



Meeting Notes

Date: Thursday, September 21, 2023
2:30 pm – 4:45 pm

Place: Branford Fire Headquarters
45 North Main Street
Branford, CT 06405

Re: CTDOT Project No.: 0175-1608
Route 146 Corridor Management Plan
Corridor Working Group Meeting #5

Project No.: 42441.08

ATTENDEES:

Corridor Working Group Members in Attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Rob Bell	CTDOT
David Elder	CTDOT
Bill Sigmund	CT DEEP
Janice Plaziak (remotely attended)	Town of Guilford Town Engineer
Allan Dodge	CTDOT
Brian Kent (Vice Chair for Sandy Fry Chair)	CT Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Board
Laura Francis (remotely attended)	SCRCOG
Barbara Rizzo	Branford Resident
Catherine Labadia	CT State Historic Preservation Office
John Hoefflerle	Town of Branford Town Engineer
Bob Yaro	Guilford Resident
Karyl Lee Hall	Route 146 and Route 77 Scenic Roads Advisory Committee
Anne Hartjen	Guilford Town Planner

Corridor Working Group Members Not Able to Attend:

Name	Affiliation
Rajat Mathur	CTDOT
David Rood	Branford Historical Society
Michael Calabrese	CTDOT
Harry Smith	Branford Town Planner

Other Attendees:

Name	Affiliation
Joe Balskus	VHB
Daniel Amstutz	VHB

NOTES:

- › Joe Balskus opened the meeting. Members introduced themselves. He went over the agenda, which included reviewing summer project work, upcoming public outreach, and discussing future strategies for the CMP.
- › Summer project work included data collection and field work, context-sensitive mapping, additional traffic data collection, stakeholder interviews, an online feedback map, and development of existing road sections diagrams. Daniel Amstutz went through this section:
 - Field work and context-sensitive mapping:
 - VHB located key features including guiderail, catch basins, culverts, signs, and crosswalks. Some data, such as guiderail and culverts, were already available through CTDOT GIS data. Field work was required to locate signage along the corridor.
 - Amstutz displayed a GIS map of the information for the group and explained how it can be mapped.
 - Additional Traffic data collection:
 - Additional traffic counts were collected in late August to capture summer traffic. Two additional locations were added to the previous count locations, at 710 Leetes Island Road in Branford (Medlyn Farms) and 444 Leetes Island Road in Guilford (the site of the November 2022 bicycle crash). Both locations had been cited by local police departments as areas with speeding problems.
 - The counts showed high traffic than previous counts done in February 2023, and closer to the counts done in July 2019. They were lower than the July counts, likely because they were done closer to the end of August.
 - The traffic speeds were similar to those collected in February. The speeds at the new locations should significant speeding, confirming the concerns from the police departments.
 - Stakeholder Interviews:
 - Eight stakeholder interviews were completed over the summer on various themes important to the CMP.
 - Amstutz summarized the comments from the stakeholders. There is a need to engage with Amtrak on their bridges. Bicycle/pedestrian safety concerns were voiced from most stakeholder groups. Several intersections rose to the top of concerns. Speeding is a common concern. Flooding was brought up often, and its use as an evacuation route is unavoidable but also raises issues when it itself is flooded. The paved shoulders and their maintenance was a concern of many. There are tensions between preserving the historic qualities of the road and addressing safety and flooding issues, as well as pressure of development.
 - Bob Yaro said raising the road under the railroad bridges should be an option to address flooding; just post a lower clearance. Don't want big trucks coming on the road anyway.
 - There was a brief discussion of the kinds of trucks on the road and their frequency. Moving trucks and construction trucks, also fire trucks may be impacted by lower clearances.
 - Online feedback map:
 - CTDOT developed an online feedback map and comment form over the summer to capture location-specific comments. The map was sent to stakeholder groups and the Working Group. Twenty comments were added,

mainly on the themes of bicycle/pedestrian access & safety, flooding, speeding, sightline issues, and intersection safety. The map could be used for feedback as part of the future strategies public survey as well.

- Existing road sections diagrams
 - As part of the scope of work, VHB will develop cross-sections showing existing road conditions at up to eight locations. The goal is to show constraints at critical corridor locations, including vegetation, slopes, walls, shoulder widths, approximate right-of-way, and other contextual roadside conditions. There will be four made per town. Locations were selected to show the diversity of conditions along the 13-mile corridor.
 - Amstutz displayed a diagram of Route 146 in Branford Center between John Street and Rogers Street. VHB is using Beyond Typical software, which allows the creation of 3D models of the road sections.
 - John Hoeffler asked if VHB could show the wider section to the east, closer to Cedar Street, which is an area of concern for pedestrian safety.
- › Upcoming Public Outreach:
 - The next Public Information meeting is planned to be on Thursday November 9 or Tuesday November 14 (confirmed). The Project Team will look into having it at the Guilford Community Center (confirmed).
 - The Working Group discussed the date, and notes that November 9 is right before the Veterans Day holiday. November 14 will be better. A suggestion was made to confirm with the First Selectmen of Branford and Guilford that they are available this evening.
 - A public survey will also be distributed this fall to present the potential strategies for the Corridor Management Plan to the public. The goal is to receive feedback on the strategies and see if there are ideas for other strategies we may have missed. It would be open in time for the public meeting and remain open through the end of the year.
- › Future Strategies:
 - Joe Balskus explained that strategies are general and not specific to locations to come up with solutions for issues that have come up during the existing conditions review. The strategies will be a way to approach future projects so they incorporate specific goals and considerations. They may involve addressing existing as well as future expected conditions. The overarching goal is to have strategies for preserving the corridor while enhancing safety. This is different from a corridor study, which is looking make improvements to address roadway deficiencies.
 - Balskus noted many of these should mesh with the priorities shared by Yaro.
 - The initial potential list of strategy themes include:
 - Stormwater & Sea Level Rise Management
 - Bicycle/Pedestrian Access & Safety
 - Speed Management
 - Roadside Safety
 - Railroad Bridges
 - Intersection Safety
 - Maintenance

- Working Group members noted that a strategy theme should include other bridges and culverts/structures, not just railroad bridges.
- Members asked, what about historic preservation & environmental protection & remediation as a strategy?
- › Balskus went over each strategy theme and the specific strategies underneath them.
- › Stormwater & Sea Level Rise Management:
 - This covers three main issues: drainage, flooding, and sea level rise.
 - It is important to separate out management of existing flooding vs. additional impacts from sea level rise.
 - Need to review the tolerable flooding occurrences (“nuisance” flooding) vs. intolerable flooding.
 - Different situations would call for different approaches; it’s important to identify the likely causes of flooding at each location of concern, and identify the site constraints, that will have an impact on how it is dealt with.
 - The potential strategies for addressing flooding are:
 - Review flooding area locations for site-specific context
 - Raise road sections or bridge over frequent flooding areas
 - Pumping stations
 - Find ways to get around the flooding – such as better north/south access to Route 1 (both for evacuation and re-routing)
 - Retreat from road or cut off road to through traffic in certain areas where flooding is a continuous problem and expected to become worse
 - Working Group members discussed this strategy theme and the specific future strategies.
 - CWG members suggested calling the theme simply “water” or water impacts to encompass flooding and sea level rise.
 - Karyl Lee Hall asked about the effects of flooding on ecology due to stormwater and sea level rise, if this should be discussed. Rob Bell noted that there are many possible impacts to be considered: marsh migration, community infrastructure being affected like wells, homes, and businesses. Yaro added that flooding will also erode the roadbed.
 - Cathy Labadia said she was trying to understand the strategies – what is the problem, and how will the strategy address it?
 - Bell noted it needs to be clear that some things can be done within the corridor while other things must be done outside the corridor. Zoning/land use is outside the scope of what CTDOT can do. Yaro said he believes the Towns should enact a historic preservation zoning overlay district for route 146 to protect the scenic vistas and other qualities. He has talked to First Selectman Matt Hoey about this. The Plan can suggest these things to give guidance and support to the Towns.
 - Brian Kent said the qualities of the road are not just about engineering, and the plan should reflect this. The visual aesthetic quality is what needs to be preserved. This also takes into account the historic qualities. The plan should describe these.

- Labadia noted the considerations about the intrinsic qualities are part of the goals, not strategies in themselves. Need to elevate these goals to all the strategies.
 - Bell clarified that these strategies are about how we approach projects. It's not going to mention solutions to specific locations in the CMP. It will have representative ideas that would apply to general locations, and these would get addressed in harmony with the goals of the plan.
 - Yaro suggested that some "earlier action projects" to show progress towards addressing issues could help foster support in the communities. But we can also acknowledge that some things need to be reviewed at a later time. The strategies should embody the kinds of things that could be advanced to projects. He expects the outcomes of the plan will include policies around the preservation of the Route 146 corridor.
 - Balskus noted that this isn't a corridor study, but we could add things that are similar elements to this kind of study.
- › Bicycle/Pedestrian Access & Safety:
- Along the corridor there are a variety of land uses and different demands for bicycle and pedestrian access. Different parts of the road will call for different strategies. Town greens and other built-up areas will have different needs than low-density areas. Important to identify specific issues and contextual elements at areas of concern, and identify constraints at these areas.
 - The potential strategies for addressing bicycle/pedestrian access and safety are:
 - Improve pavement/shoulder space available along the road to provide space for biking and walking, especially constrained areas
 - Improve overall access for bicyclists and pedestrians
 - Review connectivity along the road for walking and biking
 - Slow speed of automobiles to improve safety (covered mainly under Speed Management section)
 - Review alternative routes for bicyclists and pedestrians in the most constrained sections for access
 - Balskus noted that the main goal of this theme is for safety & connectivity for the future.
 - Working Group members discussed this strategy theme and the specific future strategies for bicyclists and pedestrians.
 - Hall asked for an explanation about what comes next after the CMP is done. Bell noted that the plan feeds into existing processes. It could also be used to apply for grant programs, another corridor study through the COG, maybe for a smaller area, and help the Towns plan for improvements and development. Balskus said it could be thought of as similar to a POCD.
 - Bell noted it is also a framework for DOT in early project planning so improvements are made in harmony with the plan.
- › Speed Management:
- The Office of the State Traffic Administration (OSTA) has authority over setting speed limits in the state. It is important to understand their process for setting speed limits in discussing speed management. In general, it follows these steps:
 - The Local Traffic Authority (LTA) – usually the local police department – requests revisions to the speed limit.

- OSTA conducts an investigation and makes a recommendation on the speed limit.
- The LTA can agree or disagree with the recommendation. OSTA produces a Traffic Investigation Report (TIR) that explains the process and the final recommendations.
- It should be noted that the OSTA process is being updated to also look at contextual and land use elements for setting a target speed for roads. Traffic calming devices are also being tested on state roads, such as raised crosswalks.
- New legislation at the state level allows automated speed enforcement in some instances.
- The potential strategies for speed management are:
 - Work with the LTA on speed limit revisions to submit to OSTA
 - Review applicability of automated speed enforcement
 - Review applicability of traffic calming devices for locations of concern
- Working Group members discussed this strategy theme for speed management.
 - Yaro asked if there can be a menu of techniques/options for this theme. David Elder noted that it is helpful to have this strategy for highway designers to give the DOT more flexibility. Need to help DOT step outside the box to deal with things like speed management and flooding.
 - Ricoszi added that the plan will also be something for the Planning & Zoning commission to look to.
 - Kent suggested classifying the corridor into similar types, where different elements can be repeatable in different places.
 - Labadia noted it is critical to identify what we are preserving. Then come up with strategies on how to preserve it.
 - Balskus said the next step of the project would be to start making real improvements.
 - Hall noted how the plan could help revitalize the scenic roads committee in Branford and Guilford.
- › Roadside Safety:
 - Balskus explained that this section includes guiderail, but is not just about this element. The primary issue is to prevent vehicles from running off the roadway. Much of the existing barrier protection along Route 146 does not meet current safety standards and would not stand up to a crash. An example of the wood post and wire guiderail along the road was shown to display this.
 - Local weather conditions with salty and damp air degrade and weaken wooden materials quickly, meaning that something like the Merritt Parkway guiderail is not a good type of guiderail for a coastal road like Route 146. Bell also noted that, besides maintenance issues, the Merritt Parkway guiderail is made only for that roadway, and there is the problem of federal reimbursement to the state for the guiderail. There is a special exception just for the Parkway guiderail. It increases liability to DOT if they do not use “normal” or approved barriers. Using approved barriers is meant to protect the public.
 - If a local municipality wanted to install the Merritt Parkway guiderail, they would have to install and maintain it at their own expense.

- The main strategy for roadside safety is to review barrier protection options. Alternative types of guiderail for scenic roads allowed by CTDOT includes:
 - Box beam rail. It is used widely by New York State DOT, and CTDOT has done some recent installations. The main issue is that it is constrained by site conditions. More aesthetically pleasing than traditional beam rail.
 - Cable guiderail with steel posts. It could potentially be used on Route 146 if there is available right-of-way for 12' deflection. It is also more expensive to maintain.
 - Other alternatives may be available in the future.
- Working Group members discussed this strategy theme of roadside safety.
 - In response to a question, Ricozzi explained that travel speeds and roadway design speeds are not the same thing.
 - Yaro asked if traffic calming made a difference. If you slow speeds down, does that affect the options for guiderail? Balskus said no, speeds are not a factor in provision of guiderail. Reviewing the options is a good first step. He noted a similar situation at Lake Waramaug in western Connecticut, where the community did not want the "W" rail (metal beam rail) and box beam rail was installed instead.
 - Labadia said she gets calls from people all the time about getting Merritt Parkway guiderail in their community, and she always has to say no. Another option could be to develop your own guiderail standard.
 - The plan can include a statement that metal beam rail is not acceptable for the roadway. Janice Plaziak noted that having this information about guiderail in a plan will help with talking to DOT about these issues. Labadia agreed that it is really important to have this, otherwise CTDOT Maintenance does what they want. The goal is to evaluate other options because they meet the goals and metal beam rail does not. Anne Hartjen suggested looking at what other states have done, or design our own.
 - Balskus responded to a question about providing a list of guiderail options by noting VHB can share what is known now. Bell said there can be a menu of known options plus "etc." for things that may be developed in the future.
 - Elder explained that CTDOT is now evaluating scenic roads for box beam installations and planning to do mainly this treatment on scenic roads.
 - Yaro said we still need to lower speeds whatever the guiderail choice is.
- › Railroad bridges:
 - There are limited options for addressing the constrained vertical and horizontal clearances at these bridges/underpasses in the near term. The stormwater & sea level rise strategies will also be relevant here in looking at how to address flooding at these bridges.
 - The primary potential strategy for these is to work with Amtrak on long-term improvements to the bridge structures.
 - Working Group members discussed the railroad bridges strategy.
 - It was again noted to break out other bridges and culverts here, and not focus solely on the railroad bridges.
 - Amstutz suggested a strategy to evaluate bridge life, when they need to be replaced, integrity, etc., so the information can inform when they may need replacement.
 - Yaro again suggested raising the road under the bridges for flooding issues and post new height restrictions.

- Bill Sigmund discussed the complications of raising the road under the bridges. Whenever the bridge needs to be replaced, the railroad would likely come back with a similar design to what is there now, so we would need to work with them on that. In addition, raising the road changes the floodplain and flooding characteristics because you would be adding fill to raise it.
- Plaziak noted that several culverts along the road are failing and are hydrologically unfit. We need to identify a strategy for these. These locations flood as well and have lack of clearance above them for paved shoulder or sidewalks. This includes the crabbing bridge, which is technically a culvert.
- › Intersection Safety:
 - For this strategy area, CTDOT traffic would need to be involved. Issues to identify with intersections include pedestrian or bike crossings, sightlines, and speed. There may be some crossover with Speed Management.
 - The potential strategy would be to review intersection sightlines, crossing distances, origins and destinations of bicycle/pedestrian travel at key intersections, and other factors. This would get into more of a corridor-study-like review.
- › Maintenance Enhancements:
 - Currently, CTDOT Maintenance does mowing along the roadway twice a year. They cannot conduct invasive plant management under their permit from DEEP for general maintenance. However, larger projects could involve invasive plant management.
 - The potential strategies for maintenance are:
 - Establish right-of-way boundary lines for the corridor to determine the extent of CTDOT property for maintenance and other potential projects
 - Review potential for maintenance enhancements for mowing, plant management, sweeping shoulders, and other potential projects
 - Working Group members discussed the maintenance enhancements strategies.
 - Bell noted that a special project was done this past spring in conjunction with Sybil Creek Bridge project, west of restaurants on route 146. It was part of the mitigation for the project's environmental impacts.
 - In response to a question, Elder explained that the general permit they have for maintenance of the road only allows mowing and is limited by available equipment.
 - Sigmund explained that mitigation at DEEP is evolving. They are working on how to better interface with DOT. Mitigation depends on the type of impact. Invasive plant management is a strategy for mitigation. Also, mitigation differs between Army Corps of Engineers and DEEP. It must be directly related to project and proponent to get a real outcome. They are trying to add more flexibility with the mitigation.
 - Need to measure mitigation against the intrinsic qualities and preservation. Labadia noted that these themes should run through all the strategies.
 - Hall noted that mitigation/maintenance should be not just for DOT – but for others as well.
 - Plaziak said the CMP should talk about vegetation control. It would be something the Planning & Zoning Commission could point to, or the land trust could use to get a grant. It would be a good tool for these organizations.

- Yaro said this should not be just a road maintenance strategy, but should include other environmental protections, like protection of the scenic qualities and vistas.
 - Yaro also referred to the ideas and priorities he sent around in the summer, which includes traffic calming and preserving historic design details. He said the road should not be widened except in extreme circumstances. Area outside the ROW is important too; what can the towns do? He referred to early action projects as well.
 - Bell noted that development controls are under local jurisdiction. They want to be careful about this in the CMP; towns need to process this for themselves. Also they don't want to have cookie-cutter approach to the whole road, as it depends on context.
 - Bell also noted that CTDOT has to show how they are accommodating bicyclists and pedestrians in new projects, which may include changes to pavement for accommodations. Hall said the basis of the project was to not expand the road pavement because that is part of historic character and historic district. Bell said they can focus on areas that are not constrained by other issues, and also fall back to the strategy on re-routing bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Hoefflerle suggested having a "things we discourage" section – such as excessive signage, metal beam rail, etc.
 - Yaro said that the Shoreline Greenway Trail was the impetus for this, the plan needs to recognize that. To accommodate people biking and walking we need to calm traffic.
 - Kent noted that in some places the vegetation has been significantly cut back, more than just sweeping. Baskus said it was likely from the mill & overlay they are doing on Route 146 in Guilford this fall. Plan should mention this resurfacing as well.
 - The Working Group briefly discussed travel lane widths. CTDOT is defaulting to 11' lanes when restriping for all projects.
 - Should add protection of trees along the roadway to the strategies as well.
- › Next steps:
- The public information meeting is confirmed for Tuesday, November 14 at the Guilford Community Center.
 - The Working Group should meet before the public meeting. The Working Group decided to meet on October 10 to go over the revised strategies as consolidated through this process. This will be a virtual meeting.
- › The meeting adjourned at 4:45 pm.