



CITY OF CONCORD

New Hampshire's Main Street™

MINUTES

Transportation Policy Advisory Committee

March 22, 2018, 6:00 PM
2nd Floor Conference Room
City Hall, 41 Green Street, Concord, NH

Members Present:

Dick Lemieux (Vehicle Traffic Safety Operations; Chair)
Brent Todd (Council Representative)
Sheila Zakre (At-Large)
Craig Tufts, (Bicycling Community)
Rob Mack, Traffic Engineer (City Manager's Designee)

Members Absent:

Jim Sudak (Public Transportation Representative)
Rob Werner (Council Representative)
Ursula Maldonado (Pedestrian and Trails Community)

Staff and Guests:

Rebecca McWilliams
Greg Bakos

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the February 22, 2018 meeting were approved as submitted (Motion-Todd; Second-Tufts; Unanimous).

3. Public Comment - None

4. Presentations - None

5. New Business - None

6. Old Business

a. Continued Discussion of NHDOT's I-93 Bow-Concord Project

Attendees spent considerable time discussing the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative for the Exit 14-15 area. Also discussed were findings and recommendations of previous studies since 2001 related to the I-93 corridor downtown, including: Concord 20/20 Vision; Opportunity Corridor Master Plan;

the City's Master Plan 2030, including Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans; the City's Comprehensive Transportation Policy and the Merrimack River Greenway Trail Feasibility Study. Attendees expressed strong concern that the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative lacked a number of key goals for the downtown area previously envisioned in prior studies, including: downtown access to the river, a pedestrian bridge over the freeway; a multi-modal center; realignment of railroad tracks to optimize land redevelopment potential; and improved east-west access across the freeway for bicycles and pedestrians. Of greater concern was that the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative might even preclude future feasibility of a number of these goals. It was felt that there was insufficient public-review opportunity available during development of the current NHDOT Preferred Alternative as opposed to the numerous opportunities made available for former studies of the I-93 corridor, particularly the NHDOT's 2008 study which noted a preference for different corridor improvements for the downtown area based on City and public input. Attendees concurred that it was very important to communicate these concerns to NHDOT before the environmental review process was completed later this spring.

An initial draft document was included in agenda materials transmitted to TPAC members prior to the meeting. Attendees devoted considerable time to revising and finalizing the document which was crafted to be an advisory consent report for City Council. The final draft report is reproduced below.

FROM: Transportation Policy Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Comments on NHDOT I-93 Bow-Concord Preferred Alternative (I-93 widening)

RECOMMENDATION: Accept this report and take appropriate action as determined by Council.

BACKGROUND: The City of Concord has, over the past two decades, envisioned goals and objectives for the I-93 corridor through the downtown area. The NHDOT presented its Preferred Alternative for the I-93 Bow-Concord Project at public information meetings in February 2018. At its February 22 and March 22, 2018 meetings, TPAC reviewed NHDOT's Preferred Alternative for the I-93 Bow-Concord project, which entails widening Interstate 93 and reconfiguring several interchanges through Concord.

DISCUSSION:

TPAC believes the point of no return for incorporating Concord's goals and objectives is fast approaching. TPAC understands that NHDOT will be closing their comment period at the end of this spring. In light of the fast-approaching deadline, TPAC compared this alternative with the goals, objectives and aspirations from these former documents:

- ***Concord Opportunity Corridor Master Plan (2005)***
- ***20/20 Vision for Concord, NH (2001)***
- ***Comprehensive Transportation Policy (2015)***
- ***Concord's New Front Door (2013)***
- ***Master Plan 2030 (2008)***
- ***Bicycle Master Plan (2010)***
- ***Pedestrian Master Plan (2017)***
- ***Merrimack River Greenway Trail Feasibility Study (2010)***

All of these plans, reports and studies were developed transparently with extensive public input. They express certain strategic goals, dreams and aspirations of the Concord community for the Opportunity Corridor. Each of these reports identify the I-93 Bow-Concord project as a critical opportunity for the City to achieve its long term goals and objectives.

The chart below contrasts the common elements from the previously-issued reports with NHDOT's Preferred Alternative.

Common Elements	NHDOT's Preferred Alternative
Moving the highway to the west.	Not included. Permanently maintains a barrier to river access.
Lowering I-93 between Exits 14 and 15.	Not included. Permanently maintains a barrier to the river.
Enhancing river access.	Not provided. It is unclear how or if enhanced river access could be added.
Opening up opportunities for recreation trails and paths both to and along the river's edge.	Not provided. It is unclear how or if such opportunities could be added.
Realigning railroad tracks	Not included. Limited options for re-aligning railroad tracks to expand developable land.
Incorporating inviting gateways and new places of public focus—riverfront plazas and parks	Not included. Insufficient public discussion on options.
Placing Loudon Road over I-93 and the rail corridor	Not included. Limits railroad realignment options
Building a new local street over I-93, connecting the Opportunity Corridor with the Fort Eddy Plaza	Not included; it is unclear if a new connection could be added
Building pedestrian scaled/livable development that is well integrated into downtown	Not included; draft alternative limits options
Improving the appearance of Concord from the highway	Not included
Improved east-west bicycle and pedestrian access	Insufficient improvement; limited future options
Pedestrian bridge over I-93 and the Merrimack River	Not included

TPAC also compared the Preferred Alternative with the "Summary/Classification Report, Bow-Concord Interstate 93 Transportation Planning Study." The options in the two columns below were extracted from the Opportunity Corridor Master Plan and evaluated by the NHDOT in 2008. The third column shows the NHDOT Preferred Alternative. The chart shows that the Preferred Alternative more-closely resembles 'Option 1 Lite' which was determined to be unreasonable in the 2008 screening process.

Project Elements	Opportunity Corridor concept, Option 1	Opportunity Corridor concept, Option 5 Option 1 Lite	Preferred Alternative
Six Lanes on I-93	✓	✓	✓
Westerly Shift of I-93	✓	✗	✗
Lower I-93 b/w Exits 13 & 15	✓	✗	✗
Reconfigure Exits 14 & 15	✓	✓	✓
Upgrade Exit 12	✓	✓	✓
Upgrade I-93/I-89 Interchange and Exit 1 on I-89	✓	✓	✓
Maintain Rail Corridor	✓	✓	✓

Extend Storrs Street	✓	✓	✓
Local connection over I-93	✓	✓	X
Multi-modal center	✓	X	X
Enhanced pedestrian & bicycle connections	✓	✓	TBD
Enhanced river access	✓	X	X
Finding	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Preferred Alternative similar to option previously found to be unreasonable

While it will be several years before construction begins, the NHDOT will be concluding the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process soon. When the NEPA phase is completed and a final alternative has been selected, it will be difficult to impossible to make significant changes to the design.

The Bow-Concord project will be transformational, possibly more so than even the Main Street Complete Streets Project. The Main Street Project was advanced thoughtfully and transparently, with extensive opportunities for public input. The community conversation around the Main Street project was a critical component to its success.

There have been only two public information meetings regarding the Bow-Concord Project. TPAC believes this has not enabled the level of discussion and scrutiny required for such a complex and potentially transformative project, particularly in light of how the preferred alternative inexplicably differs so drastically from options discussed in 2008.

TPAC believes the NHDOT's Preferred Alternative falls short in critical areas and that it would be a disservice to Concord residents to not take full advantage of the I-93 Bow-Concord project in achieving the expressed aspirations of the Concord community.

The NHDOT could have done—and could still do—a much better job of meeting Concord's aspirations, while at the same time making needed structural, capacity and safety improvements to I-93.

TPAC believes the City Council should be mindful of the NHDOT's schedule and suggests that Council could direct staff to complete TPAC's review of the Preferred Alternative in light of Council's previously-adopted reports. TPAC believes the City's interests should be brought back to the table before environmental review and final design preclude them.

TPAC stands ready to assist and advise Council and awaits Council's instructions.

TPAC approved the above draft report for April 9, 2018 submission to City Council as a consent report, with allowance for minor grammatical and formatting edits as might be deemed appropriate by staff in finalizing the formal document for submission to Council (Motion-Zakre; Second-Tufts; Unanimous).

7. Consent Reports

a. Acceptance of Subcommittee Minutes

Not discussed.

8. City Council Meeting Update

Not discussed.

