

Meeting Minutes

Project: CTfastrak (New Britain-Hartford Busway) **Date:** May 12, 2014
Subject: Public Informational Meeting – Flower Street Pedestrian Bridge Options **Time:** 6:15 PM
By: Tony Morelli **Place:** Lyceum, Hartford

The purpose of the meeting was to present design alternatives for the construction of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge at Flower Street over the CTfastrak guideway and Amtrak’s railroad tracks.

Introductions were made by Randal Davis and Richard Armstrong of the Connecticut Department of Transportation. Armstrong provided a brief history on how we got where we are, and David Tudryn, Director of Architectural Projects, of Michael Baker Engineering, Inc. presented a PowerPoint presentation consisting of a brief overview of several alternative concept designs that had been developed in the fall of 2013: The “Switchback,” the “Helical,” the “Skywalk,” and two “Elevator” alternatives. A comparison matrix was presented that showed a number of comparable attributes, such as travel distance, travel time, cost, security issues, etc.

Since the presentations to Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association and Frog Hollow NRZ in October 2013, two of these alternative design concepts, the skywalk and the elevator were advanced further. The Skywalk received very positive feedback from the neighborhood groups, while an elevator alternative might have fewer direct impacts; the other alternatives were not advanced any further due to their less favorable comparisons to the Skywalk and Elevator alternatives.

Tudryn provided specific details of the advanced versions of the Skywalk and Elevator. These alternatives have been further advanced in the design process to insure there are no fatal flaws with regards to feasibility; that they would serve the community well; and that impacts to adjacent properties could be avoided or minimized. The two alternatives are as follows:

Skywalk – This alternative would start just north of the intersection with Capitol Avenue, at the Hartford Office Supply property. The Skywalk would be constructed along the west side of Flower Street starting with a switchback ramp and gradually rising, meeting ADA standards, to the required elevation for the bridge over Amtrak and CTfastrak. The ramp would then descend to the Multi-use Trail under I-84 between Flower and Broad Streets. The Skywalk would span over the Park River Conduit, driveways and a proposed hammer-head turnaround in front of the Hartford Courant building. Several variations have been developed, and two of these were presented: one that retains the existing Flower Street roadway width and one which narrows the street to 24’-0”. The benefits of the narrower street width concept are a reduction in the impact to the Hartford Office Supply and less impact to underground utilities.

Elevator – This alternative places a glass elevator and stair tower just south of the Amtrak right-of-way line connecting to a bridge over Amtrak’s railroad tracks and CTfastrak guideway. Three variations of this alternative were presented: two that utilize different sized cul-de-sacs and one that utilizes the proposed hammer-head turnaround at the end of Flower Street. The northern terminus of the pedestrian crossing would be the same as for the Skywalk.

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Cost - Estimated construction and total project costs were presented. The construction bid amount for the Skywalk alternative is estimated to be \$7.8 million, and the total project cost is estimated to be \$11.3 – 12.4 million. The construction bid amount for the Elevator alternative is estimated to be \$5.2 – 6.7 million, and the total project cost is estimated to be \$7.6 – 10.6 million.

The following is a summary of comments/questions made by attendees (about 20 to 25):

- Hartford Courant representatives noted that they have worked closely with DOT on improvements in the vicinity of their facility, but expressed concern that either alternative is extravagant and expensive and would impact access to their facility. They also noted that the constructed Multi-use Trail, under I-84, between Flower and Broad Streets is functioning well and adds minimal travel time. As a tax payer, they feel that CTDOT should spend the money for other improvements rather than on an elevated connection on Flower Street.
- One of the attendees commented that the new multi-use trail is dark and it feels unsafe at night. She also stated that pedestrians/bicyclists have to travel in a different direction rather than over CTfastrak and Amtrak.
- It was asked how many parking spaces the Hartford Courant would lose with the Elevator Option. The response was that at this time it would be between 10 and 21 spaces based on which Cul-de-sac option was selected.
- It was also asked how many parking spaces the Hartford Office Supply (HOS) would lose with the Skywalk Option. The response was that at this time it is estimated to be between 1 and 12 spaces based on the variation selected; to maintain Flower Street roadway width or reduce it.
- Representatives for the developer made the following comments: 1) was a tunnel option, under CTfastrak and Amtrak considered? Response – a schematic layout was developed in 2012 and was deemed unfeasible due to the constraints presented by the I-84 Viaduct and the Hartford Courant facility and 2) what is the time frame for the project? Response – design could be completed by the end of 2014, and construction could start in early 2015 and completed within approximately one year. These dates are rough as each option has a different timeline.
- A comment was made why spend so much money to save less than a minute of travel time, between using the Multi-use Trail to Broad Street vs. either bridge alternative. The improvements do not seem to be worth spending about \$10 million.
- A question was asked about what would be the time frame for final decision?

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- Chris Brown, a cycling advocate, commented that a single lane CTfastrak guideway is possible and would result in a delay of about 40 seconds for buses. The Department responded that this plan was revisited, and separate from any operational impacts, a 2-1-2 configuration was ultimately found to be unsafe.
- Constantin Benciulescu, City Engineer of Hartford, had the following questions: 1) Who would own the structure? Response – not known at this time. CTDOT and city would have to consider if and how the state could own a structure on a city street. 2) Who would maintain it? Response – CTDOT. He also stated that the City of Hartford would not support any option that would increase city’s maintenance costs.
- Someone commented if the constructed Multi-use Trail under I-84 could be made safer and more attractive.