

# **TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the 10 years since the last Plan, the Town has modified its earlier focus on facilitating traffic operations to also address pedestrian safety and the negative impacts of unsafe driver behavior. While some trends have been difficult to solve, such as widespread cell phone use while driving and the funding of enforcement resources at a pace consistent with the increase in vehicle volume, the Town has been actively redesigning many of its primary and secondary streets to try to influence driver behavior and improve safety for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and mass transit patrons. In addition to these efforts, the Town also provided improvements in consideration of the changing demographics of residents (as discussed in the Demographics chapter). All of these changes, as detailed below, are part of preparing West Hartford to be a sustainable, livable community.

A high quality transportation system is a defining characteristic of a community in which people want to live and conduct business. Successful traffic calming and integrated, “complete” streets are important components of an efficient and safe transportation system; a “complete street” network is one where motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists can safely coexist. Traffic calming is the first step in providing a safe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists and involves the physical modification of the road, such as narrow traffic lanes, chicanes, curb bump outs, speed humps, striped or raised pedestrian cross walks, and center island medians. Though traffic calming measures must be used judiciously, as diversion of traffic and the impact on emergency vehicles must be considered, these modifications inhibit speeding and provide buffers for pedestrians, bicyclists, and mass transit patrons at transfer stations. Each of these alternative modes of transportation, and the quality of West Hartford’s “complete street” network, will become increasingly important in meeting the needs of West Hartford’s residents and business owners and in maintaining the quality of West Hartford’s residential neighborhoods.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

The components of the Town’s current transportation system include the street grid, parking facilities, sidewalks, and mass transit. The table below details these components:

TABLE 1

<b>TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	
<b>Amenity</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Streets (town-maintained, paved) in Miles	215
Sidewalks (concrete and brick) in Miles	245
Traffic Signals state jurisdiction	44
Traffic Signals town jurisdiction	61
Stop Signs	1105
Crosswalk town maintained	440
Crosswalk town maintained at state intersection	14
Crosswalk state maintained	43

- 1) Town maintained streets exclude State Routes (i.e. Route 44 and New Britain Avenue) and are maintained at a pace of roughly 7 miles per year, or on a 30 year cycle. Maintenance includes resurfacing and complete reconstruction. Reconstruction projects are generally timed with replacement of aging underground utility pipes (CNG and MDC); resurfacing projects are generally based on wear and tear. The standard measurement for a Town street is 10’ per lane with no shoulder, versus the State standard of 12’ per lane with a 4’ shoulder. The effect of the Town’s standard is less pavement for cars and bicycles and more sidewalk for pedestrians, which helps protect the ideal of a road traveling past homes versus houses on a highway.
- 2) Sidewalks include concrete and brick pavers. Most sidewalks in commercial centers were replaced with brick to reduce the occurrence of trip/fall accidents particularly among elderly residents (brick shifts less than concrete in frost heaves and around tree roots). In the ten years since the Town began to replace concrete slabs with bricks the total damages paid by the Town to residents who suffered from trip/fall accidents was drastically reduced.
- 3) The Town received Federal Government grant funds to replace 32 traffic signals at the most heavily traveled intersections between 2008 – 2010. Updated traffic signals use a motion detector to trigger a signal change, as opposed to a traditional underground “loop” detector. The motion detector is better suited for bicyclists.
- 4) Most pedestrian crosswalks in commercial centers have been striped and/or raised, lighted, and bounded by ADA accessible curb bump outs to shorten the crossing distance between corners.

**The Street Grid**

West Hartford’s streets are laid in a grid and are classified in terms of traffic volume. The grid, as opposed to other street layouts, is the most easily adaptable to an integrated system, since a grid provides for the greatest number of path options depending on mode of transportation. Street classifications include Interstate, Principal Arterial, Minor

Arterial, Collector, and Local. Each type of street serves a different function, and the street’s attributes (its width, lighting, markings, etc) facilitate its function.

TABLE 2

<b>STREET CLASSIFICATION BY LENGTH</b>	
<b>2006</b>	
<b>Street Classification</b>	<b>Miles</b>
Interstate	3.3
Principal Arterial	10.7
Minor Arterial	31.0
Collector	24.4
Local	157.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>227.2</b>

Interstate Highways

The Town is served primarily by Interstate 84 and vehicles may enter or exit I-84 at six locations in Town: Prospect Avenue, Park Road, Trout Brook Drive, South Main Street, New Britain Avenue, and Ridgewood Road. West Hartford’s east-west arteries service diverted highway traffic during times of heavy volume; for this reason it is important for the Town to support the Hartford/New Britain busway (as discussed below) in order to minimize the impact of this congestion on local roads. The Park Road off-ramp was recently widened to reduce backups exiting Interstate 84 and there is a long range plan to create a full interchange at the I-84 Flatbush Avenue entrance and exit.

Recent development in Bloomfield and Windsor and the widening of Route 218 has brought increased traffic volume on the main north-south arterial streets in West Hartford (Trout Brook Drive, Main Street, and Mountain Road). Alternatively, the completion of Route 9 has decreased traffic on parts of South Main Street and New Britain Avenue in the southwest corner of Town. North-south volume should be closely monitored, as solutions to growing congestion may be needed.

State highways function independently from pedestrians and bicyclists and are not part of an integrated network, unless parking facilities are located immediately adjacent to the on/off ramps. There are no plans at this time to integrate the highways into West Hartford’s “complete street” network.

Principal Arterial Streets

Principal arterial streets connect multiple municipalities and major traffic generators such as shopping centers, universities, and municipal facilities. Streets included in this classification service the longest trips and carry the highest volumes of traffic other than the interstate highways. Examples of principal arterials are Albany Avenue, Farmington Avenue, New Britain Avenue and Main Street. These streets must prioritize the movement of vehicles over the needs of other modes of transportation and consequently are not the most appealing option for pedestrians and bicyclists.

According to the 2000 Census Journey to Work data, roughly 25% of the West Hartford workforce is employed in Town, while the remaining 75% of workers commute to jobs

outside of West Hartford. The Census also indicates that roughly the same number of people that commute out of West Hartford, commute into West Hartford for businesses located in Town. Because of these regional factors, traffic issues at the regional level must be recognized in the long term planning process.

#### Minor Arterial Streets

Minor arterial streets carry significant traffic volumes but tend to service more “in-town” driving than “through-town” driving. Trips on these roads tend to be of shorter length and access to adjacent properties takes a higher priority than on principal arterials. Examples include Trout Brook Drive and Asylum Avenue. Several minor arterial streets have been improved with traffic calming modifications and can be utilized as part of a complete street network.

#### Collector Streets

Collector streets collect and distribute traffic between arterials and local streets. They are typically located within one residential, commercial, or industrial area and examples include Quaker Lane, Webster Hill, and Ridgewood Road. Several collector streets such as Boulevard and Farmington Avenue have been improved with traffic calming modifications and are conducive to pedestrian and bicycle users.

#### Local Streets

The primary purpose of local streets is to provide direct access to the abutting property. Due to their quiet nature local streets are the most welcoming to pedestrian and bicycle users.

### **POTENTIAL TRAFFIC**

Projecting future traffic is an important exercise, but accuracy has been spotty in the past due to unforeseen social, economic, and demographic changes. As noted previously, east-west volumes have been generally stable due to the employment losses in Hartford mitigating the growth in vehicle ownership, and north-south volumes have increased due to road upgrades and development north of Town. These trends are expected to continue for the near future.

It is important for the Town to support effective traffic improvements to Interstate 84 to minimize the congestion that diverts highway traffic to local streets. Although most recent discussion has been to promote alternatives to widening of highways, such as increased bus transit, high occupancy lanes and light rail, these options appear unlikely to offer sufficient congestion relief. In addition to the possibility of added lanes on I-84 where room is available, other effective improvements might include upgraded surveillance for incident management and new or relocated ramps, particularly the advancement of a full interchange at Flatbush Avenue in Hartford. A full interchange at Flatbush Avenue will permit Eastbound and Westbound entrance and exit (instead of the current configuration, which only permits Eastbound entrance and Westbound exit) and thus alleviate north-south travel on local roads in the southeast portion of Town, and in particular between Flatbush and the Prospect Avenue I-84 (full) interchange.

## **MASS TRANSIT**

The Town is well served by 12 fixed bus routes provided by Connecticut Transit. The route along Farmington Avenue has the highest rider volume in the Capitol Region and a high bus frequency throughout the day. Whereas public transit used to be considered a service primarily for the densest areas and for people who lacked automobiles, the emerging concern regarding sustainability may dictate changes in government funding of public transit and personal behavior.

### **Hartford-New Britain Busway**

A busway between Hartford and New Britain is in the design stages. Two stops are planned in West Hartford along New Park Avenue, with feeder buses to serve nearby residents. The intent of the busway is to divert traffic from I-84 heading to and from Hartford and to facilitate access for Hartford and West Hartford residents traveling to New Britain to work or attend college.

### **Dial-A-Ride**

There are various segments of the population who do not have access to the fixed route bus system due to location, age, or disability. The Town supports a Dial-a-Ride paratransit system which is heavily utilized, but there are currently several use restrictions including trip purpose and advance scheduling. In recognition of the Town's large and growing elderly population (as discussed in the Demographics chapter), which has travel desires beyond medical and shopping trips and to points beyond town lines, the Town is currently exploring the feasibility of expanding or redesigning paratransit options.

### **Independent Transit**

The Town is currently studying additional mass transit options that would be provided by an independent operator. These options would serve as alternatives to the Dial-a-Ride and bus systems.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS**

It has been a longstanding community goal to provide a street grid that exceeds the minimum function of funneling traffic from one location to another, by using street improvements to provide a safe and attractive streetscape. The majority of West Hartford's existing grid is easily adaptable for a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths between local streets and commercial and municipal destinations within and across neighborhoods, which will permit vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle travel to safely coexist.

### **Pedestrian Considerations**

All transportation, at some point or another, involves walking; whether to and from home, between a vehicle and a building, or between destinations. Safe pedestrian walkways can enhance the quality of life for residents and business owners alike, as they provide additional access without additional congestion. The extensive planting of trees along most major streets, widened and in many cases bricked sidewalks, raised and lighted crosswalks, signal modernization, and the installation of medians, curb bump-outs and access ramps all enhance pedestrian safety throughout Town. In addition to these

physical considerations, the Town's public schools and Police Department provide educational safety programs to students, in order to maximize their safety and encourage more walking as a means of independent transportation for children, particularly to and from school.

### Bicyclist Considerations

Currently bicyclists, based on findings of the Bicycle Task Force, do not feel safe riding along arterial roads due to unsafe driver behavior, a lack of dedicated bicycle lanes, traffic signals that do not respond to bicyclists, and a general lack of understanding between bicyclists and drivers of how to effectively communicate with one another. The Task Force, in its Master Bike Plan provided to the Town Council in January 2008, makes several recommendations in order to provide a more inviting and safe transportation option for bicyclists.

The existing transportation infrastructure in Town can be adapted for bicycle use. The Task Force recommends using portions of the existing street grid for a bike path connecting neighborhoods and commercial centers throughout Town which can be marked with paint and "share the road" signage. The specific streets and needed connectors are identified in the Task Force's report. The Task Force considers the current quality of the pavement sufficient to enable safe bicycle transit, although increased sweeping and attention to sewer grates, pot holes, and the like along the bike path will be necessary. The Task Force recommends the continued conversion of vehicle-operated traffic signals which do not respond to bicyclists, to video-operated signals which can be triggered by the presence of a bicycle in the travel lane. Many of the Town-owned signals are already in the process of being converted, however the 44 State-owned traffic signals in West Hartford are the vehicle operated type and are not slated for conversion. The Task Force recommends conversion of all of the traffic signals to video-operated technology.

The Task Force addressed the lack of secure bicycle parking around Town and recommended the inclusion of "inverted U" style bike racks at all major destinations, including shopping districts, municipal and recreation centers, and places of employment. The inclusion of bike racks at the most frequented mass transit stops would also be appropriate. The Task Force suggests establishing a "bike rack zoning requirement" along similar guidelines as existing vehicle parking regulations (i.e. a certain number of bike racks per square foot) for all new building applications reviewed by the Town.

Beyond these infrastructure recommendations, the Bicycle Task Force calls for support programming that will allow for the effective use of the bike paths. A Town-wide safety education program addressing appropriate "share the road" behavior for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists should be disseminated through the schools, parks, libraries, Town Hall, the Town's website, and the Department of Leisure Services. Educating Town residents about how to appropriately navigate the "complete street" network (i.e. which mode of transportation has the right of way, the importance of communicating one's direction and how, etc) is an important component of its success. The Task Force also recommends enforcement of laws vital for the safe coexistence of vehicle and non-

vehicle traffic. In addition to education and enforcement programs, the Task Force recommends Town sponsored programs to encourage residents to bicycle more often, like bike-to-school, bike-to-work, and family bike outings. Finally, measuring the success of these recommendations in terms of infrastructure improvements, increased cycling, and the safety of those cyclists, should be monitored and re-evaluated annually.

### Mass Transit Considerations

A shuttle or other similar system should be considered among the three most congested neighborhood commercial districts: West Hartford Center, Elmwood Center, and Bishops Corner. These three districts are located within densely populated residential areas and are destinations for many short, in-Town trips, particularly along the south-north arterials that are experiencing increased vehicle volume. Residents who live in one district can drive, walk, or bike to the shuttle stop and ride to another district. Limiting shuttle service to only these three stops ensures “express” service, so patrons will not become frustrated by multiple stops. This type of closed-circuit shuttle service is designed for high volume, short distance users like those on corporate and college campuses, and provides great freedom for people who either do not have access to a car or who otherwise prefer not to drive. In addition to permitting aging baby boomers to retain an independent lifestyle, an expanded paratransit system will help address the affordability of remaining in Town, since having access to a private automobile would not be required for daily activity. This type of quick-trip, closed circuit shuttle service can reduce congestion along the north-south arterials as well as within the commercial districts.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy recommendations emphasize the maintenance and improvement of existing circulation systems, with a limited number of transportation infrastructure improvements. General transportation planning objectives include the following:

1. Provide and maintain a circulation system which meets the current and anticipated needs of all Town residents and reduces or limits the inconvenience and safety concerns caused by traffic congestion.
2. Encourage regional transportation system improvements to reduce or limit through traffic on local streets.
3. Provide and maintain a circulation system that protects the character and safety of the residential neighborhoods.
4. Promote sustainability and energy conservation by supporting alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, mass transit, and bicycling.
5. Provide off-street vehicle and bicycle parking of sufficient quantity and adequate design for the types of intensity of future commercial and residential development without unduly impacting traffic circulation and residential neighborhoods.

### CONCLUSION

The two largest and fastest growing segments of the population in West Hartford, families with school age children and aging baby boomers, are the two groups that would most benefit from a fully integrated transportation system. A transportation system where vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle transit can safely coexist is a great benefit to

residents, particularly to those who either do not have access to a car or prefer not to drive. Providing current and future residents with the ability to maintain their independence regardless of mode of transportation is a core factor in West Hartford's evolution into a sustainable, livable community and will set the Town apart from neighboring municipalities.

## **GOAL**

Promote an integrated and balanced “complete street” transportation system which provides the best possible service, mobility, convenience, and safety while leaving a positive social, economic, and environmental influence on West Hartford.

## **POLICIES**

1. Utilize the existing neighborhood street grid for the establishment of dedicated walking and bicycle networks from neighborhoods to commercial and municipal destinations.
  - With input from the Bicycle Task Force and other interested parties, establish and identify, with signage or other highly visible markings, “best routes” for bicyclists and pedestrians.
  - Work with employees and various Town agencies to provide recommended bicycle parking at destinations.
  - Maintain pavement and sidewalk quality at a level safe for bicycle and pedestrian travel.
  
2. Implement traffic improvements to maintain neighborhood vitality and character.
  - With input from affected residential neighborhoods, consider traffic calming techniques that will reduce speed, discourage commercial and cut-through traffic, and promote walking and bicycling in residential neighborhoods.
  - Monitor and modify traffic calming techniques for effectiveness.
  - Continue commitment to high level of street maintenance and infrastructure including resurfacing, curb replacement, and improved pavement markings.
  - Encourage dedicated left-hand turning lanes on arterial roadways to improve capacity and safety at busy intersections, which also reduces cut-through traffic. The intersection of South Main Street at Sedgwick/Park Roads should be a high priority.
  - Continue program of upgrading traffic signals, including an ongoing evaluation of timing, phasing, and lane use.
  
3. Support traffic improvements that will take advantage of the Regional roadway network.
  - The Town should support expediting the construction of a full interchange on I-84 at Flatbush Avenue in Hartford in order to reduce traffic congestion and reduce accidents in the New Park Avenue – Flatbush Avenue area.
  - The Town should continue to seek Federal/State funding for modification of the I-84 ramps at Park Road. Moving the ramps together and widening Park Road in that immediate area should significantly improve traffic flow.
  - Encourage the State and Connecticut Transit to study the frequency of bus routes and its effect on rider volume, particular on Park Road and Boulevard, to permit more timely travel on these routes.

- Continue to participate in the State project to improve New Britain Avenue in Elmwood, including left turn lanes, and pedestrian and visual enhancements such as a median and landscaping.
  - Support improvements to Route 44 over Avon Mountain in order to make the road safer and reduce the number of closures which divert traffic to West Hartford streets.
4. Support transportation improvements that enhance the economic strength of West Hartford while protecting the residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage connections between, and consolidate access (entrances and egresses) to, off-street parking facilities in commercial areas (i.e. Park Road, Farmington Avenue) to improve traffic flow and safety, and to reduce encroachment into adjacent residential areas. Attention should also be paid to the location of the access and its proximity to intersections and/or other hazards.
  - Extend Oakwood Avenue to New Britain Avenue to improve accessibility of this underutilized area. This would also reduce traffic at the intersection of New Britain and New Park Avenues.
  - In cooperation with the City of Hartford, consider signal interconnection and turning lanes along Prospect Avenue to maintain traffic circulation and minimize traffic diversion onto residential streets.
5. Support programs that provide and encourage alternate transportation modes on a Town wide basis.
- Although a technology issue rather than a physical improvement, continue to push for statewide approval to permit photo enforcement of red light running and speeding. In other states, this has been proven successful in reducing red light and speeding violations by enhancing limited, traditional enforcement resources and consequently providing a safer and more inviting environment for non-vehicular transportation.
  - Paratransit services should be evaluated continually to support residents who cannot utilize the fixed route bus system and/or who wish to complete in-Town trips without driving.
  - Provide safe walking routes for the general public and particularly to encourage more children to walk to school. Also, consider the feasibility of additional school busing to mitigate potentially unsafe congestion around Town schools.
  - Encourage age-appropriate school “field trips” for the purpose of introducing students to public transit. Students and parents will be more comfortable using the public bus system if the first experience is a supervised, group experience.
  - Encourage age-appropriate school walk and bike events for the purpose of encouraging walking and riding to and from school.
  - Complete the Trout Brook bike path and other bike paths using the existing street grid with the input of the Bicycle Task Force. Develop connections to existing and planned regional greenways and multi-use

trails. Consider bicyclists during street reconstruction and re-striping where reasonable, particularly on non-arterial roads.

- Work with employers and landowners to encourage provision of high security bike racks, as a prelude to future bikeway planning.
6. Support programs that provide alternate transportation modes on a regional basis.
- Identify and obtain funding for additional bus shelter locations at busy transit stops.
  - Support completion of the New Britain-Hartford busway to reduce inter-town traffic on Town streets, and the effect of train crossings on the New Park-Flatbush Avenue intersection.
  - Assist Connecticut Transit in adding or modifying bus routes, such as in the north-south corridor.
  - Support upgrades to regional rail freight lines, in order to reduce truck traffic.