

November 11, 2020

Commissioner Joseph Giulietti
Connecticut Department of Transportation
2800 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, Connecticut 06111

Dear Commissioner Giulietti:

The neighborhoods surrounding Manresa Island write to express our disappointment with the supplemental studies conducted by the Department following our meeting with the Walk Bridge team in July, 2020. We submitted a long series of questions about the impact of the project on the site and the surrounding neighborhoods, and we were heartened that the Department decided to further investigate some of the questions we raised. The long-awaited reports issued last week, however, only heightened our concerns.

The Department has demonstrated only that this project is not appropriately located in the heart of residential neighborhoods. The Department has failed to answer the obvious question raised by its own studies: why not construct and demolish the bridge spans at an existing industrial site along the Connecticut coast where there is no impact on the quality of life of any Connecticut resident? This is an industrial project, and all possible industrial alternatives should be explored before focusing on any residential area.

Noise

The noise study predicts that the noises of the various tools used at the site would be in the range of 50-64 dBA, a roughly 10 dBA increase from current background levels. Effectively, the background noise level in neighborhoods surrounding Manresa would double. All day. Six days a week. For up to six years.

Even worse, the noise study significantly underestimates the noise levels the neighborhoods would experience. The study treats the salt marsh between Manresa Island and Village Creek as dry land. For at least the hours surrounding high tide, however, those marshes are almost entirely inundated, and the sound is effectively traveling over water. Using the study's own methodology, the noise level of the Sand Blaster Air Compressor at the MAN-3 location at high tide would be around 75 dBA. That would be like living with a vacuum cleaner running continuously—for six years.

The report makes no mention of East Norwalk. Based on the study's methodology, however, Calf Pasture Beach is also likely to be bombarded with more than 70 dBA six days a week for the duration of the project. That level of noise would significantly diminish one of the great joys of summer for thousands of Norwalk families for years.

Traffic

The traffic study does not address at all the traffic on Woodward Avenue south of Meadow Street—the stretch of road that was one of the major concerns we raised in July. That stretch of road is narrow, with reduced bike lanes, reduced sidewalks, several well-used bus stops, and the only large public park in the area, drawing substantial pedestrian traffic, especially children.

The Trip Generation analysis does not appear to include the vehicular traffic for the loads of materials from the demolition of the existing bridge that we were informed in July would be barged into the Manresa site and then trucked up Woodward Ave to Lajoie's Auto & Scrap Recycling on Meadow Street. Assuming the material being removed is roughly comparable in size to the volume of material brought in for the new bridge, the study would seem to underestimate the number of truck trips on Woodward Avenue *by half*.

The study also treats the fact that Meadow Street, Woodward Avenue and other roads along the route to Manresa already suffer from heavy truck traffic as a reason not to worry about the impact of additional trips—rather than questioning whether it is safe or equitable to add additional pollution and accident risk to already heavily impacted neighborhoods.

Environmental

This restatement of the Department's position appears to involve no additional analysis and as such does not significantly address many of the concerns raised by the neighborhoods in July. What, for instance, happens to the lead paint dust and other contaminants caught by the six-inch gravel layer if Manresa is entirely covered with flood waters as it was during Hurricane Sandy? Or if the site is pummeled by hurricane force winds? Does that lead dust end up in our water and backyards?

Alternate Sites

This analysis was simply baffling in its omissions. Why were no shipyards and/or other industrial sites on the Connecticut coastline considered? The report points to the need to dock barges bringing spans constructed elsewhere in appropriate harbors in Bridgeport or New Haven. But it does not answer the question of why the spans could not be constructed on barges parked there in the first instance. The report's objections to building the spans in more distant locations—such as communication delays, hurricanes and other risks from lack of close coordination—would appear not to apply to distances of 20 or 30 miles. And both Bridgeport and New Haven have existing waterfront industrial sites cut off from residential neighborhoods where it seems this construction and demolition could be safely performed away from children and homes more generally.

We remain opposed to any attempts to use the Manresa site for the building or demolition of the Walk Bridge. These reports are not a genuine attempt to address the concerns of the surrounding communities. They significantly underestimate the effects on and risks to our residents, particularly our children. We are disappointed that the Department has not taken our questions seriously, and we will continue to object to this project.

Sincerely,

Residents of Village Creek, Harbor Shores, Harbor View, and Wilson Point