

North Street Bridge

Presentation to the Board of Selectman

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North Street Bridge Coalition

Objectives

The North Street Bridge project must be delayed in order to provide time to address the many outstanding concerns relating to safety, schools, residents, traffic congestion, construction timetable, water drainage, emergency services, abutting properties, businesses and economic issues.

The construction timetable and traffic disruption for 18-24 months is unnecessary. These are not just D11, D10, and D7 issues. These issues concern the entire Town as well as commuters and people from neighboring towns that come to Greenwich for schools, shopping, restaurants and other business.

This is a catastrophe about to happen. It is avoidable.

All of these issues must be managed in a more satisfactory, thorough and public manner. In the following presentation, we address these concerns and provide recommendations.

We ask that the current DPW timetable be delayed in the best interests of everyone in the community of the Town of Greenwich.

Recommendations

- Traffic - Conduct an independent traffic study, not only a count, but to evaluate and manage traffic flow during construction. Including but not limited to safety of residential side streets which are not meant for high volume traffic, identifying appropriate alternative routes, and peak flow times on North Street.
- Construction Timeline - Task WMC to find an alternative solution to complete the construction of the bridge in a significantly shorter timeline. If WMC cannot offer a solution, find another engineering firm that can.
- Communication and Coordination with Essential Services (emergency vehicles, healthcare, schools etc) – Develop a comprehensive plan with input from heads of emergency services and school officials to schedule vehicle flow during construction to mitigate traffic disruption. Including parent pick up/drop off and bus scheduling for the 8 schools and over 7,000 students and staff in the immediate area.
- Water Drainage – Ensure that any bridge design will accommodate future storm water infrastructure improvements in the Brothers Brook Drainage area, develop a plan to address those improvements and commit to a timely schedule for funding in the Town budget (or seeking funds from state/federal).

Addressing Resident and Community Concerns

We submit this Petition to express our concerns and strong opposition to the current plans for the repair and reconstruction of the North Street Bridge (NSB).

Concerns:

- Traffic Congestion and Safety
- Emergency Vehicles and Public Safety Issues
- Schools, Students, and Parents Impact
- Construction Time Period
- Water Drainage
- FAQ

Traffic Congestion and Safety

Concerns:

DPW Plan - One lane at the bridge will remain open with a signal light providing for alternating lanes of traffic (ALT). The signal light will include preemption which is intended to enable immediate passage of emergency vehicles.

NO ONE BELIEVES THIS WILL WORK.

It will create extreme traffic congestion and safety issues.

By closing one lane, North Street capacity will be reduced by 50%. By creating alternating lanes of traffic, the lane that is open will be reduced by 50% to provide for the traffic in each direction. This means the roadway for traffic flow in each direction will be reduced by a total of 75%. Also, traffic will move slowly as it goes through the construction site.

Traffic Congestion and Safety (continued)

Alternating Lanes of Traffic (ALT) will result in drivers randomly seeking alternative routes on small side streets off of North. Recently, when North was re-paved, traffic randomly diverted to small streets and continued traveling at 30 mph which is the speed of North. Residents were concerned about their safety with no town measures to manage flow in place like speed bumps or signage.

What is the daily traffic on North? DPW is using a traffic count of 7,000 cars/day which is data from the CTDOT in 2020 during Covid. However CTDOT data from August 2024 shows Annual Avg Daily Traffic (AADT) at 9,500. This average figure understates peak traffic counts on specific days and months like the school year.

DPW has stated that Accelerated Bridge Construction methods (ABC) will be used for the construction of the NSB. CTDOT has established “ABC Decision Making Process” recommendations for Detour Time Delay, Alternating Traffic Delay Time, and Reduced Lane Delay Time. **The CTDOT states that “Alternating Lanes of Traffic should NOT be used for average daily traffic volume in excess of 8,000 vehicles/day”.** **Comment:** Alternating Lanes of Traffic is successfully used on country roads or roads with little traffic. It does not work for roads such as North Street which is one of the major traffic arteries of Greenwich.

Traffic Congestion and Safety (continued)

Traffic congestion currently occurs numerous times a day specifically at this location. Below photo is taken near the North Street Bridge with traffic backed up for nearly a mile from the stoplight at Parsonage/Fairfield even with both lanes open. Imagine the backup with 75% of the roadway closed.



Emergency Vehicles and Public Safety Issues

DPW has stated that North Street must remain open with one lane for emergency vehicles. This makes construction more difficult which is their reasoning that the NSB project will take 18-24 months.

This thinking is wrong and instead of solving problems, it will almost certainly create problems.

By closing one lane and with alternating lanes for the open lane, we believe that rather than assuring that North will be open for emergency vehicles, it will result in it being effectively closed for emergency vehicles as they will find it impossible to use North due to the extreme congestion.

The Fire/Police/GEMS Dispatcher will likely just route emergency vehicles around the segment on North Street from North Maple to the traffic light at Parsonage/Old church and North. Why build a plan around an event that likely will not happen?



Emergency Vehicles and Public Safety Issues (continued)

The NSB has a 4 ton weight limit. Trucks that weigh in excess of this amount constantly cross over the NSB as the weight limit is not being enforced. This creates a safety problem. Greenwich fire trucks weight from 55,000 lbs (27.5 tons) up to 80,000 lbs (40 tons) when fully loaded as they are when going to a fire. When asked about this, DPW responded that there is a State of CT law exempting emergency vehicles. That is not the point.

The Fire Dept has multiple station locations and can send emergency vehicles to Northeast Greenwich from the Fire Station at North Street/Merritt Parkway and other Fire Stations. Police and GEMS can also access Northeast Greenwich from multiple locations. **The point is these emergency vehicles should not even be crossing the NSB to begin with yet DPW believes NSB must remain open for emergency vehicles which is the reason for the protracted 18-24 month construction period.**

Schools, Students, and Parents Impact

The DPW website for the North Street Bridge states that there is one school within 0.9 miles of the NSB. **Comment:** Within one mile or so of the NSB and the choke point at the traffic light at Parsonage/Old Church and North Street, there are 8 schools with over 7,000 students/staff.

In its recent FAQ, DPW stated that “the major traffic generators in the surrounding [NSB] area such as schools, Greenwich Hospital, local religious centers have all been contacted”. **Comment:** We met with schools representing over half of the 7,000 students/staff and found that the schools had limited or no knowledge of any such contact and knew very little about the DPW plans/timing/potential problems.

One school official understood the total NSB construction time would be 6 months, not 18 to 24 months.

Schools, Students, and Parents Impact (continued)

According to the DPW FAQ, the Route #1 bridge replacement (East Putnam Avenue bridge adjacent to Hillside Road where Greenwich High School is located) will start in the Fall 2025 and overlap with the replacement of the North Street Bridge for up to 18 months resulting in Greenwich High School being surrounded by extreme traffic congestion problems.

What will all of this extreme traffic congestion mean for school start and departure times, parents driving students to school, and buses. **No one knows.** Among other issues, there have been no discussions with the TWU Local 100 (bus drivers union in Greenwich) who might need additional hours.

The 8 schools and over 7,000 students/staff plus 14,000 parents of the students means that the school issue alone impacts over **20,000 students/parents/staff which is nearly one-third of the population of Greenwich.**

Students/buses/parents come from all over Greenwich to GHS, the only public high school in Greenwich, to the three private schools, Greenwich Catholic, Temple Sholom school, NSS and CMS. The North Street Bridge problem is not just a D7, D11 and D10 problem. **It affects all of Greenwich.**

Construction Time Period

The DPW contract with WMC Engineering describes certain Town goals. **Comment:** There are no goals in the WMC contract requiring NSB construction to be completed within the shortest time period possible, there are no goals about minimizing traffic disruption, there are no goals relating to water drainage issues, there are no goals to minimize the numerous problems, including environmental, for abutting properties, and there are no goals for DPW to coordinate plans with the 8 schools in the area.

Initially, WMC Engineering said the construction time would be 18 months. Now DPW is stating the construction time is 18-24 months. What changed? **Will it change to 24-36 months?**

DPW states that NSB construction will utilize Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) methods which is why the construction time period is only 18-24 months. **Comment:** It does not make sense. More complex bridge construction than NSB is frequently done using ABC methods and completing construction within two months or less. For example, in May 2024 a fuel truck exploded on I-95 near Norwalk. The damage was catastrophic and meant I-95, and the bridge over I-95, had to be rebuilt. I-95 had to be closed, but using ABC construction methods, it was re-opened within 30 hours. Now the bridge has been rebuilt without any traffic disruption on I-95 during the construction period.

Construction Time Period (continued)

DPW selected the lowest cost bidder WMC for design services.

Funding for the bridge is coming from the State, the Town of Greenwich is bearing minimal cost for this project. An inexpensive, long timeline should not be the priority. It should be safety, schools, traffic and business disruption, expediency, transparency and residents. **Comment:** The Town must consider alternative design plans and/or engineering firms.

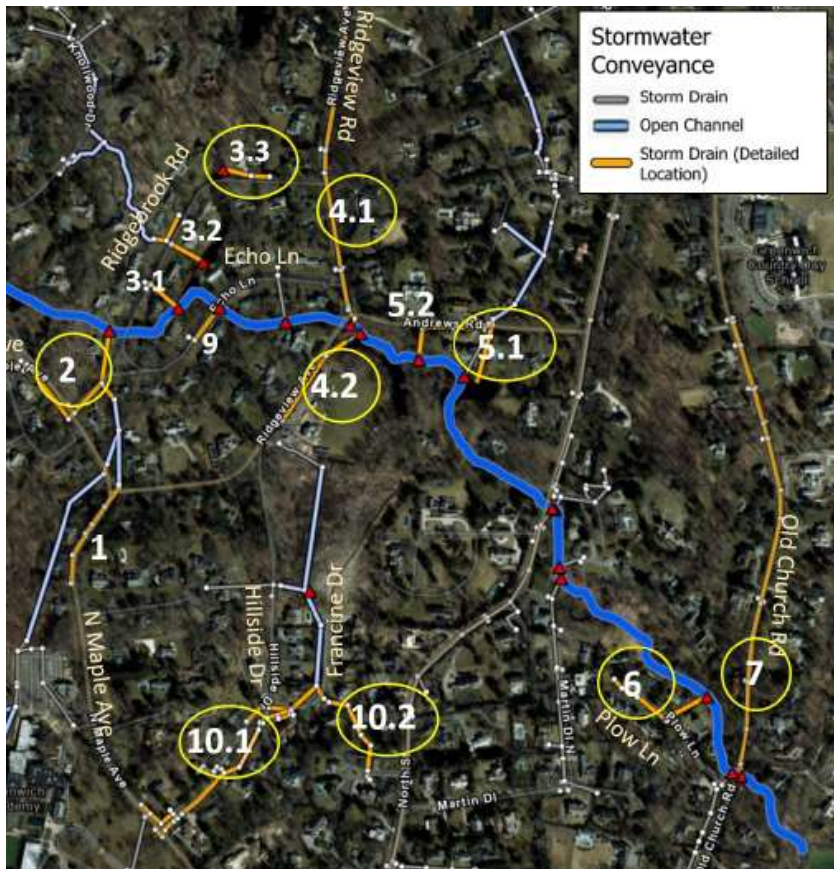
Water Drainage

The North Street Bridge is an integral part of the Brothers Brook Drainage Area which includes Hillside Dr, Ridgebrook Rd, Echo Ln, North St, Old Church Rd etc. These areas are plagued with substandard infrastructure as studied and documented by CDM Smith for the Town in 2022 and presented in a public meeting on January 19, 2023.

CDM Smith identified 9 projects to address vastly sub-standard town infrastructure that provides water management for hundreds of homes in this area and results in frequent and severe flooding for many residents. Is this bridge being constructed in a way to accommodate the CDM Smith study? **Comment:** Undertake a comprehensive plan that addresses the CDM Smith recommendations to remedy insufficient infrastructure tied to this project. The Town would be remiss in only repairing the bridge without adjacent and connected infrastructure and should commit to a plan to address and fund these projects in a timely manner.

State grants are being used for North St Bridge, why not explore additional funding through state or federal grants to finance these projects.

Water Drainage (continued)



DRAINAGE SYSTEM ALTERNATIVES

Profile #	Location Description	Target Capacity	Existing Capacity ¹
1	N. Maple Ave by Ridgeview Ave	10-Year	25-Year
2	N. Maple Ave by Ridgebrook Rd	10-Year	2-Year
3.1	Ridgebrook Rd – south (by house #16)	25-Year	5-Year
3.2	Ridgebrook Rd – middle (by house #20)	25-Year	2-Year
3.3	Ridgebrook Rd – north (by house #27)	10-Year	5-Year
4.1	Ridgeview Ave – north of brook	10-Year	2-Year
4.2	Ridgeview Ave – south of brook	10-Year	5-Year
5.1	Andrews Rd – east	10-Year	1-Year
5.2	Andrews Rd – west	25-Year	2-Year
6	Plow Lane	10-Year	5-Year
7	Old Church Road – north of brook	10-Year	2-Year
8	Husted Lane	10-Year	10-Year
9.1	Echo Lane – west (by house #10)	25-Year	1-Year
9.2	Echo Lane – east (by house #18)	25-Year	< 1-Year
10.1	Hillside / Francine Drive – SW branch	10-Year	1-Year
10.2	Hillside / Francine Drive – SE branch	10-Year	2-Year

Recommendations

TRAFFIC - An independent Traffic Management Study must be done to determine the current average daily traffic volume, and the impact on residents on small side streets, commuters, business traffic to downtown Greenwich, emergency vehicle access to get to patients, Greenwich Hospital, Nathaniel Witherell, plans for fire trucks from multiple locations, and the many issues relating to the 8 schools with 7,000 students and staff (and the 14,000 parents of these students). An independent Traffic Management Study would evaluate and recommend how to manage alternative traffic routes meant for this volume of traffic that are acceptable to everyone involved rather than simply leaving it to the random behavior of drivers or to Waze/Google Maps. Safety measures like speed bumps and lighting must be in place for any residential streets at risk of being used by drivers.

DPW is currently initiating a process for a traffic count before and during construction. **We do not want a traffic count that will just monitor the problems during the construction/traffic crisis.** We want to avoid the problems before they occur by conducting an independent Traffic Management Study. A shorter duration complete closure of NSB would enable re-routing instead of dangerous traffic activity on a bridge under construction.

Recommendations (continued)

EMERGENCY VEHICLE AND PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES – DPW needs to proactively work with leaders of emergency services departments to develop a plan during construction and explore options that do not require one lane closure as well as traffic re-routing that does not pass over a construction site or a bridge that is currently deficient in weight limitations and unsafe for these vehicles.

SCHOOLS, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS IMPACT – There must be an overall plan that is developed in coordination with the schools to account for pick up, drop off, busing. There needs to be time for parents to be informed of all the issues relating to the NSB and how it will affect them. The schools need to have time to fully understand the NSB proposal, and how to react to it with regard to start and dismissal times, bus and parent drop-off and numerous other issues, and busing.

Recommendations (continued)

CONSTRUCTION TIME PERIOD - DPW has stated that the plan of 18-24 month construction period and alternating traffic lanes while construction is in progress was proposed by WMC Engineering (DPW's consulting engineering firm) not by DPW. This plan is ill-conceived and totally unnecessary. We have had multiple meetings with a major engineering company with offices in NYC, multiple East Coast states and international offices, and it is a company that know the characteristics of NSB very well. The company has a Bridge Division. This company believes that construction could be completed during the summer in approximately two months taking into consideration the issues relating to the relocation of utilities, water drainage, new abutments and the existing street line (easements). The Town needs a second opinion and needs to hire an engineering firm to advise on alternative plans that make sense for the entire Greenwich community.

WATER DRAINAGE - DPW must ensure that any bridge design will accommodate future storm water infrastructure improvements in the Brothers Brook Drainage area. It must commit to a timely plan to address, fund and complete CDM Smith 2023 study recommendations including making an effort to seeking funds from state/federal programs. These projects are already on List 3A of the Stormwater Capital Improvement Projects and should be moved up for funding.

DPW – FAQ’s on NSB website

DPW added FAQ’s to the North Street Bridge webpage on the Town of Greenwich website. The FAQ’s do not address several of the critical issues, and many of the FAQ’s do not provide the full perspective. Please see our Comments below:

FAQ - Route #1 bridge (East Putnam Avenue) adjacent to Hillside Road (Greenwich High School location)
- The State has indicated it will start utility relocation in the Fall 2025 and start bridge replacement in Spring 2026.

- **Comment:** That means the work on this State bridge will overlap and will be done at the same time as the work on the North Street Bridge for up to 18 months.

FAQ - Project Timeline – DPW has stated that the construction period is 18-24 months. The timeline shows starting construction on NSB in Spring 2025 and completing construction in the Fall 2026 which would be 18 months. 24 months would mean completing construction in the Spring 2027.

- **Comment:** Spring 2027 (24 months) is not shown on the Timeline.

FAQ's (continued)

FAQ - Traffic Impact Questions – The FAQ states that “as the road is remaining open during this construction a detour is not applicable, furthermore people who wish to avoid the alternating 1-way traffic at the construction zone will naturally find alternative routes that best fit their commutes. Traffic GPS applications such as Waze, Google Maps etc. will be notified by DPW of the construction at this location and will filter traffic accordingly.” **Comment:** This is not acceptable. An independent Traffic Management Study needs to be done to determine acceptable routes, not drivers randomly finding alternative routes or Waze/Google Maps determining how traffic should divert. Waze/Google Maps will divert traffic to small side streets that were not meant for such a high volume of traffic.

FAQ - Why hasn't a traffic study been conducted? DPW Answer: “A traffic study is only conducted when there is a change in use, for example a parcel conversion from residential to commercial.” **Comment:** The NSB construction will result in new traffic patterns as drivers seek to avoid the congestion. The rationale is the same as “change in use” –i.e. a traffic study should be conducted.

FAQ's (continued)

FAQ - How much traffic increase would be anticipated as a result of this project. DPW Answer: “DPW does not anticipate a change to the traffic as a result of the project. No additional traffic generators are anticipated.”

- **Comment:** DPW is missing the point. It is correct that there may not be more traffic, HOWEVER because the North Street roadway will be reduced by 75% to each lane of traffic, and traffic will slow while crossing the construction site (not 30 mph which is the speed limit on North), the traffic flow will be severely diminished. This will be similar to traffic construction or an accident on the highway when traffic is closed in one lane. It results in a huge backup of traffic. The issue is not increased traffic, the issue is extreme traffic congestion for the existing traffic.

FAQ's (continued)

FAQ - Why can't a full road closure be used to shorten the construction time? DPW Answer: “After meeting with emergency services that operate in the Town of Greenwich, it was made clear that the road must remain open to maintain emergency response given that North Street is a Principal Arterial Roadway.”

- **Comment:** The Federal Highway Administration defines a Principal Arterial Roadway as an Interstate highway or a roadway that serves major metropolitan areas. All roadways have detours from time to time as needed for construction. Again, consider the example of the repair of I-95 and the bridge at Norwalk in May 2024. I-95 is an Interstate highway and thus a Principal Arterial Roadway. It was closed with a detour to enable rapid repair.

FAQ's (continued)

FAQ - "ABC with pre-cast units is more costly."

- **Comment:** The State of CT Department of Transportation has established standards for the "ABC Decision Making Process". Based on a number of project cost inputs, it determines if the ABC process is more or less expensive than conventional construction methods. In many cases, ABC is less expensive because of the reduced construction time. If a project can be reduced from 18-24 months to two months or less, there can be significant cost savings.

FAQ - Hydraulic Questions: DPW Question: Will the larger span of the bridge lead to increased flooding downstream? **DPW Answer:** "A temporary structure will be installed upstream of the bridge that mimics the span and opening of the current bridge. This structure will stay in place and will only allow the same amount of water through as existing conditions, once modifications can be made downstream this temporary structure can be removed." **Comment:** There is a lot of uncertainty about this. The WMC Task 4 – Final Plan will not be received until October. Again, **No one knows** until the Final Plan is submitted. In the meantime, DPW is trying to move forward with NSB.

FAQ's (continued)

DPW Question: “What would be the cost to improve the conditions downstream of the North Street Bridge to allow for the complete removal of the proposed upstream temporary restriction and what other factors would play a role in the process?”

- **Comment:** What would be the cost? How will it be funded? **No one knows.** DPW did not provide answers to these questions!

FAQ's (continued)

DPW Answer: “FEMA regulations do not permit a negative impact downstream as a result of the project, therefore a restriction is proposed adjacent to the new bridge to mimic existing conditions. The Town’s consultant, CDM Smith, has complete additional modeling and is preparing a report with recommendations for improvements downstream of the North Street Bridge with associated costs so that in the future the restrictions may be removed. **The report is anticipated to be completed in the next 6 months.** Simultaneously, DPW will present these recommendations to the Flood and Erosion Control Board, so these improvements may be added to the already existing Stormwater Capital Improvement Projects Prioritization Ranking Sheet.”

- **Comment:** The North Street Bridge cannot proceed until these issues are clear. The CDM Smith report with recommendations will not be received for at least 6 months. What will it recommend? **No one knows.** In the meantime, DPW is moving forward to send out the RFP for NSB construction.

FAQ's (continued)

Schools: The DPW FAQ did not mention anything about Schools.

Comment:

There are numerous important issues that must be taken into consideration:

- Start and Dismissal Times?
- How will the increased traffic congestion affect the time that it takes students/staff to get to school?
- Safety issues?
- Busing? Will routes need to change? Will bus drivers need to drive additional hours. Have these issues been discussed with the TWU Local 100 which is the bus drivers union for Greenwich.