



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06131-7546



Office of the
Commissioner

March 2, 2016

An Equal Opportunity Employer

The Honorable Bob Duff
State Senator
Twenty-Fifth Senate District

The Honorable Chris Perone
State Representative
One Hundred Thirty Seventh District

The Honorable Gail Lavielle
State Representative
One Hundred Forty-Third District

The Honorable Fred Wilms
State Representative
One Hundred Forty-Second District

The Honorable Bruce Morris
State Representative
One Hundred Fortieth District

The Honorable Terrie Wood
State Representative
One Hundred Forty-First District
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Senator and Representatives:

Subject: Norwalk Common Council Resolution
Replacement of Metro-North Railroad Bridge over East Avenue
State Project Nos. 170-1375 and 300-0033
City of Norwalk

This is in response to your inquiries regarding the recent resolution passed by the Norwalk Common Council that urges the Department of Transportation (Department) to rescind its plans to lower the East Avenue roadway to provide a vertical under-clearance of 14'-3" in conjunction with Metro-North bridge replacement Project No. 170-1375.

It is currently the Department's intention to replace the East Avenue Bridge, as well as perform repair work on the Osborne Avenue rail structure, under the same construction contract with the replacement of the Metro-North Railroad "Walk" Bridge, a movable swing bridge over the Norwalk River. The Department understands the public concerns expressed through the Common Council resolution and has strived to balance the competing interests of preservation and compliance with current bridge and highway geometric design standards by proposing the 14'-3" clearance.

The design standard for vertical bridge clearance for a new bridge over East Avenue is 16'-3". East Avenue is classified as an Urban Principal Arterial which means its primary function is to convey traffic from local and collector roads to an expressway. The proposed vertical clearance of 14'-3" represents a deviation from the 16'-3" standard. An increase in vertical clearance to 16'-3" was considered early in the design process but it was determined that this would require further depression of the roadway and require a pump station for roadway drainage. The 16'-3" standard would also require major redesign of the adjacent East Norwalk train station driveway with loss of parking spaces.

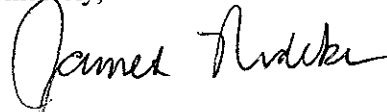
The new bridge with a vertical clearance of 14'-3" will allow the passage of legal height vehicles with a minimum factor of safety. It should be noted that the configuration of the roadway under the bridge (i.e. a low spot) requires more than 13'-6" immediately under the bridge to allow a legal vehicle to pass. Furthermore, the proposed limited clearance of 14'-3" will still require the new bridge to be "posted" for low clearance. When the work is complete, legal height truck traffic will be able to stay on East Avenue. As you are aware, today legal truck traffic with vehicular heights greater than 12'-2" traveling on East Avenue with a destination south of the railroad tracks must by-pass the existing railroad bridge structure using local streets; Fort Point Street and Bridge Street for example. These roads are narrow, residential and not well suited to carry truck traffic. However, the vertical clearance under the Fort Point Street rail bridge is 14'-3" and can otherwise accommodate legal vehicular heights. The Department believes strongly that it has found the proper balance relative to the vertical clearance in this location. If the East Avenue rail bridge project was designed with an underpass clearance of 13'-6", the bridge would be "posted" for 13'-3" underpass clearance in accordance with Department practices and would not accommodate legal truck heights of 13'-6". Legal truck traffic would continue to use local roads.

With respect to alternative warning devices, the Department would not artificially limit vertical clearance on a new bridge to a substandard height for the sole purpose of impeding truck traffic where proper vertical clearance could otherwise be obtained. Generally, over-height detection systems, while used in some locations, are considered interim measures or where the necessary vertical clearance cannot be obtained for other engineering reasons such as roadway drainage or significant operational or property impacts. Additionally, over-height detection systems typically require sufficient area for a large truck to turn around and, if installed where there is insufficient area for trucks to safely turn around, dangerous conditions and/or significant traffic congestion can result.

In summary, the Department believes that increasing the vertical vehicular bridge clearance to 14'-3" will enhance public safety and strikes a desirable balance between design standards and local site constraints. This bridge has a long history of overhead strikes from trucks that the Department is committed to reducing. There were twenty-seven reported overhead truck strikes between 2010 and 2015, all of which required documentation, field inspection, damage assessment and structural adequacy determination. Besides the risk of impact damage to the railroad bridge and truck occupants, there is potential risk to Metro-North passenger rail traffic and interruption of train service until bridge impact damage is assessed and repaired when necessary.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at (860) 594-3000.

Sincerely,



James Redeker
Commissioner

cc: Mayor Harry Rilling
Councilman John Kydes
Councilwoman Shannon O'Toole Giandurco
Councilwoman Michelle Maggio
Western Connecticut Council of Governments