



Workshop #2 Summary - DRAFT

ABOUT THE EVENT

On March 25, 2010, nearly 100 Greater-Hartford residents attended the second public workshop of the I-84 Viaduct Study. The intent of the workshop was to describe and receive public input on five Preliminary Alternatives for replacement of the I-84 Viaduct through downtown Hartford. The event was sponsored by the HUB of Hartford Committee in partnership with CRCOG and the City of Hartford, and hosted by the Hartford Public Library.

The March 25 event began with a drop-in session, held from 4pm – 5:30pm. Attendees viewed posters describing current conditions near the viaduct, the preliminary replacement alternatives, and “lessons learned” from other communities across the country and abroad. Also on display were the study team’s assessments of how each Preliminary Alternative could impact urban/community design, transportation, and economic development. Estimates of relative costs for each alternative were provided as well. Attendees discussed the Preliminary Alternatives with members of the study team, and many also submitted comment forms.

A workshop from 5:30pm – 8:30pm provided an opportunity for more detailed discussion of the Preliminary Alternatives. After a presentation describing current conditions, Preliminary Alternatives and the study team’s assessments, attendees divided into three facilitated groups. Each group was asked to respond to the following questions for each alternative:

- What do you think works well about this alternative?
- Are there ways you think this alternative *doesn't* work well?
- How could this alternative be improved?

Comments were recorded on flipcharts. At the end of the workshop, attendees reconvened as one large group, and representatives from each small group reported back on their group’s discussion.

THE PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES & PUBLIC RESPONSE

Workshop #2 provided an opportunity for spirited public debate about the future of the I-84 Viaduct. Attendees had differing opinions about the alternatives, but on some topics there was broad agreement. A record of public comments from the event is attached. The Preliminary Alternatives and general public response to each is summarized below.

Alternative 1 - Enhanced Viaduct (Baseline): Replaces existing viaduct with a more visually attractive viaduct structure that is less costly to maintain.

The Enhanced Viaduct alternative was broadly regarded as an improvement over current conditions – but not as an adequate solution to widespread concerns about how the highway impacts and divides the city, particularly around Asylum and Broad Street.

Alternative 2 - Skyway Viaduct: Replaces the existing viaduct with a more visually attractive “Skyway” viaduct that carries through traffic. Many existing ramps are removed; access to the core is provided by interchanges at the edge of the area. The Skyway is elevated higher above ground than the existing viaduct to reduce its presence as a barrier that divides the city.

Attendees’ response to the Skyway Viaduct alternative was divided. Some believed that removal of local ramps could help improve the flow of through traffic, and felt that ramp removal would reduce the presence of the highway on nearby streets. Others had significant concerns about how removal of ramps could potentially worsen access to downtown job centers and major employers such as Aetna and The Hartford. Some felt that the higher elevation of the Skyway would enhance connections below it, while others thought the higher elevation would make the viaduct structure more visible and less appealing.

Alternative 3 - Boulevard: Replaces the viaduct with a high volume tree-lined urban street.

Some participants were enthusiastic about the possibility of creating a more walkable, tree-lined environment in the viaduct area but others were less convinced that this was really achievable given the particular site circumstances and constraints.

Several attendees also expressed concerns about the capacity of the boulevard to accommodate high traffic volumes. Some raised questions about where excess traffic would go if the road’s capacity was reduced, and whether a high traffic boulevard would continue to be a barrier within the city.

Alternative 4 - Tunnel: Replaces the existing viaduct with a tunnel between Sisson and Asylum. New development would occur over the tunnel on land formerly occupied by the viaduct. Existing ramp locations could be maintained.

The Tunnel alternative received a very positive response from attendees, and was thought to offer the most benefits—it was successful in reconnecting the city while continuing to accommodate high traffic volumes. However, many attendees who believed this was the most

beneficial solution also questioned the viability a tunnel option given the very high cost of this approach relative to other alternatives.

Alternative 5 - Composite Tunnel-Viaduct: Existing viaduct is replaced with a tunnel at Asylum/Broad, and with an enhanced viaduct structure along the remaining segment. Incorporates new development over the highway, linking downtown and Asylum Hill.

The Composite Tunnel-Viaduct alternative received a very positive response. Attendees liked that this approach offered potential to reconnect the two sides of the city particularly in the Asylum/Broad area. Many attendees noted that this alternative offered some of the key benefits of the full Tunnel alternative, but because of its much lower cost was seen as a more viable solution.

The public's comments will help shape further investigation of I-84 Viaduct replacement options by the HUB of Hartford Committee. Study findings will be presented at a final public meeting in late spring/early summer. The results of this study will be used by CT DOT as a starting point for a more detailed technical and environmental analysis.

WORKSHOP #2 COMMENTS ON PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE #1 - ENHANCED VIADUCT (BASELINE)

What do you think works well about this alternative?

- Shrink Sisson ramps
- Improves Sisson exits
- Lower price – also look at investment
- Superior noise reduction - modern version – Not as visually abrasive as current viaduct
- Economical, best bang for bucks
- Noise not a problem
- Makes better use of the un-used space around the viaduct; Opportunity to use space under the viaduct for something other than parking lots (bike trails, etc.)
- Bike trails are possible with this plan
- Focus energy on existing city streets
- Cost is least expensive – should be kept in mind
- Nothing
- Would different approaches get you more \$ in funding?

Are there ways in which you think this alternative doesn't work?

- If doesn't improve economic development = not an option
- Same position as now doesn't cut it
- It's POOR
- Capital and Farmington - highway separates them
- UGLY and barrier between neighborhoods
- It makes what exists now lasts longer
- Exits take up too much room
- Need to recognize local and thru traffic
- Don't rebuild it – cost – maintenance cost – ugly
- Neighborhoods still disconnected
- No man's land – east, on Asylum – doesn't address this
- Still a spaghetti of ramps over the park - doesn't address this
- Needs to have fewer ramps – this doesn't address
- Transportation predicament – ramps add to congestion – more ramps maybe not the solution
- What would happen if amount of downtown housing was increased?
- No improvements for traffic
- Will speed traffic through Hartford
- Status quo – no major improvements above today

How could this alternative be improved?

- All alternatives should offer positive alternatives to the car, make it easier for downtown employers to stop using cars
- Make sure to include rail and buses
- Shift highway? Shift rail?
- Plenty of room to switch rail around Sisson, run highway under
- Move rail line so it runs parallel to the south of the highway; Development near Sisson?
- Development near Sisson?

- Biking corridors?
- Good design of supports
- Sell development rights below to pay for project
- Works well with improved mass transit

General Comments

- More of the same. Locals want to eliminate the viaduct. “Lipstick on a Pig.”
- Good for 10 years, but then what? Not a long-term fix.
- Frankly, it might be useful / cost effective to allow/pay a number of creative thinkers of all disciplines to design proposals for how to alter the existing conditions. For instance, Broad Street and the area under Flower St. could be improved with small scale [?] and landscape (tree alle interventions).
- No – does not fix Aetna/Capitol area.
- Boring and does not solve the issue of splitting the city in half.
- OK – Better use of underside – and paint it; S/W of us does this
- Close Sigourney on ramp. Widen to eight lanes.
- Doesn’t address the issues – economic development / connectivity.
- ☹

ALTERNATIVE #2 - SKYWAY VIADUCT

What do you think works well about this alternative?

- Eliminates more entrances and exits that are problematic
- Closing Sigourney Street ramps will improve traffic flow
- May improve pedestrian environment
- It will bring back the river
- For people traveling thru – it will be a benefit because they don’t have to stop
- There could be lined bike paths, linear park, lighter underneath

Are there ways in which you think this alternative doesn’t work?

- “Enhanced enhanced” viaduct
- Bleak stretch of road
- Above and below doesn’t work
- Still “ugly”
- Same problem but higher
- Higher up is less accessible
- May not enhance pedestrian environment
- Development may not be as desirable under Skyway
- Same price, but less quality than #5
- Lacks future flexibility (adding lanes)
- Terrible visually
- Fewer development opportunities
- Could offer opportunities for bike paths below, but there are other, better bike corridors anyway...

How could this alternative be improved?

- Look at intercity highway connections
- Should be real street north of streets to reroute traffic

- Pressure off using cars. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN!
- Interregional traffic shouldn't come through city

General Comments:

- More of the same except higher up. Why just move your problem higher? 30 years forward you move higher still? Who wants to live under a bridge? Trolls? ☺ Other cities are eliminating their skyways, why build what others are eliminating already?
- I like this idea best if the viaduct itself can be used primarily for inter-regional travel, then other means of accessing the city can be enhanced such as the busways in development from all suburbs surrounding the city.
- Improvements, but only fair results at what cost.
- If the skyway viaduct cost estimates are comparable/similar to the Composite Tunnel/Viaduct then the Composite Tunnel/Viaduct would be a more meaningful improvement.
- Potential issues: emergency access, noise from road would carry over city.
- Best option. Will be cheaper than composite/tunnel. Affords the opportunity to build a landmark, aesthetically pleasing structure. Could allow much better use of land beneath the structure.
- Yes – Toronto, Canada to do same – I like what I saw.
- Good – put buildings under, then neighborhood not separated.
- Doesn't address the issues – economic development / connectivity.
- ☹

ALTERNATIVE #3 – BOULEVARD

What do you think works well about this alternative?

- Fewer ramps
- More like a street, don't just "drive thru" city
- Forces mass transit, most restrictive but could be a good thing
- Could be the "blossoming of city"
- People
- Good place for Hartford marathon
- Creates useable land
- More peaceful
- One of the least expensive options
- If less vehicles using road, will reduce noise

Are there ways in which you think this alternative doesn't work?

- Not a boulevard thru major part of city
- Sounds good but a lot to consider
- Could be inviting...depends on how it gets done
- Separates city? Not pedestrian-friendly?
- Doesn't handle the traffic
- Still a disconnect, but at least you could see the other part of city; lesser of 2 evils
- Not good for economic development
- Seasonal maintenance
- A better idea for I-91
- Wrong part of the city

- So much truck traffic – it wouldn't be pleasant
- Diversions may cause political issues

How could this alternative be improved?

- Improve light rail, mass transit – streetcars?
- Build the circumferential highway network?
- Skyway and boulevard hybrid?
- Improve public transit and transportation ranks better than “poor”
- Study reduction in single occupant automobile use
- Tunnel from Sisson Ave ramps under Trinity and connect to the Charter Oak Bridge and Boulevard where I-84 exists today

General Comments:

- The only solution that addresses/allows easy access into the city to stimulate increased tourism by allowing people to see the city. 175,000 is a lifeblood that we are completely missing out on – only focusing on sending THROUGH Hartford faster. You could build 2 boulevards for the cost of 1 tunnel. How will auto change 30 years from now?
- Terrible idea. Won't work. Would be incentive to move businesses out of Hartford.
- Frankly the Boulevard option seems nostalgic. We have highways with considerable traffic; rather than try to turn back the clock, make the best of what is here. Note that removing the highway could further isolate Hartford as a poverty ghetto, state sacrifice zone.
- No way – would be a slow moving parking lot spewing pollution – picture a thousand trucks all idling.
- Impossible
- Where does the interstate traffic go? Okay only if a bypass/additional interstate is built.
- No
- How about combining this with skyway
- ☺ - #3

ALTERNATIVE #4 – TUNNEL

What do you think works well about this alternative?

- Might as well make change now so we don't have to change it again later on
- Growth, think more broadly
- We like everything – it's sexy, pretty....
- Creates new space – economic development improved
- Safety issue solved – it will be safer – lights etc.
- Could fix Trident intersection
- Flexibility for street network/organization
- Could add a lot of streets – add connectivity
- Connects Asylum Hill back to downtown
- Noise would go away (but noise isn't bad now anyway....)
- Potential to reinvigorate the city
- More housing, more open space – “could do anything”
- Reduction of noise pollution

Are there ways in which you think this alternative doesn't work?

- Very expensive!
- Much more difficult to get funding
- Park river conduit complicates
- Rather spend \$ on I-91
- COST!! Everything bad about this comes down to \$\$
- Development would be more expensive to build
- Still have rail, busway, infrastructure in the way

How could this alternative be improved?

- Depress tunnel – big gash in city – build over it
- Highway kills the city
- Costs a lot but can we get it back over time?

General Comments:

- Costly – does Hartford have money for this? Cuts off traffic from the city.
- Impractically expensive. Nice theoretically but not feasible
- Best idea presented.
- Feasibility and cost issues are key. Perhaps we also need a chart of how much time it would take to design/fund/build. If a tunnel then the RR ought to be built into it.
- OK, but the more complex, the more potential issues and cost overruns.
- Way too expensive and restrictive in terms of getting on/off. Great for through traffic, not for local traffic.
- Yes – Best for reconnect of city – and put boulevard over it.
- Toooooo much money (i.e., Big Dig Boston). Bad for traffic, can't find exits - i.e., westbound I-84 Waterbury.
- If we can fund, this would be great!
- ☺ - #1

ALTERNATIVE #5 - COMPOSITE TUNNEL/VIADUCT

What do you think works well about this alternative?

- Favorite option with Sigourney exist in place
- Like reclaimed land at union station
- Gain parkland at Sigourney

Are there ways in which you think this alternative doesn't work?

- Whole thing is a disaster!
- Decking has already occurred without major improvements
- Noise pollution will still exist (but continuous structure will reduce)

How could this alternative be improved?

- Move railroad track
- Option #6 (moving railroad track), boulevards, alternatives to depress highway
- Highway under Sigourney
- Capitol Ave viable real estate
- Pedestrian and bike connection between capitol and park

- Farmington and Asylum - focus on bigger development opportunity
- Capitol to multi modal area
- Exit at Sigourney
- All alternatives should go under Asylum – too much vertical activity
- Can land gain extend further east and further connect city? – include note in report

General Comments:

- I like the Composite Tunnel #5, practical solution to revitalize the city of Hartford. Opens up and strengthen street Network as well as the city in general!
- Yes – Best for reconnect of city – and put boulevard over it.
- 2nd best option (or tied for first) in my opinion. Leaves options for access that would be severely limited if tunnel only option. Interested in true cost estimates. If cost is truly comparable to skyway viaduct, I'd like to see the plans. Improvement at rail station is a big plus.
- This concept seems most likely in tunneling is feasible; can the railroad tracks be built into the tunnel? Tracks w/in the tunnel might allow/enable more of a complete tunnel.
- What would the new viaduct look like? 2nd best idea.
- Looks good. Potential problem: the Conn. River Flood Conduit better not fill!
- Probably the best idea. I think cost would explode beyond projections.
- ½ solution only. Development at existing Main St ½ tunnel has NOT panned out – in fact ugliest building in our city is right at this intersection. What changes with more of the same.
- Not worth the effort.
- After carefully reviewing all five alternatives for the above referenced project at the open house held at the library yesterday, I recommend the Composite Tunnel/Viaduct Hybrid Alternative for reasons including, but not limited to, the following:
 1. A downtown park is created which was the original intent of this study.
 2. Closing down ramps which are not used.
 3. Traffic flow capacity would be maintained.
 4. Clearance over railroad would be maintained.
 5. Aesthetics of reconstructed structure would be an improvement.
 6. Cost would be among the lowest of the alternatives.

I have spent most of my career designing bridges and other structures. I am a licensed structural engineer and I have a degree in civil engineering and also a degree in mathematics. I have lived in Hartford for the past 45 years and am dedicated to the city as we move forward. I consider this to be a primary project for Hartford's future. For these reasons, I feel I am qualified to make this judgment.
- Makes the most sense to me. Focus should be on economic development, especially downtown.
- ☺ - #2

REPORT BACK NOTES

Group 1

Alternative 1 - Enhanced Viaduct (Baseline): Like shrinking of Sisson ramps

Alternative 2 – Skyway Viaduct: Idea is ok

- Like improvements at Sigourney, but we would still have a viaduct; no big changes here.
- Same relative cost as Alternative #5, but you get less

Alternative 3 – Boulevard:

- Lots of debate on this alternative!
- Some thought it wasn't so bad; less through traffic might be a good thing. Others asked, who is this for? Who does this highway need to serve?
- Alternative is relatively less expensive, and would be quieter because fewer cars
- Politically difficult to implement

Alternative 4 – Tunnel:

- Instead, take 84 from Elwood Tunnel under Trinity, and connect to I-91 south of the city?
- Would reduce noise, we liked it, but it's expensive!
- Would the Park River Conduit be a problem?

Alternative 5 – Composite Tunnel/Viaduct:

- Positive! More land at Union station! Parkland at Sigourney = good!
- Same noise still...
- Why doesn't the City look at decking areas further east, near High St. and Main St.
- Why hasn't land we've already decked attract development?

Group 2

Reported just on new ideas

- Could you move the rail tracks south? If you could move the rail tracks horizontally so they didn't cross the highway then no viaduct would be needed
- Eliminating ramps would save money; we could use that money to make a boulevard elsewhere
- There should be more discussion about improving mass transit, directly link to the assessment
- Could we depress the highway without having a full tunnel? Could we cut without the cover?

Group 3

Overall

- Diverse group! Lots of perspectives!
- Regardless of highway design, get rid of the "spaghetti" of ramps at the eastern end of the Viaduct
- Address the bad Trident intersection at Asylum & Farmington

Alternative 1 - Enhanced Viaduct (Baseline):

- “Lipstick on a pig;” could be made better, but still a pig.
- We don’t like it.

Alternative 2 – Skyway Viaduct:

- We liked photos showing development under viaducts, but think this would be harder to make happen with a Skyway
- Could bring back Park River, provide space under Skyway for a bike path.... But are there better corridors for bikes?
- Terrible visually

Alternative 3 – Boulevard:

- Given traffic volumes, this alternative not feasible on its own because ring highways never built
- Would be an economic detriment! Would have so many trucks on it! I-84 is an economic engine and we have to respect that.
- Location for Hartford marathon?
- Boulevard would be a better option for I-91

Alternative 4 – Tunnel:

- We really like this but want to keep the Sigourney exit; otherwise, cars will be filtering through city to get to jobs
- Creates opportunities for high-rises, for housing, for whatever above - but the cost; how would this project be funded? Would funding for an urban-friendly project be more easily obtained? A tunnel would get federal funding – would a boulevard? Since the interstate function would be diverted?
- Give us better cost information!
- Could you straighten the rail tracks in the east end of the area?

Alternative 5 – Composite Tunnel/Viaduct:

- Gives you positives of Tunnel alternative at “spaghetti ramps” area near the Capitol - but keeps cost down
- Would the cost actually be higher than described?
- Keep the Sigourney ramps
- So much “up and down,” vertical change along the corridor! It’s unsafe – maybe fixable?

General Comments:

- Please expand the scope to include the Section of I-84 North of Asylum and West of High Street
- To me, the priority is economic development and more connectivity downtown (including commuters to The Hartford and Aetna). Sisson and the Aetna portion of the Viaduct are low priority. The Sisson interchange is complex in itself. Historic solutions like making Capitol Ave a boulevard with a diamond interchange at Laurel degrade the access from the West [??] I-84 and creates traffic problems on Laurel Street.

- This project does not go far enough East. There is a stretch between High Street and County Wexford Park, which could be decked. This would reconnect Downtown with the North End. Also, eliminate or reduce the Sisson Avenue on and off ramps.
- Roads serve people not cars. People also walk, run, and ride bikes. I-84 and other highway projects should take all forms of transportation into account, as well as the neighborhoods they pass through. People spend most of their time outside their cars. People vote and cars don't!!
- Consider/plan for future, not present. 40% vacancy downtown, large investments in downtown housing, existing mass transit hub (Union) all trend towards decrease in auto traffic, not more. GREEN is #1 trend over next 30 years. + green = less cars, not more.
- Without accurate sections these all seem very speculative.
- Keep freeway, other areas have done so – or rebuild / slight relocation / tunnel; Providence RI, [?], TX, Boston MA, [?] TX.
- Consider two levels, one for through traffic, one for local. Relocate I-84 to along north or south of city line. Neighborhoods will not be split. What would average daily traffic be if there were no restrictions (i.e., traffic vans). None [of alternatives] solve traffic problems. Railroad still splits neighborhoods. No - or only a few – downtowns are viable.