

WJCTC LRTP 2050 Update

Stakeholder Meeting Summary



Overview

On March 12, 2024, the Watertown Jefferson County Area Transportation Council (WJCTC) held a series of kick-off stakeholder meetings for the Long-Range Transportation Plan 2050 Update. A series of three stakeholder meetings were held, each one focusing on a different sector (and a public meeting was held later the same day). All meetings were held at the Watertown City Council Chambers located at 245 Washington Street.

Project Background

The LRTP 2050 Update will develop an integrated multi-modal surface transportation system, giving priority to those elements that serve regional, statewide, and national goals. The WJCTC, Barton and Loguidice, and WSP held these meetings to introduce the project purpose and goals to key community stakeholders that have an interest in the region's existing transportation needs.

Government Stakeholder Meeting (9:00-10:30am)

Fred Frank, from WSP, convened the meeting and asked participants to introduce themselves. Fred then asked who was familiar with the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) process and who had been involved during the last LRTP five years ago. He then gave a brief introduction about what the LRTP is, explained the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and discussed the need to update the long-range transportation plan every five years. Keith Ewald, from Barton & Loguidice, emphasizes the importance of hearing from stakeholders and gathering information for analysis.

The group (see Appendix A for the Attendee List) then discussed the following challenges, issues, and opportunities:

Roadway/Traffic/Freight

- Truck route/freight study should be advanced and carried forward.
 - The issue is economic development and public safety.
 - This has been studied and needs to move forward – should be highest priorities!
 - The WJCTC's Highway Technical Committee will start implementing in coordination primarily with member agencies (and secondarily with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)).
- The city's industrial park only has one entrance and exit.
- Access improvements are needed for the airport.
- Need to accommodate economic development around the airport.

- Best options for Brownville Bridge – information will be forthcoming. The bridge is critical to economic development and should not be slowed down.
- Interstate access to Old Rome State Road – if the Ag park takes off and there is a civic/convention center located there may be a need for direct access from the interstate.
 - There will be a need for another access point.
 - There is significant growth potential and don't want all that traffic added to Arsenal Street.
 - There was some talk that it could extend to Exit 44.
- Review rail siding on the side of Rail Drive at the industrial park.
 - The city has done work on stormwater here; upgrades potentially to main sewer trunks.
 - Raised platform for forklift; it would be bulk or container.
- Intersection at Pearl and Main is problematic - How can this be improved? Roundabout? This was a location identified for improvement in the first LRTP that should be carried forward.
- Discussion around Route 3A
 - Potential for missile defense site to be added to the post in a way that would make 3A unusable (severed at two ends); would need a replacement path that avoids village.
 - Drivers would cut through the Village of Carthage, which would create challenges.
 - Funding for a study is appropriated.
- The railroad overpass on South Massey by I Street has height and width issues.
 - Identified as a constraint in the Truck Routing Study.
 - GPS directs trucks that way and then they get stuck and must turn around in a residential area.
 - See recommendations in truck study; perhaps add truck warning signals.
- Additional growth potential on Exit 46 now that water and sewer have been added.
- New business development is happening between Brownville and the interchange which will most likely attract more businesses; construction of Brownville bridge is currently underway.
- Significant land use shifts: City of Watertown is built out so look outside city lines.
- Corridors of growth: 12F, Arsenal Street to the west and south, Love's truck stop at Exit 47 is adding traffic to an already busy intersection, Arsenal Street traffic may be shifting to other interchanges.
- Roundabout feedback: from an operations standpoint, it's working; much safer.
- Safety – specific areas of concern
 - Along Arsenal Street
 - The new YMCA across from County building with a cut-through and increased traffic has caused accidents.
 - Is an internal drive (not a City street) but cars use it as a main road.
 - All on a City-owned parcel.
 - Volume of traffic is creating the issues – should study the traffic volume and then decide what changes are needed.
- Reconfigure Arsenal/Public Square roadways.

- Was looked at in the Watertown Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) plan in 2018 and didn't go anywhere. The potential project was controversial because the square was redone relatively recently (2008). It may need to be revisited. The idea was to reclaim the south side and island as more pedestrian-friendly spaces.
- There may not be an appetite for change.
- OK for pedestrians but not really designed for them. It's safe, but not convenient. Need to include physical changes to slow cars, make pedestrians safer.
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- Perceived lack of parking
 - A lot is private vs public.
 - Not a great walk to destinations so people feel like there isn't parking.
 - There has been infill development on the north side of Public Square, so adjacent parking lots have filled up.
- Traffic flowing through the Square during commute times and parking in the evening are issues. There are many fender benders and traffic calming could address this.
- The 2028 City Capital Program includes repaving public square. Reverse angle parking and other minor improvements could be implemented at the same time. Traffic signal repositioning would also help.
- There was a road diet implemented on Route 11 from High School to Thompson and Chestnut and then DOT extended out of City.
- Washington Street is a main route into the City and utility work needs to be done.
 - Work is more than the City can afford; needs to be full depth – utilities, roadway, and landscaping.
 - There are ped signals, but cars fly through – kids are trying to cross to school, but there are no physical features to encourage following the flashing lights (like on Factory St).
- West of Public Square there are midblock crossings with close calls – changes are needed, may need beacons or a raised median/crosswalk.

Bike/Pedestrian/Transit

- Housing
 - Need to make sure transportation money is being spent in areas where affordable housing is available, want to make a positive impact with the LRTP.
 - The city changed routes and bus stops/shelters were moved so this negatively impacted accessibility.
 - We want to positively impact people who fall within low-income populations (similar to environmental justice).
- Transit demand is growing among people with mobility impairments.
- Transit needs to be ADA accessible.
- Sidewalks should also be ADA accessible.
- The bike/ped study looked at three ways to extend the Black River Trail to Fort Drum.
 - The biggest obstacle is project sponsors, which can't be the City.
 - Who would maintain it?

Keith reminded the participants to please send any updated plans his way and to please take the online survey for this project.

Transportation/Transit Stakeholder Meeting (12:30-2:00pm)

Keith Ewald, from Barton & Loguidice, convened the meeting and asked participants to introduce themselves. He then asked who was familiar with the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) process and who had been involved during the last LRTP five years ago. Keith gave a brief introduction about what the LRTP is, explained the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and discussed the need to update the long-range transportation plan every five years. He emphasizes the importance of hearing from stakeholders and gathering information for analysis.

The group (see Appendix A for the Attendee List) then discussed the following challenges, issues, and opportunities:

Transit

- Challenges relating to transit in the City (Citibus) are frequency, service span, and schedule (for weekends and 3rd shift).
- County is trying to start rural transit, but county boundaries don't line up with MPO boundaries.
 - They are planning on 4 fixed routes and a first-mile, last-mile demand-based service as a feeder to the routes.
 - Routes will be Carthage into Watertown, Southern Jefferson County into Watertown, Gouverneur Route 11 into Watertown, and Alexandria Bay - Clayton into Watertown.
 - The service will be a feeder to Citibus.
 - They need to order buses but need an operator to sign on and pay the 10% local share.
 - They will need to figure out what % of service will occur within the MPO boundary and then can get funding for that. The County would need to be its own recipient of FTA funds or become a subrecipient of the City.
- 10% local match requirement is transit's biggest hurdle. Potential sources are mortgage tax, bridge tolls, and sales tax.
- Citibus is restructuring routes (adding some stops and another route) to reach BOCES and Samaritan Summit Village. The restructuring is currently in progress, going to community for input, timeline for implementation is this spring/summer, could be incorporated into this LRTP plan update.
- Citibus is at 75-80% of pre-COVID ridership.
- WSP could use O&D data from onboard surveys as it is helpful to justify grant expenditures.
- There is a Fort Drum spouses' Facebook page and there are a lot of people asking for rides to airports - many one-car households in the area.
- Challenging intersections that are difficult for bus drivers were discussed.
- The Arcade and Arsenal stop light was damaged in an accident and taken out.
 - The City Council voted to put it back, but it hasn't been replaced yet – this makes it difficult for Citibus drivers to make the turn.
- A multi-agency (Citibus, county, city, Uber, Lyft, Trailways) transit hub would be ideal.
 - May want to review the STIP for Citibus for the next couple of months.
 - An ideal location would be 'the Mercy site' at 250 Stone Street.
 - Car share and bike share could also be included.

- Groceries and medical appointment trips are mostly covered, but there is not much opportunity for ‘social’ travel.
- There is also an aging community who need to get around. The Volunteer Transportation Center (VTC) does not have many accessible vehicles.
- Citibus has paratransit, but people need more frequency, more options. Outside the City of Watertown there is no paratransit, and no other ADA options are available.
- Citibus buses have bike racks, which are used occasionally, but bike lanes in the area are spotty, and there are not a lot of dedicated bike lanes.

Airport

- Roadways to the airport need improvements.
- Northeast of the airport is a future development site.
- It is a transition point from air to ground transportation.
- There is a need for connecting a new access road to Route 12F.
- Airline employees have a tough time getting to and from work.
- Soldiers can sometimes only get a ride at certain times and have to wait a long time at the airport.
- Airport traffic is driven by flight times.
- There is only occasional freight/cargo.
- Work is currently being done on a new terminal building (in design now, construction later this year).
- They are looking for a low-cost air carrier and when do get one will add a significant amount of traffic – possibly triple traffic and parking area.
- The new terminal will have one jet bridge with two parking locations and a third parking position for ground boarding.

Bridge Authority/Funding/Bike and Ped

- Can money be spent outside the MPO boundary? No, but the boundary is large and irregular outside MPO.
- The new Love's truck stop at I-81 Exit 47 has helped the Bridge Authority immensely; traffic has picked up since pandemic ended almost back to pre-pandemic levels.
- The Bridge Authority faces challenges with traffic patterns and freight needs.
- The Brownville bridge is a NYSDOT project, so there is no local county match.
- Opportunities – bike/ped, more bike lanes, sidewalk repair and snow removal for wheelchairs.

Keith reminded the participants to please take the online survey for this project.

Business Stakeholder Meeting (2:30-4:00pm)

Keith Ewald, from Barton & Loguidice, convened the meeting and asked participants to introduce themselves. He then asked who was familiar with the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) process and who had been involved during the last LRTP five years ago. Keith gave a brief introduction about what the LRTP is, explained the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and discussed the need to update the long-range transportation plan every five years. He emphasizes the importance of hearing from stakeholders and gathering information for analysis.

The group (see Appendix A for the Attendee List) then discussed the following challenges, issues, and opportunities:

- Knowlton Technologies is “shoehorned” into Public Square, which makes daily operations challenging.
- What came out of the truck study?
 - The Black River/Mill/State intersection was recommended to be rerouted for safety.
 - A series of signage recommendations were made to help navigate around Public Square and keep trucks on truck routes.
 - The study included a process for reaching out to Google maps, etc. to get map directions updated.
 - Recommendations were made that would get trucks off residential streets and away from the Square.
- At the corner of Factory & Mill – in the Square – trying to be all things to everybody and has created issues and traffic.
 - Knowlton must have all trucking go to the warehouse at the Jefferson County Industrial Center and have one smaller truck run all day from their building to the warehouse.
 - Traffic backs up consistently on Factory Street – it needs to be redesigned (Factory Street was redone about 10 years ago and the new configuration is not perceived to be as efficient as the old configuration).
- It is a good idea to coordinate affordable housing and transportation.
- Affordable housing occupancy rates drop the further outside of Watertown you get because transportation options are limited, and people are not able to access services.
- Jefferson County is one of the few that doesn’t have a public transportation system – need to get that moving forward, maybe by partnering with neighboring Lewis County, which runs buses into Watertown and Jefferson Community College.
- Marketing funds would be useful to help people know about public transportation services.
- Look at connecting separate pieces of trails that currently exist.
- Rail spurs come from many different directions and belong to many different companies – would hate to lose them.
- Rail capacity has been reduced and rates are more expensive now compared to trucking.
- A connection between Arsenal and Coleman was mentioned.
- There are issues with cyclists using sidewalks, hitting pedestrians. It’s a struggle to sacrifice parking to add bike lanes, especially with diagonal parking.
- There are challenges with electric scooters and a need for better parking solutions.
- Keith reminded the participants to please take the online survey for this project.

APPENDIX A

Consulting Team (at all Stakeholder Meetings)

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation/Organization
Keith	Ewald	Barton and Loguidice
Fred	Frank	WSP
Katie	O'Sullivan	WSP
Tanya	Zwahlen	Highland Planning
Julie	Boasi	Highland Planning

Government Stakeholder Meeting Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation/Organization
Brian	MacCue	City of Watertown
Chris	Barboza	NYS Tug Hill Commission
Kris	Reff	NYS DOT / WJCTC
Goeff	Urda	City of Watertown / WJCTC
Michael	Bourcy	Jefferson County
Michael	Robare	Watertown Housing Authority
Jim	Lawrence	Jefferson County
Mike	Lumbis	City of Watertown – Planning
Barb	Cadwell	NYS DOT / WJCTC
Sharlice	Bonello	City of Watertown
David	Zembiec	Jefferson County Economic Development
Marshall	Weir	Jefferson County Economic Development
Ken	Bibbins	NYS DOT Region 7
Jarrod	Radley	NYS DOT Region 7
Bob	Hagemann	Jefferson County
Logan	Eddy	City of Watertown

Transportation Stakeholder Meeting Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation/Organization
Patrick	Labiendo	Thousand Island Bridge Authority
Sara	Freda	Jefferson County / Lewis County Transit
Aaron	Docteur	NYS DOT Region 7
John	Exford	Volunteer Transportation Center
Grant	Sussey	Watertown International Airport
Jarrod	Radley	NYS DOT Region 7
Brandi	Smith	Volunteer Transportation Center
Kyle	Meehan	City of Watertown / Citibus
Ken	Bibbins	NYS DOT Region 7
Barb	Cadwell	NYS DOT / WJCTC
Kris	Reff	NYS DOT / WJCTC
Jim	Lawrence	Jefferson County

Business Stakeholder Meeting Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation/Organization
Jon	Richards	Knowlton Technologies
Reginald	Schweitzer	Neighbors of Watertown
Michelle	Capone	Development Authority of the North Country (DANC)
Barb	Cadwell	NYSDOT / WJCTC
Kris	Reff	NYSDOT / WJCTC
Jim	Lawrence	Jefferson County

APPENDIX B

Meeting Photos



