal Highway Administration Regulations 23 CFR 772 and the Departments Highway Traffic Noise Abatement Policy for Projects Funded by FHWA.

In order to do the noise study, the design team first determines if there are any noise impacts. Traffic noise impacts occur when traffic noise levels for the design year build conditions approaches (within 1 dB(A)) or exceeds the noise abatement criteria in 23 CFR 772 or if the design year build conditions substantially exceed existing noise levels by 15 dB(A) or greater. The noise abatement criteria have different noise level thresholds defined for different land use categories.

If the barrier is found warranted, then it is assessed for feasibility. In order to be feasible, the barrier must provide a noise reduction of at least 5 dB(A) for a minimum of two-thirds of the impacted receptors. Additionally, feasibility assessment evaluates whether or not the barrier can be constructed. Factors considered include drainage, utilities, and maintenance. If the proposed barrier meets the feasibility requirements, then it is evaluated for reasonableness.
Reasonableness confirms cost effectiveness, the total cost of the proposed barrier is divided by the benefited receptors (i.e., the number of receptors that receive a minimum noise reduction of 5 dB(A)). CTDOT's noise abatement policy states that construction of a noise barrier is deemed reasonable if the request of the above equation is less than $55,000 per benefited receptor.

Question from Diane: Will the noise study be a 24-hour study or just a peak service study?

Response: Noise study does not use the "peak hour" and is based on the "loudest" hour for the noise study. The design team takes multiple field readings, and generally the loudest noise hour is when traffic is free flowing. Sometimes during peak hour, the traffic might be standstill and hence that will not be the loudest hour.

Question from Anonymous: Without trees, there is absolutely no buffer for the noise. Since the trees are in the DOT right of way, will the tree removal be considered for the sound study?

> Response: Per the Federal Highway Administration, trees are not an approved mitigation to noise. However, the Traffic Noise Model takes into account terrain and ground zones of existing conditions.

Question from Anonymous: Will there be a public comment period on the sound study? What will the future public comment opportunities be?
Question From Don: How does the public gain access to the sound studies and are they available for review during the public comment period?

> Response: There will be future comment opportunities if your neighborhood qualifies for a noise barrier. If noise barrier construction is warranted, feasible, and reasonable, then CTDOT will send out a survey via mail to your address. At that point you will be able to vote for or against the construction of the noise barrier. There will also be an open-ended comment section where you can provide your comments or concerns at that time and mail it back to CTDOT.

Question from Anonymous: Without a sound barrier in certain areas of the construction, home values will plummet. How will homeowners be compensated for this?

> Response: The Department adheres to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This is a screening process conducted by the Department and part of the intent is to eliminate any adverse effects to the public. The project is also a full FHWA oversight project. The purpose and need of this project is to reduce the congestion and improve safety. Therefore, based on the purpose and need and the requirements of the NEPA policy, the home values are not expected to plummet.

Question from Anonymous: The opportunity to comment (to the sound study), seems to be limited to property owners determined by the study to be subject to a possible barrier. What are the opportunities for other parties to comment? How does the sound study fit into the NEPA review since the sound effects will be essential to identifying project impacts and how they would be addressed?

> Response: The project follows both NEPA and FHWA policies. NEPA requires the comparison of proposed alternative with a baseline, such as the no-build in the design year, to determine whether traffic noise impacts will occur and if the proposed project itself creates a traffic noise impact. In contrast, FHWA noise regulation utilizes the opportunity provided by a proposed project to consider mitigating current, as well as future, noise problems.
>
> For the other part of your question, if there is another way that you can comment on the noise study, the best way to comment on the noise study other than the mailers would be to request the noise study and then submit your comments through email.

Question From Anonymous: How do you identify benefited receptors? Is it just property that abuts the area of construction, or do you include homes within the neighborhood?

> Response: A "receptor" is a representation of a specific location. An "impacted receptor" is a recipient that has a traffic noise impact as described in 23 CFR 772 and the Department's Noise Policy. A "benefited receptor" is any recipient that receives a noise reduction of at least five decibels from a proposed barrier.
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> To the question of "do we include a whole neighborhood?", yes, it would include the entire neighborhood as long as it's within the project limits and extends approximately 500 feet beyond. If the decibel readings indicating that houses are being affected by noise, then those limits are extended even further.

Question from Anonymous: Resident of Cartpath Dr., talking about I-91 SB. Recently, they laid conduits underground in our area, I would like to know if that would disqualify us from getting a noise barrier on I-91 SB?

> Response: The underground conduits carry cables are meant for IMS. These conduits will not disqualify your neighborhood from getting a noise barrier if it meets FHWA and CTDOT criteria.

Question from Cheryl (via phone, Teams, and email): I live at 18 Horseshoe Dr. Meriden; my house is the house that is on the side of the highway. I tried to get a sound barrier put up and was told they did not have money to put one up. The noise level is so bad that I cannot even hear my TV. My house shakes, I have cracks in my walls from tractor trailer trucks going by and throwing their jake brakes on because at the end of my street and the exit to East Main Street, 15 SB, and I-91 SB they put them on. The motorcycles that go by as well. When I purchased my house back in 1993, the traffic on I-691 was nothing compared to what it is now. I am so afraid of a tractor trailer truck going off of I-691 and ending up in my back yard or hitting my house. I'm hoping there will be a sound meter done to determine how much the noise level is where I live. I bought all the land from the State about 12 years ago, which is all the way down to the exit ramp. I own the left side of Horseshoe Dr. My house is the only house on my side of the street as well. I-691 is in my back yard and that is the truth. I am that close to the highway. Thank you for taking my comment seriously. I hope to hear from you soon. Please let me know if there is anything I need to do, like taking any surveys or if you need access to my land. My cell phone is (860) 919-6507 and my home phone is (203) 235-9676.

Response: The entire project area is included in the noise study (including Horseshoe Drive). A noise barrier will be proposed if it meets the FHWA and CTDOT criteria.

Structures:

Question from Don Baur: Does the retaining wall serve the same purpose as a sound barrier or are these different design features?

Response: Retaining walls and sound barriers are two different structures. Retaining walls are intended to minimize the impact of the roadway, minimize the embankment slopes, or minimize impacts to adjacent properties by containing the overall construction impacts. Noise barriers are generally precast concrete panels that are intended solely for mitigating the noise.

Question from Chris: What is meant by a flyover ramp regarding Route 15 SB to I-91 SB?

Response: The existing connection from Route 15 SB to I-91 SB is a single lane-left hand exit. This ramp will be replaced by a right-hand two-lane exit ramp that will meet the traffic needs as well as minimize some of the confusion that motorists experience as they approach this exit. A new Bridge No. 01819 will carry this ramp over Route 15 SB, as well the two-lane ramp from I-91 SB to Route 15 SB. This new bridge (#01819) will be the flyover ramp.

Question from Anonymous: What do you mean by "rehabilitate approximately 20 structures and several retaining walls"? What is a structure? What is a retaining wall?

Response: A "structure" means a bridge or a culvert. "Retaining walls" are essentially vertical walls that are used to support embankment and assist with roadway grading. As part of this project, there are several structures (culverts and bridges) that are aging, and some of these structures will be replaced with new structures or will be rehabilitated.

A new structure may be needed if the alignment is changing or the roadway is being widened, etc. The remaining structures (culverts and bridges) will be rehabilitated. Rehabilitation varies from simple painting and patchwork to extensive rehabilitation of structural steel and concrete; sometimes it may include substructures and even underpinning of the foundation. Thus, the rehabilitation can vary from very nominal improvements to comprehensive repairs. If the structure rates well and it's in good condition, then the improvements and rehabilitations are anticipated to be minor. In some cases where the structures are in poor shape, rehabilitations can include extensive concrete and steel repairs. This applies to both culverts and bridges.

Submitted by: *Jacob Gray* Date: July 22, 2022
Jacob Gray, PE | Civil Engineer – Parsons

Recommended by: *Sajjad Alam* Date: July 22, 2022
Sajjad Alam, PE | Project Manager - Parsons

Attachments: Presentation