



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Project Advisory Committee Meeting #6

**Brattleboro Municipal Center
230 Main Street
Brattleboro, NH**

MINUTES

November 27, 2018

Project Advisory Committee: Peter Elwell (Chair), *Town Manager, Town of Brattleboro, VT*; Michael Abbott, *Representative, New Hampshire State Legislature*; Steve Diorio, *Selectman, Town of Hinsdale*; Sue Fillion, *Planning Director, Town of Brattleboro, VT*; John Gomarolo, *Member/Resident, Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) Transportation Advisory Committee/Town of Winchester, NH*; Bob Harcke, *President, Hinsdale Commercial and Industrial Development Commission*; Kathryn Lynch, *Community Development Coordinator, Town of Hinsdale*; Fred Moriarty, *Board of Trustees Treasurer, Brattleboro Museum and Art Center*; Ed Smith, *Member/Resident, SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee/Town of Hinsdale, NH*

Project Advisory Committee Lead Team: Chris Campany, *WRC*; J. B. Mack, *SWRPC*; Henry Underwood, *SWRPC*; Trent Zanes, *NHDOT*

I. Approval of Minutes of December 18, 2017 Meeting

Chair Elwell called the meeting to order at 10:45 a.m. and welcomed attendees.

The minutes of December 18, 2017 were approved by unanimous vote.

II. General Project Updates

Trent Zanes provided an update on the status of the Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project. He said that following the most recent public hearing (January 18, 2018), NHDOT has conducted work related to slopes and drainage, and to develop the plans to “about 60%” of the project. He said they were also coordinating utility relocations and that Vermont was working on acquiring rights of way for the project.

He said that NHDOT had applied for a 2018 BUILD Discretionary Grant for the project. He said the application, which was submitted in July of 2018, requested \$25 million from the United States Department of Transportation and that they expect to hear in December of 2018 or January of 2019 as to whether the application was successful. A portion of the funding requested through the application would be directed to rehabilitation of the existing bridges.

Trent Zanes updated attendees that NHDOT would create a separate project for rehabilitation of the existing bridges and that the approximate advertisement date would be approximately six months prior to the end of the new bridge’s construction. A specific project number was not currently available. With

respect to the rehabilitation of the existing bridges, he said NHDOT would request input relative to hand rails, lighting, gates, trail width, surface and bollards, among other things. Finally, he noted that photos from an aerial drone were now available.

Ed Smith asked how much funding would be available for rehabilitation of the existing bridges and if the project would require a separate environmental assessment. Trent Zanes responded NHDOT is in the process of hiring a consultant to inspect and provide more information about the existing bridges. He added that the \$8 million figure related to the existing bridges discussed previously is only an estimate. With respect to the need for a new environmental assessment, Trent Zanes said his understanding was that this would not be needed as the new project would be a “child” of the existing #12210C “parent” project.

III. Proposed Updates to the Public Involvement Plan

J. B. Mack advised attendees that there has been turnover and other changes to the Project Advisory that required updates to be made. He said SWRPC would revise the Plan with an updated roster for the project webpage.

IV. Existing Bridges Subcommittee Update

J. B. Mack reminded attendees that the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) had authorized the regional planning agencies in both states to develop an Existing Bridges Subcommittee to act in an advisory role to the PAC on matters related to the existing bridges as well as Hinsdale Island. Some of the Subcommittee duties include: collection of existing conditions information, collection of connectivity options and plans (such as connecting to existing trails like the West River Trail in Vermont), as well as creation of a vision for the new existing bridges area and island. He said there is a public involvement component that will include reaching out to stakeholders on both sides of the Connecticut River. He explained that the Subcommittee will pass its recommendations on to the PAC. The Subcommittee has met twice during 2018, including an orientation meeting as well as a meeting focused on scenario planning (looking at the pros and cons of different ways of using the bridge and island area). Currently, WRC and SWRPC are collecting information from stakeholders and data resources about the bridges. Last week, there was a meeting with trail stakeholders about opportunities and options. The information would be prepared for review as part of an upcoming Subcommittee meeting.

Chair Elwell asked if security questions have come up in discussions with the Subcommittee. J. B. Mack responded that some police data has been collected already and that both police departments have been forthcoming about their observations as members of the Subcommittee. J. B. Mack mentioned that the bollards, for example, could pose an access issue when responding to calls. He also mentioned that current extent of vegetation coverage was a concern. Chair Elwell asked if there will be consideration for the bridges to carry vehicles like a fire truck or ambulance. Trent Zanes commented that a remote gate could be an option to control vehicle access and that the original plan was for 12-foot wide trail but that it could be wider. He said the bridges will be able to handle some amount of vehicle traffic.

Chris Campany mentioned that Vermont’s “areawide” Brownfields funding as well as the Vermont Agency of Transportation Better Connections Program are potential options to support scenario planning efforts. Chris Campany added that the Better Connections Program can pay for final design work, but not support general visioning. He added that he is a landscape architect and has a landscape designer on staff that could look at a design of plantings and vegetation for the Subcommittee to consider.

V. Bridge Lighting & Overlooks Discussion

J. B. Mack reminded attendees that the PAC has already provided some input on design features of the new bridge but that feedback on lighting as well as overlook still remains. Don Lyford of NHDOT shared with J. B. Mack prior to the meeting that the goal of this agenda item should be an introduction to the topic and that it was not necessary for the PAC to provide a final decision.

Fred Moriarty asked if the bridge project would be going out to bid in 2019. Trent Zanes confirmed that September was the proposed date.

Trent Zanes advised attendees that in consulting with NHDOT staff regarding ornamental lighting, the general procedure is that a city or town provides or acquires the lighting and it is then installed by NHDOT as part of the project's construction phase. He referred to a PowerPoint slideshow for his presentation. Among the options are not having lighting at all, or lighting the roadway and sidewalk. Maintenance of any lighting on the bridge would be split between Hinsdale and Brattleboro. On the Vermont side of the river, lighting could extend from the former college building to Royal Road. On the New Hampshire side of the river, lighting could be extended along Georges Field Road to Mountain Road. He also added that lighting could include Hinsdale Island. Reasonable cost lighting may be purchased as part of the project and that lamps typically last around 10 years. Costs to maintain lighting would be the responsibility of the municipalities.

Four different examples of Brattleboro fixtures were displayed to provide a sense of current local preferences. The Main Street and Depot Street were the most recently-installed examples. Additional examples of different styles were provided from Concord and Dover, NH. Trent Zanes said the Concord installations were common throughout New Hampshire. Chair Elwell said he will go over slides with Steve Barrett, Director of Public Works, who could provide helpful feedback on maintaining the lighting and other considerations.

Trent Zanes said that NHDOT is not planning to paint the guardrail and added that painted light fixtures can weather poorly. He also said that the pedestals for the lights were to be located behind the guardrail, away from traffic, and would not be part of or attached to the guardrail itself. The PAC should eventually be prepared to provide a desired style for the base, post, and lamp. Poles with banners could be an option as well. Trent Zanes offered to provide more detail on options at a subsequent meeting.

Michael Abbott suggested that solar powered lights be considered. Chair Elwell concurred this should be looked into.

Chris Campany asked if group had committed to a post style of light. He offered to send out a reference on different types of fixtures and their intended purposes. For example, he said lighting could be incorporated into rails. He said lighting diagrams could be provided to members to talk about pros and cons of the different types of lights. Ed Smith asked for more information about if rail lighting would be more susceptible to vandalism and maintenance costs. Chris Campany offered to look into this and added that poles can also be subject to damage due to intentional or unintentional damage. Trent Zanes pointed out that winter snow removal and accommodating a sidewalk plow will need to be considered. Fred Moriarty asked if different lights may present more light pollution. Trent Zanes commented that generally a shepherd style pole is beneficial, however there are considerations such as the light and specific fixture itself that determine how effective the design is at reducing light pollution. Light color was also briefly discussed as a consideration. It was noted that Brattleboro currently has LED lighting of the same color throughout the Town. John Gomarlo asked about the potential for illuminating the island area and mentioned a recent research and purchase of products by the Town of Winchester for illuminating the Town's public works properties.

J. B. Mack asked if NHDOT can help the towns understand maintenance costs. Trent Zanes said he was not sure that they could, and that they do not have detailed information about selecting a light or providing other information. Chair Elwell commented that between the two municipalities, this information could be collected. J. B. Mack said between now and next meeting, staff will provide Trent Zanes' slides to help communities take next steps and suggested any information collected by either town be brought to next meeting. Chair Elwell offered to follow-up with the Town of Hinsdale directly prior to bringing ideas to the PAC at the next meeting. Kathryn Lynch confirmed with Trent Zanes that each town will not be required to purchase lighting.

Trent Zanes returned to the slide show regarding the location of potential pedestrian overlooks, which were reviewed along with photos, facing north, taken by an aerial drone at the approximate locations of piers 3, 4, and 6.

Bob Harcke left meeting at 11:30 a.m.

Trent Zanes said the next step in considering the location of pedestrian overlooks was to understand the committee's preference. He added that the relative cost of each overlook was not significant. There was general agreement that a minimum of two overlooks would be desirable. It was noted that the two proposed locations depicted in Option 2 would accentuate views of the Connecticut River.

A concern was noted relative to Option 3 as the views would include the "tank farm" from pier 2. Mike Abbot commented that overlooks centered over the water make sense and that Option 3, which included three overlooks, was overkill. Chris Company also spoke in favor of Option 2 and added that views from pier 4 would always be visible from the sidewalk over the rail. J. B. Mack commented that his presentation on interpretive signage would provide information on overlooks and suggested holding off on a final decision until after this agenda item. Ed Smith spoke in favor of Option 3 because there was closer access to an overlook from each end of the bridge and that high point in the middle would be advantageous because it would be furthest north and at the highest elevation of the bridge. Chris Company commented that interpretive signage could be beneficial closest to the "tank farm" to address the industrial history of the area. With respect to the height of each location, Trent Zanes estimated the highest point on the bridge would be likely be at pier 5 but also noted the bridge grade would only be 1%.

VI. Interpretive Signage Opportunities

J. B. Mack referred to a PowerPoint slide show presentation. In general, he said, interpretive signage is not an ideal medium for complex stories. Generally, people will spend 30-40 seconds at a sign before they want to move on. He said signage should be oriented towards the view and that the drone footage could be helpful for this. As part of the slide show, J. B. Mack provided interpretive signage examples related to geology, specific areas of a horizon, engineering history (for example bridge type), unique flora or fauna, historic events (for example colonial history, industrial history, Native American). He added that if there is more than one interpretive sign, they should be connected in some way, or at least share the same style. Physically, interpretive signs are often tilted so they do not obstruct the view. However, vertical options also exist. In the case of a vertical sign, there is typically more content, often with a map. He said the context of the signage could be part of an economic development strategy for tourism, to document history, identify a prominent landscape feature like Mount Wantastiquet, etc.

J. B. Mack pointed out that there will effectively be a new loop for walking and biking, so the Committee may want to consider signage that would include the new and older bridges.

Ed Smith asked who would produce and pay for the signage. Trent Zanes said he was unsure if this could be covered by the project. Mike Abbott expressed concerns over vandalism, such as has occurred on Mt.

Wantastiquet and more recently through the removal of “No Camping” signs on the island. Chris Company commented that the more the area is used, the less vandalism will be an issue. He added that the design of the area will also help to minimize the occurrence of vandalism. Harpers Ferry National Historical Park was suggested as an example of an area resilient to public activity. The Molly Stark Byway may be another option to study. J. B. Mack said placards last on average 5 years but can last up to 20 years. He added that he was willing to share a relevant reference, which includes cost information.

Attendees spoke in favor of overlooks, signage, and a loop concept. Fred Moriarty said that numerous groups in Brattleboro, such as the Rotary, could step up to help with maintenance. Chair Elwell suggested Brattleboro staff could take the lead on considering signage options relative to the Town of Brattleboro.

John Gomarlo pointed out that one way to conceptualize three individual overlooks would be one focusing on Brattleboro, one on Hinsdale (topics such as dances, ball fields, other activities on the island), and a third for the Abenaki (that colonized both sides of river).

Mike Abbot brought up the NH 9 bridge over the Connecticut in Chesterfield as an example of potential difficulties in relying on volunteers for maintenance. Chris Company said the context of the two areas is very different. Specifically, he commented the NH 9 bridge is more of a “pass through” area.

Chair Elwell noted the general preference of committee members as to include either two or three overlooks and asked if staff assigned to the committee could put more energy into how this would work. Trent Zanes said that consensus as part of the next meeting would be helpful. He added that the committee could also choose different designs for the overlooks than the ones that were presented today.

VII. Next Meeting

Chair Elwell confirmed as part of the next meeting, the group would discuss lighting, signage, and overlooks.

VIII. Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Underwood
GIS Specialist/Planner