Route 9 Stakeholder Meeting, July 22. There is a stakeholder meeting scheduled for July 22 from 2pm to 3pm at MassDOT District 2. Hadley will be sending its Town Administrator, Fire Chief, Police Chief, and Acting DPW Director.

Mayor David Narkewicz of Northampton recently sent a letter to MassDOT advising them that a rapid transit bus service should be a high priority for the Route 9 corridor.

# CITY OF NORTHAMPTON

**Mayor David J. Narkewicz**

City Hall, 210 Main Street Room 12
Northampton, MA 01060-3199
(413) 587-1249
mayor@northamptonma.gov


July 6, 2015

Mark Kolonoski
Environmental Planner, MEPA/NEPA Unit
10 Park Plaza Room 4260
Boston, Massachusetts

RE: Route 9 Corridor Improvements

Dear Mr. Kolonoski

Thank you for inviting us to participate in the Route 9 Corridor Improvements.

As you may know, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) completed a Comprehensive Service Analysis in 2014. One of its key recommendations is that we should eventually create a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) connecting Northampton, Hadley, and Amherst. We strongly embrace this recommendation and have already met with PVTA to explore how to advance this recommendation.

I urge that any Route 9 corridor improvement be specifically designed to optimize bus rapid transit. While I agree that the Route 9 corridor needs attention, I believe that the best way to reduce congestion is to make transit more desirable and that every investment we make should be a step in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David J. Narkewicz
Mayor

## Project Narrative

Project Description

Route 9 in Hadley has been a corridor of noted consideration for some time. Its function as the sole east-west principal arterial in the area requires this roadway to assume the full burden of regional mobility servicing Hadley and Amherst and by extension is the catalyst by which future growth within these communities will be shaped. It is a corridor currently in need of cohesive investment strategy to address the fragmented context which it traverses. Congestion management, regional mobility, safety, accessibility, pedestrian, bicyclist and transit amenities; this project will device and implement an integrated solution respectful of these demands through the comprehensive reconstruction of the key stretch of Route 9 between Middle Street (Route 47) and North/South Maple Street, a distance of 2.25 miles.

To enable these improvements the Project will include a robust project development phase to establish a community supported roadway cross-section (lane use) and associated roadway widening. Improvements will promote healthy transportation options as well as enhance safety conditions, provide additional pedestrian and bicycle amenities, meet current ADA standards and improve overall vehicular traffic operations. To facilitate these improvements the Project also includes drainage, landscaping, relocation of existing retaining walls, installation of granite curbing and associated roadway work.

Need for Improvements

In 2004 MassDOT in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration undertook a Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study (CRCTS). Its purpose was to determine the need for regional transportation improvements as they relate to crossings of the Connecticut River in the Hampshire and Franklin counties. This study included a comprehensive analysis of the potential need and feasibility of additional bridge crossings over the Connecticut River. The study concluded that new bridge alternatives would result in significant environmental and social impacts which outweighed associated traffic benefits. It was recommended that a comprehensive improvement plan for existing corridors could address regional congestion and mobility concerns. Route 9, was identified as the most critical element of this regional mobility improvement plan. The CRCTS recommended short and medium term recommendations along Route 9 which included investing in ITS equipment, TDM strategies and migrating towards a hybrid bus rapid transit program. In the long term the study recommended widening Route 9 to a consistent 4 lane cross section to eliminate bottlenecks and satisfy 2025 projected traffic volumes.

The need to rehabilitate the existing roadway and signage as well as the lack of adequate and accessible pedestrian, bicycle and transit amenities have also been identified as needs along the corridor. The intersections with Middle Street and Mountain Farms Mall are also both high crash location warranting safety mitigation.

The need for improvement is also driven by the critical nature of this area as a resource to the Commonwealth. Route 9 not only provide a limited east west connection between I-91 to the

west of the Connecticut River to the Hadley and Amherst area but also to the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the flagship Institution of the State's higher education system. Improvements along Route 9 have the ability to enhance the vitality of both the abutting land use within these communities but also for the University. This is an opportunity. Improvements along Route 9 could communicate not only functionality, but also the seamless integration of technology which would communicate an exceptional sense of place, promoting smart growth principals within these communities and further enhancing the University's prominence.

Existing Conditions

The study area encompasses Route 9 from its intersection with Route 47 (Middle Street – Station 79+00±) to its intersection with South Maple Street (Station 199+00±). Functionally Route 9, within the project area is classified as a Principal Arterial running in the east-west direction and is under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for the entire length of the project. The Town of Hadley municipal offices, Library, and District Court are located off of Route 9 in the vicinity of the Middle Street intersection. Land use along Route 9 within the study area indicates a place in transition. Elements of the full range of suburban land use types from natural, village center and developed are present. Specific uses include agricultural, intermittent residential and retail/commercial (both big box and smaller uses). The posted speed limits vary from 35 miles per hour (mph) to 45 mph depending on direction of travel and location along the corridor.

Within the Town of Hadley, Route 9 is generally a four lane roadway providing two travel lanes in each direction, with providing exclusive left-turn lanes at major signalized intersections. From west to east, this condition exists from the Connecticut River to approximately 700 feet east of Middle Street, for an area in the vicinity of the signalized intersection with the Lowes driveway and again from the Home Depot driveway signal to University Drive in Amherst. However, sections of Route 9 within the study area is limited to one travel lane in each direction, creating a bottleneck for flow operations along this key regional corridor. Marked shoulders are present throughout the study area with intermittent sections of granite curbing. No exclusive pedestrian or bicycle accommodations are present along the corridor, though pedestrian facilities are provided at signalized intersections, including crosswalks and pedestrian phasing. The lack of non-vehicular accommodations along this key corridor limits the ability of the local and regional population to make healthy transportation choices. This is especially restrictive given the location of the Town center in the vicinity of the Middle Street intersection and the nearby recreational Norwottuck Rail Trail.

There are significant existing environmental constraints along the corridor. One of these environmental constraints is presented by an unnamed brook that crosses Route 9 from north to south through various culverts. The project area is located within the DEP Approved Wellhead Protection Areas (Zone II) of the Town of Hadley public water supply wells.

Alternatives

As this project progresses, various alternatives will be investigated. These will be developed through the review of all pertinent previously prepared information, most notably the 2004 Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study as well as through early coordination and

public informational meetings, gathering of field survey information and value engineering related to balancing proposed traffic operation and roadway improvements with healthy transportation and growth management objectives.

Key alternatives include investigating widening to accommodate 4 travel lanes (two in each direction), similar to adjacent stretches of Route 9, or a three lane alternative (one travel lane in each direction and center turn lanes). The three lane alternative will most closely resemble the conventional "road diet" cross section. General guidelines relative to road diets indicate they are appropriate for roadways exhibiting ADT of 20,000 vpd or less. Volumes along Route 9 historically range between 18,000 to 22,000 vpd in the vicinity. More specific guidance from FHWA indicate the road diet cross section may be considered for roadways with ADT below 25,000 vpd but other factors including peak hour volumes, left turn volumes, alternative by-pass routes and other factors must be carefully considered. This project will undertake this detailed analysis to devise an appropriate solution. It should be noted that the one key component of the 2004 CRCTS which should be revisited is the growth projections which at the time concluded that a 4 lane roadway section is required. The study indicated a 24% growth in traffic volumes was expected between 2002 and 2025. Given that this study was conducted at a period when traffic volumes have now been concluded to have peaked, these growth projections will be revisited and the underlying conclusions should be modified if necessary.