

DANBURY BRANCH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TASK 5

ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

STATE PROJECT 302-008



SECTION 17: SCENIC ROADS

JUNE 2009

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INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the presence and potential impact to scenic roads that traverse the study corridor. In Connecticut, there are two categories of scenic roads: State Scenic Highways, which are determined for eligibility and managed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CT DOT); and Local Scenic Roads, which are selected by municipalities and protected by municipal ordinances. Both of which are recognized for archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational or scenic qualities. There are one (1) State Scenic Highway and two (2) Town Scenic Roads in the 1,000 foot wide study corridor. There are other Scenic Roads in the various Towns but outside the corridor and they are also noted in this Tech memo.

Although there are considerable variations of the definition and eligibility standards of a local scenic road, among the municipalities which have scenic road ordinances, the CT DOT has put forth specific criteria for potential state scenic highways. According to the CT DOT, a scenic highway must “abut significant natural or cultural features such as agricultural land or historic buildings and structures which are listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places, or afford vistas of marshes, shoreline, forests with mature trees, or other notable natural or geologic feature which singularly or in combination set the highway apart from other state highways as being distinct. The Highway shall have a minimum length of one (1) mile and shall abut development which is compatible with its surroundings. Such development must not detract from the scenic or natural character or visual qualities of the highway area.” (CT DOT)

Regulatory Context

State Scenic Highways

The State Scenic Highway Statute oversees Connecticut scenic highways and is administered by the CT DOT through a Scenic Road Advisory Committee. Proposed projects and improvements to scenic highways are assessed by the committee. If no possible adverse effects are determined to result, then a proposed project or improvement will proceed without changes. However, if any adverse effects to the scenic quality of the road that have been determined to be likely to result the committee’s findings are reported to the Commissioner of the CT DOT. Any possible modifications that would minimize or mitigate the unwanted changes to scenic highways are recommended by the committee, however, the commissioner makes the final determination.

Town Scenic Roads

At the local government level, the Town Scenic Highway Statute allows a municipality to adopt a scenic road ordinance in order to:

- Determine the eligibility and specific criteria of and designate a town scenic road and/or assign the power to designate scenic roads to the Planning Commission or Planning and Zoning Commission; and
- Evaluate and approve or deny any proposed changes or improvements that may alter or detract from the scenic character of designated town scenic roads (Connecticut Trust)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

State Scenic Highways

There is only one State scenic highways located within the 1,000 foot wide study corridor. Two others are in towns along the corridor but not in the 1,000 foot area. These Scenic Highways are listed below by town from south to north.

Norwalk

The Merritt Parkway (Route 15) is designated as a scenic road at the state and national levels. The Parkway crosses over the Danbury Branch in Norwalk, between exit 39 (US 7 Expressway) and exit 40 (Old US 7/Main Street). The Merritt Parkway is designated a scenic road easterly from the New York state line to the Housatonic River in Stratford. Relative to the railroad, the Parkway is an overhead structure at Milepost 3.41 and is about 0.2 miles south of the Merritt 7 Rail Station.

The Merritt Parkway was constructed from 1935-1940 and integrates the natural landscape of its surroundings by meandering through hills and valleys. The parkway features 69 unique bridges that are primarily constructed of reinforced concrete but also include stone-faced bridges and steel span bridges. These bridges are aesthetically pleasing with their Art Deco style and sloped and curved wingwalls. One of these featured bridges in Norwalk, shown below, is East Rocks Road over the Merritt Parkway and is located approximately one mile to the east of the Danbury Branch crossing.



East Rocks Road over Merritt Parkway in Norwalk, CT (www.nycroads.com/roads/merritt/)

ConnDOT in Project No. 102-269 is reconstructing the interchanges at exit 39 (US 7 Expressway) and exit 40 (Main Street) in Norwalk. The Danbury Branch passes under the Merritt Parkway between these interchanges. At exit 39 ConnDOT plans to construct new ramps that will improve access to and egress between the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 Expressway.

Currently, exit 40 is the oldest cloverleaf interchange and ConnDOT plans to rebuild this to improve access between Main St., route 7, and the Merritt Parkway.

Reconstruction of the overall Route 7/Main Avenue/Merritt Parkway Interchange is not anticipated to begin until the Summer of 2014 at the earliest. This will allow adequate time to conduct the necessary National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and finalize design plans for that project.

There are no scenic elements along the Merritt Parkway where it passes over the Danbury Branch. Figures 1 and 2 are views along the Merritt Parkway.



Figure 1: View Along Merritt Parkway Looking East



Figure 2: View Along Merritt Parkway Looking West

Wilton (not in Study corridor)

Route 33 in Wilton is Scenic for 4.90 miles from the Wilton/Ridgefield town line, in a southerly direction to the intersection with Old Ridgefield Road #1. The intersection is about 0.20 miles west of the Danbury Branch. The closest station to this scenic road is the Wilton Station. The southerly end near Old Ridgefield Road #1 and the intersection of Route 33 and Route 106 is recognized by the town of Wilton and the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District. The old Town Hall (Built in 1832), Congregational Church (Built in 1790), original Congregational Church Parsonage (Built in 1832), along with three residential homes are located along Route 33 in the Historic District. Figures 3, 4, and 5 are views along Route 33 just west of the study corridor.



Figure 3: Beginning of Route 33 Scenic Road



Figure 4: View Along Route 33 Looking West With Church On Right



Figure 5: View Along Route 33 Looking East With Church On Left

Redding (not in Study Corridor)

The scenic portion of Route 53 in Redding runs from the Redding/Weston town line in a northerly direction to the southern junction of Route 107 to the east of the corridor. The closest station to this scenic road is the Branchville Station. This densely wooded, rural section of Route 53 provides a beautiful array of colors during foliage season. It meanders along the west side of the Saugatuck River and Saugatuck Reservoir and offers breathtaking views.

Town Scenic Highways

Not all towns intersected by the study area corridor have adopted a scenic roads ordinance to date. According to the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials and other local officials, the following scenic roads are located wholly or partially within the study area corridor or in the respective towns:

Norwalk

An inventory of town scenic roads designated by the City of Norwalk is not currently available, either from on-line resources or by the City of Norwalk Planning and Zoning Department. The City of Norwalk Customer Service representative only gave Sillow Street as a designated scenic road. Sillow Street is not in the study corridor.

Wilton

There is one Town designated scenic road in Wilton, and it intersects the study corridor.

- Seeley Road, which has been designated by the Town of Wilton as a town scenic highway traverses the study area corridor north of the Cannondale Station. It begins at Route 7 and runs easterly, crossing the Norwalk River. Further east is an at-grade crossing of the Danbury Branch. The area within the study corridor is generally wooded. Figures 6 and 7 are views of Seeley Road in the corridor area.



Figure 6: Seeley Road At Grade Crossing Looking West Toward Route 7



Figure 7: View Along Seeley Road Looking East From At Grade Crossing

Redding

There is one road within the study area corridor that has been designated by the Town of Redding as a scenic highway.

- Marchant Road, from Simpaug Turnpike to Umpawaug Road features gentle terrain, meadows, stone walls, and mature trees. Figures 8 and 9 are views along Marchant Road to the east of the railroad tracks.



Figure 8: View Along Marchant Road Looking West Toward Study Corridor



Figure 9: View Along Marchant Road Looking East

There are also several roads in Redding that are not within the study corridor but have been designated by the Town of Redding as scenic highways.

- Side Cut Road, from Station Road to Redding Road (Rt. 53) is in a broad valley with a stream and mature trees. Although not in the study corridor, it begins just to the east. Figures 10 and 11 are views at the intersection of Station Rd. and Side Cut Rd.



Figure 10: Intersection of Station Road and Side Cut Road



Figure 11: View Along Side Cut Road Looking North

- Cross Highway, from Hill Road (Rt. 107) to approximately 700 feet easterly of Newtown Turnpike (hills and valley, meadows, mature trees, historic buildings, distant views).
- John Read Road, from Lonetown Road (Rt. 107) to Black Rock Turnpike (Rt.58) (upland terrain, meadows, stone walls, woodland, dirt road).
- Lee Lane, from Redding Road (Rt. 107) to end (gentle terrain, mature trees, narrow winding road).
- Limekiln Road, from Redding Road (Rt. 53) to Lonetown Road (valley to rugged upland, woodland, distant views, winding road).
- Mark Twain Lane, from Diamond Hill Road to end (upland slope, stone walls, meadows, mature trees narrow road).
- Old Hattertown Road, from Poverty Hollow Road to Newtown Town Line (broad valley, meadows, woods, winding dirt road).
- Pine Tree Road, from Black Rock Turnpike (Rt. 58) to Easton Town Line (narrow stream valley, rushing brook, wooded hillsides, narrow road).
- Poverty Hollow Road, from 500 feet south of Stepney Road intersection to Newtown Town Line (valley terrain, rushing stream, ponds, waterfalls, meadow forest).
- Sherman Turnpike, from Newtown Turnpike to Sanfordtown Road (valley to hilltop, steep hillsides, woodland, narrow partly-dirt road).
- Topstone Road, from Chestnut Woods Road to Umpawaug Road (rolling terrain, woodland, meadows, mature trees, dirt road).
- Wayside Lane, from Redding Road (Rt. 107) to fork and thence on both branches to Umpawaug Road (ledgy terrain, woodland, stone walls, narrow winding roads).
- Whortleberry Road, from Gallows Hill Road to Limekiln Road (ledgy upland terrain, woodland, narrow winding partly-dirt road).

Ridgefield

There are no scenic highways designated by the Town of Ridgefield that are located wholly or partially within the study area corridor. There are, however, several roads in Ridgefield that are not within the study corridor by have been designated as scenic highways.

- Florida Road, from 600 feet north of Brook Lane to Florida Hill Road (narrow valley, ledgy terrain, woodland, stream, winding road).
- Lounsbury Road, from Ivy Hill Road to Cains Hill Road (upland terrain, mature trees, stone walls, distant views, winding road).
- Ned's Mountain Road, from Ned's Lane to Old Mill Road (rough terrain, woodland, narrow winding road).
- Old Branchville Road, from Branchville Road (Rt. 102) to same (loop) (hilltop to valley, rough terrain, woodland, partly winding road).
- Pelham Lane, along Wilton Town Line, from Nod Hill Road to Beechwood Lane (fronts on National Historic Park) (upland, gentle terrain, stone walls, historic site, narrow road).
- Silver Spring Road, from West Lane (Rt. 35) to St. John's Road (gentle terrain, woodland and golf course, winding road).

Danbury

There are no scenic highways designated by the Town of Danbury that are located wholly or partially within the study area corridor. There is, however, one road in Danbury that is not within the study corridor by has been designated as a scenic highway.

- Long Ridge Road, from Church Road northerly approximately 5,800 feet to a point approximately 1,300 feet south of the intersection with Brushy Hill Road. (upland valleys and ridge, nature trees, stone walls, sharp curves, narrow road).

Bethel

To date, the Town of Bethel has not yet adopted a town scenic highway ordinance.

Brookfield

To date, Brookfield has not yet accepted any proposed town scenic highways.

New Milford

There are no town scenic highways designated by the Town of New Milford that are located wholly or partially within the study area corridor. There are, however, several roads in New Milford that are not within the study corridor by have been designated as scenic highways.

- Barker Road, from West Meetinghouse Road to Squires Hill Road (hilly terrain, woodland and meadow views, stone walls).
- Buck's Hill Road, from paved portion to Merryall Road (wooded upland area along shoulder of stream valley, dirt road).
- Burnett Road, from Cherniske Road to Kent Town Line (upland valley, pastoral and mountain views).
- Cherniske Road, from Squires Hill Road to Sawyer Hill Road (hilly upland terrain, distant views).
- Crossman Road, from Buckingham Road to Upland Road (valley to hillside, forest and meadow, dirt road).
- Front of the Mountain Road, from Brown's Forge Road to Long Mountain Road (steep hillside, woodland, distant views, narrow dirt road).
- Hine Road, from West Meetinghouse Road to Long Mountain Road (high ridgeland on Long Mountain, woodland, meadow, distant views, dirt road).
- Indian Trail Road, from West Meetinghouse Road westerly approximately 4,400 feet (valley and hillside, woodland, meandering dirt road).
- Judd's Bridge Road, from Mine Hill Road easterly approximately 3,700 feet (varied terrain, woodland, dirt road).
- Legion Road, from Lillis Road southerly approximately 3,115 feet (ridge top, meadowland dirt road).
- Lillis Road, from Second Hill Rd. (loop, entire length) (gentle upland terrain meadowland, dirt road).

RESOURCES

Scenic Road Designation, Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation official website
<http://www.cttrust.org/index.cgi/146>

Connecticut Scenic Roads, Connecticut Department of Transportation official website,
<http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?A=2094&Q=305520>

Scenic Road Inventory, Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, official website,
http://www.hvceo.org/transport/transport_allscenicrd.php

[Maps Live.com](http://www.mapslive.com)