Poughkeepsie 9.44.55
Advisory Committee Meeting #7

Date: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 at 1:30 PM

Location: Zoom Virtual Meeting

Attendees:

NAME	AFFILIATION
Mark Debald	Dutchess County Transportation Council (DCTC)
Emily Dozier	DCTC
Tara Grogan	DCTC
Dylan Tuttle	Dutchess County Planning
Heather LaVarnway	Dutchess County Planning
Dan Coots	New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT)
Lance MacMillan	NYSDOT
Vincent Grella	NYSDOT
Lisa Mondello	NYSDOT
Jeff Wright	New York State Bridge Authority
Jay Baisley	Town of Poughkeepsie
Michael Welti	Town of Poughkeepsie
Kristen Taylor	Town of Poughkeepsie
Natalie Quinn	City of Poughkeepsie Planning
Paul Hesse	City of Poughkeepsie Planning
Mayor Rob Rolison	City of Poughkeepsie
Evelina Knodel	MASS Design
Mark Sargent	Creighton Manning Engineering (CME)
Mark Nadolny	CME
Hannah Brockhaus	FHI Studio

Purpose: The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the Arterials assessment and obtain committee input, before proceeding with public review.

OVERVIEW

Mark Debald welcomed the Advisory Committee to the meeting. Mark Sargent of Creighton Manning Engineering started the meeting by reviewing the reasons for possibly redesigning the Arterials, which include a significant crash history, changing demographics, high speeds and several previous studies that called for changes. He also provided background information about road diets, which have been found to reduce the range of speeds and the number of vehicles speeding excessively. The 44/55 Arterials currently consist of three lanes, each 11 to 12 feet wide, with one to three-foot shoulders and five-foot sidewalks.

Conceptual Alternatives

Alternative designs for the Arterials use the same pavement width; this study is not considering a major reconstruction or roadway widening, although spot improvements will be considered. The objective is to work within the existing roadway to achieve the study objectives and make the road more of a “complete street” that better fits into the fabric of the City. Two basic concepts are being evaluated from a traffic operations perspective. The first concept reduces the number of lanes from three to two and leaves the Arterials operating as one-way streets. The second converts them to two-way streets, with turn lanes at the intersections.

Under the two-lane concept, the pavement not used for travel lanes could be used for a bike lane and some on street parking with bump-outs at intersections. The final design could consider striped buffers, a conventional bike lane, or a separated (parking protected) bike lane. A parking protected bike lane would be challenging due to driveways and intersections along the corridor, could make it hard to do curb extensions, and would likely entail higher maintenance costs. These options can be explored further if the two-lane option is preferred.

The other basic concept is reintroducing two-way traffic on both of the Arterials, which would mean 11-foot-wide travel lanes with either a turning lane or in some places potentially a raised median in place of the middle lane. Bike lanes would not be feasible under this alternative because turn pockets at the intersections are needed for basic operations. Another option discussed was a reversible center lane alternative. This would operate differently because there would be no center turn lane pockets. If the Committee is interested in this option, it could be further evaluated. The interchange of 44/55 near the eastern terminus of the study area would need to be reconfigured if the Arterials were converted to two-way traffic.

In preliminary discussion of the alternatives before reviewing the traffic analysis, a few key ideas were mentioned. The overall goal of changing drivers’ behavior was highlighted, as was improving the facilities for people walking and bicycling. The Mayor mentioned the huge challenge of enforcing speed limits on the Arterials and the increase in aggressive driving due to COVID. He also warned of the maintenance implications related to garbage collection along the Arterials, particularly with a parking-protected bike lane.

Traffic Operations

Mr. Sargent noted that the two concepts operate much closer to roadway capacity, compared to the capacity of the existing roadway network. The modeling conducted to date shows that they don’t perform well with 10% growth of traffic during am and pm peak hours. They nominally perform well with existing traffic. However, traffic volumes often go down with a road diet project. Volume reductions have been seen in examples of successful road diets around the country, as well as crash reductions and speed reductions. It was also noted by a Committee member that designing for increased capacity can be a self-fulfilling prophesy – if capacity exists, people will continue to drive.

Mark Nadolny then reviewed travel times in the am and pm peak for the existing condition (3 lanes), two lane, and two-way alternatives, for both the existing and estimated future traffic volumes (i.e. 10% growth over 20 years). Currently, the travel time to navigate the corridor is about 5-6 minutes, which increases slightly in the two-lane alternative with existing volumes and doubles in future volume pm peak conditions. Under the two-way alternative, travel time is between 13 and 20 minutes across the existing and future conditions. Mark also reviewed travel time charts that showed eastbound and westbound directions.

Maintaining one-way traffic allows for signal coordination along the corridors. The consultant team conducted a supplemental analysis of the two-lane alternative to see how much better it could operate with spot improvements at intersections. The two-way alternative does not provide the same opportunity for spot improvements within the existing pavement width, since the basic concept is three lanes wide consisting of one lane each way with a center turn lane. Adding spot capacity improvements such as right turn lanes would involve widening and property impacts beyond the existing right-of-way. Under the two-lane concept, the locations with spot improvements include, as an example, South Hamilton and South Clinton streets, where there are higher volumes of left turns, which can be directed into left turn pockets to improve traffic flow along the corridor. Similar improvements are possible at other intersections.

Additionally, “squaring the weave” – eliminating the curve at Columbus Drive/Westbound Arterial and redesigning it as a standard intersection, was recommended in the City Center Connectivity Project (2018). A sub-alternative including this realignment, as well as incorporating a two-way Market Street, has been evaluated. Travel times for am and pm conditions including these sub-alternatives were presented. Squaring the weave increases overall travel times by about 30 seconds, which is considered acceptable. At this point, the team is reaching the conclusion that the two-lane alternative is most feasible, and perhaps most desirable.

Evelina Knodel asked if the Arterials could have different treatments. Mr. Sargent replied that based on the volumes, at least two lanes are needed in each direction—it wouldn’t be feasible to make one Arterial two-way (one lane in each direction) and the other two lanes in one direction.

Jeff Wright noted that the spot improvements, which remove the space needed for a bike lane and bump-outs at the intersections, improve traffic operations by less than a minute, which may not be significant enough for the lost benefits. The consultant team said they can test the model to see how well it works without the spot improvements. It was noted by other Committee members that other one-way streets around downtown Poughkeepsie contribute to the circulation difficulties; while this cannot be modeled as part of this study, converting some of these streets to two-way may be a future option for the City. Further discussion noted that volume reduction on an arterial (due to a road diet) is limited by the availability of alternative routes; there are local, but not regional, alternatives for these corridors.

Mr. Sargent also presented comparisons of Hudson Valley main streets regarding travel times and speeds. The overall speed on the corridors, including time stopped at signals, is much higher today on the Arterials than on main streets in Beacon, Kingston, New Paltz and Newburgh (which also carry lower volumes). Under the two-lane alternative overall speeds would still be higher than the comparison streets, while under the two-way alternative speeds would be lower.

Mr. Sargent then presented a preliminary concept for the intersection of Clinton/Smith streets at the Westbound Arterial to remove some of the traffic islands. This intersection is currently channelized with right-turn slip lanes and pedestrians on the north side of the intersection need to cross five separate legs of traffic. A roundabout was evaluated at this location and was determined not feasible due high volumes. The City supports further evaluation of an improvement concept here to have a better understanding of how it would operate.

Mr. Nadolny presented SYNCHRO traffic simulation models for the two-way and two-lane concepts, which further demonstrated the discussion points noted above. It was noted that pedestrian signal phases are concurrent with adjacent traffic in the model. Under existing conditions, the two-lane alternative seems feasible. The team discussed a reduced volume scenario but determined that they do not want to rely on reduced volume for the selection process. At this point, it makes sense to present existing and future conditions, rather than running additional analyses for less forecasted growth or negative forecasted growth.

The Committee discussed preferences for parking, bus pullouts, turn pockets and other options under the two-lane option. It was suggested that a wider green buffer, and (under a long-term concept), wider sidewalks, may be preferred at least outside of the civic core, where off street parking is widely available. Towards downtown, some parking space, or commercial loading space, may be desired. The consultant team will incorporate a sensitivity analysis in the traffic models to test the impact of parallel parking maneuvers on the two-lane scenario. It was also noted that today there is an expectation of driving through Poughkeepsie very quickly; it can be challenging to change expectations. However, lowering speeds to improve safety should be a primary message.

The NYS Bridge Authority and Streetlight data show a near 50 percent decrease in traffic during early pandemic restrictions, but volumes climbed to a stable reduction of about 15-20 percent over the last five months of 2020. The team also noted that the Origin-Destination study showed that about 20 percent of volumes on the Arterials was through traffic, and the remaining 80 percent was local traffic, turning on or off the corridors. Travel times along the Arterials may not be as critical for these local trips.

The preliminary assessment reflects the pros and cons for each alternative and highlights the benefits of the two-lane alternative: it provides reasonable travel times with existing volumes, provides opportunities for amenities like parking, bike lanes, bump outs, shorter crossings, and loading zones, and it costs less to construct. The Committee agreed with this sentiment, noting that the two-lane alternative achieves the compromise of reasonable travel times for motorists and space for amenities, and is more implementable than the two-way alternative.

The City of Poughkeepsie representatives were pleased that squaring the weave and a two-way Market Street have been included in this analysis, and that the two-lane concept did not preclude these future improvements. All things considered, the two-lane alternative seems like the best compromise even though it maintains one-way circulation. They noted that circulation is only one consideration of redesigning the Arterials. Improving the walking experience along and across them is also very important for the city's goals. This was reflected in commentary from many Committee members: the quality-of-life benefits with increased space between the roadway and sidewalks and front doors along the Arterials, with opportunities for additional green space, would be a major improvement.

It was suggested by the Town of Poughkeepsie representatives that it would be preferable to start without a separate eastbound right turn lane at Raymond Ave, as they are focused on reducing crossing distances and improving the walking experience in Arlington. They would also like to see how the roads would work further east near Burnett Blvd.

NYSDOT staff recognized the need to balance the competing objectives and needs of all users and requested the traffic simulation models for review. The Committee highlighted the phasing benefits of the two-lane alternative: the first phase, striping, appears implementable in the short-

term, and later phases could address moving curbs, narrowing the roadway width and extending the sidewalk, adding turn pockets, or other alternatives. The ability for short-term action as a means of regaining trust with the community was also highlighted. The Committee also discussed potential funding for capital improvements to implement the project. It was noted that priorities in the new federal administration include climate resilience and environmental justice and equity, which would be goals of this project.

Schedule

The next Committee meeting will be scheduled to review draft material for the public meeting. The public meeting will be scheduled for late spring and will be virtual, similar to the first public meeting. The team will be looking to the Advisory Committee to help publicize the meeting, including identifying neighborhood groups to distribute information.

Next Steps

The consultant team will finalize the assessment, addressing follow up questions raised by the committee, and prepare a virtual “join at your own pace” public meeting, similar to the one conducted for the interchange assessment, with the goal of public release in late spring. At that point, the Committee is asked to assist with wide publication of the virtual meeting. The project is anticipated to conclude by late summer 2021.