

Getting to Yes On Route 9 Signal Removal

For 7 years, the Middletown community has discussed and debated the state's proposals to remove the traffic signals from Route 9 in Middletown. Disagreements over these issues have largely concerned the changes to exits and entrances necessary to accomplish that goal in way acceptable to the community.

We offer the following general points and principles to the community and its leaders with the hope of approaching consensus as a community and achieving the best long-term solution for City of Middletown.

1. Reaching a mutually agreeable plan with the CT DOT to remove the traffic signals on Route 9 in Middletown is a goal worth achieving.

CT DOT appears determined to removal the signals and prefers to do this with the cooperation of the City. But lacking a viable, preferred plan endorsed by the community, CT DOT has the authority to proceed with a plan that does not require city endorsement. Such a plan would most likely not involve city streets and retain most or all of the exits and entrances to Route 9 where they are presently located. However, such a change would entail constructions of a raised highway at the bottom of Washington Street and Court Street as was proposed in the 2016 CT DOT plan. Such a structure at that location, approximately 23 feet in height, would be a terrible eyesore that would visually block the view of the river from that area of downtown.

Removal the traffic signals is a worthy goal in that it will result in improved air quality in the Harbor Park and nearby areas, reduced noise from Route 9 that comes from accelerating and slowing traffic, and fewer accidents. Traffic signal removal will also reduce the temptation for Route 9 southbound motorists to exit at West Street in Cromwell and use Newfield Street to approach the city and residential streets in the North End to reach the Arrigoni Bridge.

2. A raised highway at the bottom of Washington and Court Streets is a completely unacceptable outcome and avoiding it compels us to find a better solution to signal removal.

3. A wide, attractive pedestrian deck over Route 9 aligned as a continuation of the walkway between Riverview Plaza and the police station is essential.

Such a pedestrian deck has been a plan of the city for many years, as it would allow attractive pedestrian access between Main Street and the riverfront that is currently prevented by the presence of Route 9.

Working with CT DOT toward an agreeable plan to remove the traffic signals offers the prospect that CT DOT will pay for such a pedestrian deck.

4. Exits should be located as close as possible to the routes and destinations intended by the motorists using those exits.

According to 2018 CT DOT projected estimates for 2020, the 2 northbound exits in the downtown area (Washington Street and Hartford Avenue) are utilized by approximately 500 cars per hour at peak evening rush hour. The vast majority of those vehicles (perhaps 90%) are headed either west on Washington Street/Route 66 or to the Arrigoni Bridge.

At the very least, the northbound exit at Hartford Avenue needs to be retained for traffic over the Arrigoni Bridge. This may be achieved by signaling the entrance to and exit from northbound Route 9 at this location. Another possibility would be to install a roundabout at the bottom of Hartford Avenue that would allow continuous on and off traffic and allow northbound vehicles on Route 9 to reverse direction and go back to the Harbor Drive exit.

A northbound exit onto River Road is acceptable if it is visually appealing and maximizes safe pedestrian and bicyclist access. There is also the prospect that, in exchange for this concession by the City of Middletown, CT DOT would pay for improvements in this area that would showcase the riverfront and serve as an attractive gateway to the south end of the downtown area.