

# ConnDOT to restart planning for Merritt interchange overhaul

By **ROBERT KOCH**  
HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) will head back to the drawing board next year in the effort to rebuild the Merritt Parkway/Main Avenue/Route 7 Connector interchange in Norwalk.

ConnDOT this year decided to “re-initiate” the project and has started the process of selecting a new environmental planning consultant/engineering firm, according to a project status provided by the state agency.

The decision restarts the long-planned but never realized project but construction is hardly imminent.

“At this point, it’s very speculative to guess at when construction would start and how long it would take. It’s probably a three to four-year project to construct,” said ConnDOT spokesman Kevin J. Nursick. But there is a “minimum of five years out

before any construction would begin.”

Nursick emphasized that those time frames are “very speculative.”

Under the reinitiation of the project, ConnDOT anticipates selecting the new consultant in early 2015. The consultant will assess the potential environmental impacts of the project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA).

The work will include preliminary engineering and a “formal revisiting of design alternatives.”

In 2009, when ConnDOT decided to postpone the project after evaluating the department’s capital plan and funding levels, a design alternative known as 21C enjoyed “broad public support.”

Nursick said that design remains “front and center.”

Alternate 21C, if built, would improve the existing

# Interchange planning ahead

## From Page A1

connections and create the four missing connections between the parkway, Route 7 Connector and Main Avenue. The design would minimize impact on wetlands and existing bridges, and wouldn't employ high-flying ramps, ConnDOT Principal Engineer Richard B. Armstrong said at a public informational meeting at Norwalk Concert Hall in February 2009.

Alternative 21C and other options will be considered when the environmental assessment and preliminary engineering work resumes next year.

"Extensive public involvement and engage-

ment with community stakeholders will guide the project development," according to ConnDOT.

After the NEPA and CEPA processes are complete, ConnDOT will advance into final design and engineering. The construction schedule remains to be determined.

A decade ago, ConnDOT began work on an earlier overhaul plan for the interchange but work came to a halt.

In 2005, the Merritt Parkway Conservancy, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Norwalk Land Trust, Norwalk Preservation Trust and Norwalk River Watershed Association sued the Federal Highway Administra-

tion (FHA) in effort to downsize "the massive new interchange project on the historic Merritt Parkway at Route 7 and Main Avenue in Norwalk," according to the Parkway Conservancy.

In March 2006, U.S. District Court in New Haven found that the FHA had not met its legal "obligation to ensure that all possible planning was done to minimize harm prior to approving the interchange project."

Since the lawsuit, the DOT considered 15 designs. In 2008, attention focused on Alternate 12A and the Cloverleaf Plan with Ramp D Option No. 2. Silvermine residents labeled the latter design destructive to their neighborhood.