

Route 9 Stoplight Removal Community Resistance Report

Submitted to the City of Middletown by Wesleyan's Comparative Urban Policy Class

November 19, 2024

Executive Summary:

The largest sources of resistance to the DOT stoplight removal plans are: 1) ignorance about the current plans, 2) lack of trust in the DOT, 3) belief that Rt. 9 drivers are being prioritized over Middletown residents, and 4) concern about traffic impacts (safety, environment, noise, in-town congestion) if stoplights are removed.

Main Recommendations: 1) Implement traffic-related solutions (light timing, traffic cameras, trooper presence, etc.) to address current traffic issues and build trust with community members and businesses, 2) increase communication with the community about successes and plans.

Methodology:

Wesleyan's Comparative Urban Policy Fall 2024 began by exploring the Route 9 Repository website put together by the previous year's class for background information. The class first met with Howard Weissberg (Acting Director of Public Works for City of Middletown) to get an overview of the project from the city's perspective and learn how our class could be helpful to the City of Middletown and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. We determined that the best use of class resources would be to try to identify the sources of community resistance to the current DOT plan to remove the stoplights on Rt. 9 in Middletown, so the City and the DOT could better address community concerns.

In September and October, the class identified stakeholders who were likely to be impacted by the stoplight removal process, targeting those who were likely to oppose the plans in order to better understand their resistance. Individuals and groups of students met with thirteen residents, five business owners, and five community activists.

Because many of the concerns related to traffic, especially truck traffic, groups of students conducted traffic surveys of three high-volume intersections related to the stoplight removal project during two half-hour time periods during the morning and evening commutes (8:45-9:15 am and 4:45-5:15 pm).

The qualitative and quantitative data were compiled, and this report along with supplemental material were given to Howard Weisberg and posted to the Route 9 Repository website on November 19, 2024.

Qualitative Data Findings

- Ignorance about the DOT plans is high. Most residents interviewed in the Bridge/Miller district and along deKoven Dr. didn't know about the project or had significantly incorrect information about it.
- Trust in the DOT is low among both residents and business owners. Many people interviewed preferred to remain anonymous. Common reasons given for the low level of trust included: bad earlier plans for stoplight removal, poor communication about the project, and sense that DOT is prioritizing Rt. 9 drivers over Middletown residents/business owners.
- Residents and business owners worried about increased traffic volume and the noise, pollution, and safety risks it would cause for their neighborhoods.
- Business owners were concerned about business disruption during long construction and availability of parking during and after construction.
- Residents and activists were concerned about environmental impacts—high traffic volume near waterfront, physical disruption of the capped Omo superfund site by construction, disruption and pollution of Sumner brook by construction and high traffic volumes.

Quantitative Data Findings:

- Main St. @ Hartford Ave is busiest intersection by far: 2,000+ vehicles, almost 200 trucks (50 big) passed through during the two half-hour observation periods (8:45-9:15am and 4:45-5:15pm)
- Far more northbound Rt. 9 traffic coming out of Middletown @ Hartford Ave (than southbound), especially big trucks and commercial vehicles
- Congestion is made worse by illegal behavior (blocking intersections, running red lights)
- Traffic came in large waves, shifting from very congested to empty.
- From Crash Data: accidents are rare and generally non-fatal. Earlier projects on Rt. 9 appear to have significantly reduced accidents.
- From Google Maps Data: Congestion can add 5-10 min to Rt. 9 driving during rush hour.

Recommendations (from community members and our traffic observations):

Traffic-related recommendations:

Easy/Obvious recommendations:

- Fix light timing on deKoven Dr. at Washington St. exit – shorter deKoven light
- Fix light timing on Main Street by Hartford Ave. In evening, Bridge → Rt. 9 light needs to be much longer light because traffic heading was often backed up, frequently blocking the intersection
- Install traffic cameras to stop blocking and red light running at intersections

- Install traffic cameras/add occasional State Troopers presence on Rt. 9 reduce speeding
- Improve signage at Washington St. and Hartford Ave. intersections
- Improve signage on Rt. 9, both directions, to help drivers know that a light is coming

Harder/Need more study recommendations:

- Rt. 9 drivers turning into Middletown usually take the first opportunity to do so, so the 'second shot' exit has much less traffic. Perhaps reduce the Rt. 9 → Middletown exits to one each direction. For South bound-drivers, they could turn right into Middletown at Hartford Ave, but would no longer be able to turn Right at Washington St. (They could also take the Rt. 17 exit if needed). For North-bound drivers, they could turn left at Washington street, but the left turn into Middletown would be eliminated at Hartford Ave.
- Perhaps add additional physical barriers at Washington St. & Rt. 9
- Perhaps block/patrol N. Main cut-through at Main St. intersection
- Perhaps widen the shoulder on Rt. 9 to speed accident recovery times
- Perhaps add rumble strips to Rt. 9 to improve safety

Communication-related recommendations:

- Direct outreach to residents abutting Rt. 9
- Create and distribute fliers about (a) improvements already made and (b) upcoming plans
- Reach out to business owners with same information: (a) improvements already made and (b) upcoming plans

Data Supplements:

Google Maps—Commuting/Traffic Times:

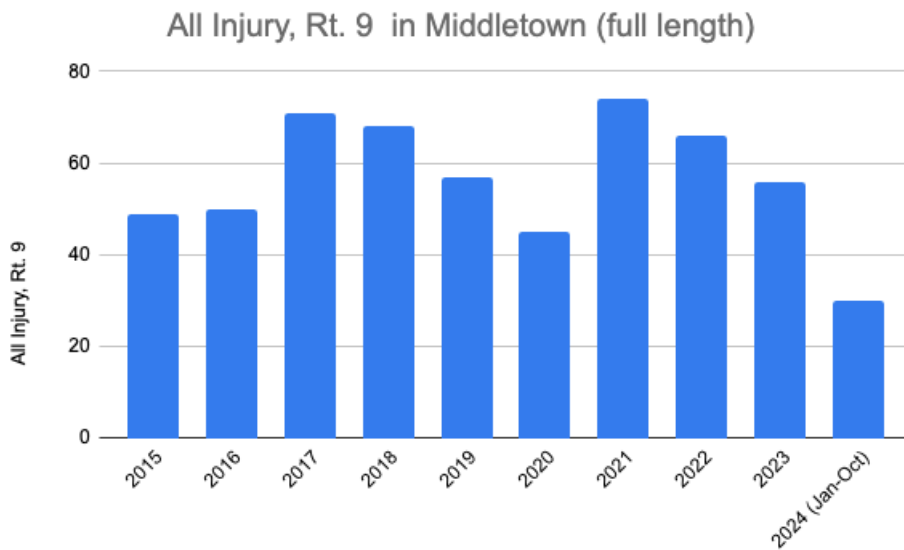
CT Valley Hospital to Cromwell Automotive

- Tuesday 19th @ 5am 6 min
- Tuesday 19th @ 8am 9-16 min
- Tuesday 19th @ 5pm 8-14 min

Cromwell Automotive to CT Valley Hospital

- Tuesday 19th @ 5am 6-8 min
- Tuesday 19th @ 8am 7-14 min
- Tuesday 19th @ 5pm 7-10 min

CT Crash Repository:



In the last ten years there has been only one fatal injury (2017) in the relevant section.

Of the 30 injury-causing accidents so far in 2024:

- 8 at or near Hartford Ave intersection
- 6 at or near Washington St. Intersection
- 2 at or near Harbor Dr. Ramp
- 12 were elsewhere on Rt. 9 (not in section with lights)

Most accidents with injuries in the area are no longer on Rt. 9.

January – October 2021

“any/possible injury” in CT
Crash Data

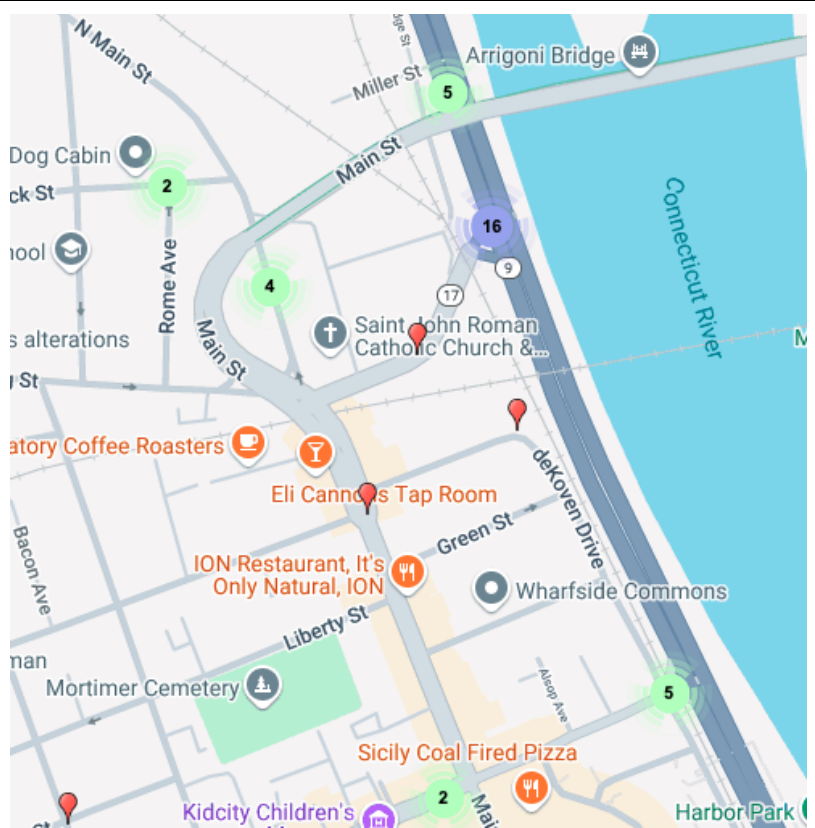
Rt 9 & Hartford = 21

Washington St. = 5

N. Main = 4

Total = 30

Note: Rt. 17 → Rt. 9 = 21



January – October 2024

“any/possible injury” in CT
Crash Data

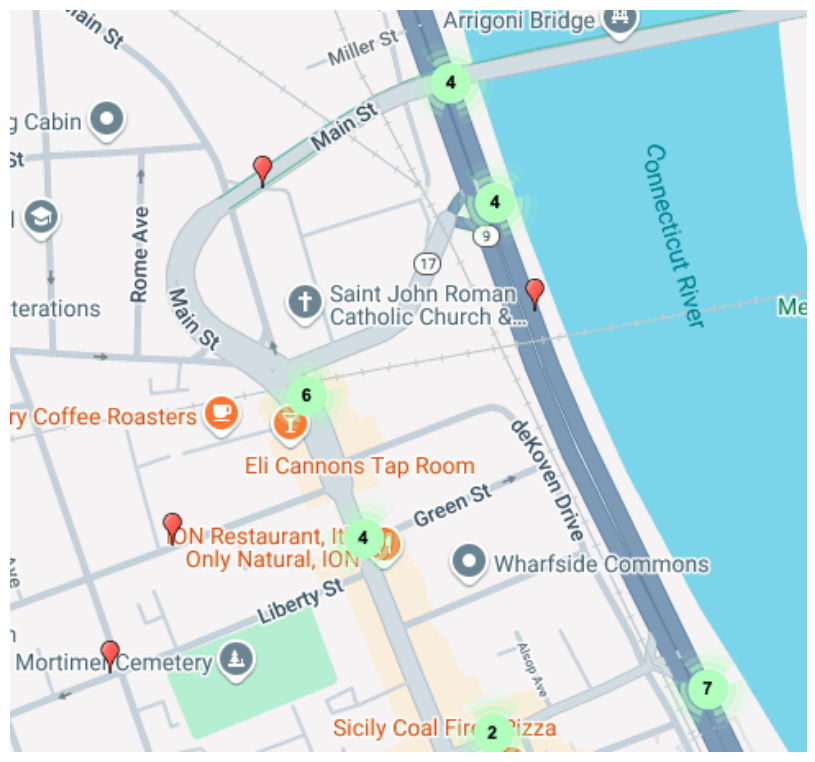
Rt 9 & Hartford = 8

Washington St. = 7

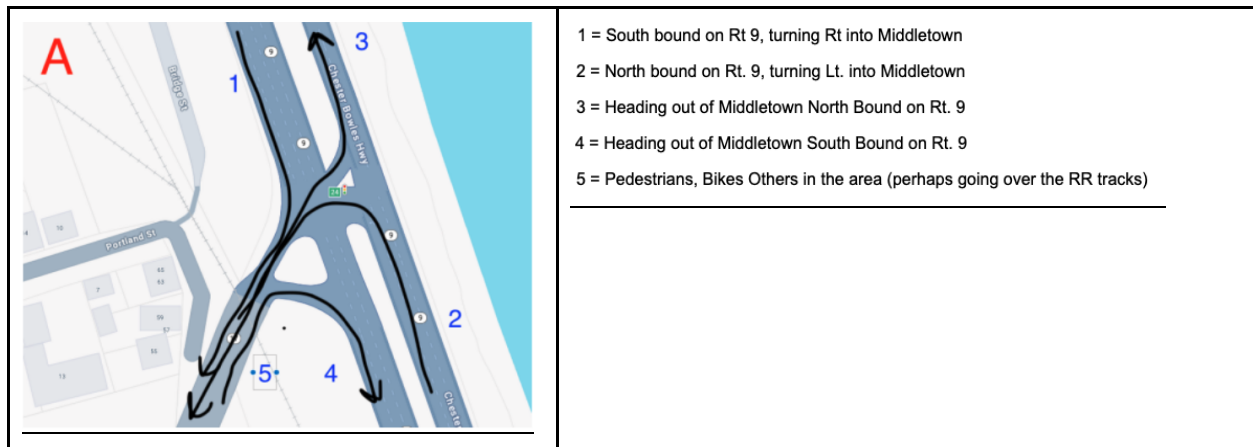
Main & Hartford = 6

Total = 21

Note: Rt. 17 → Rt. 9 = 18

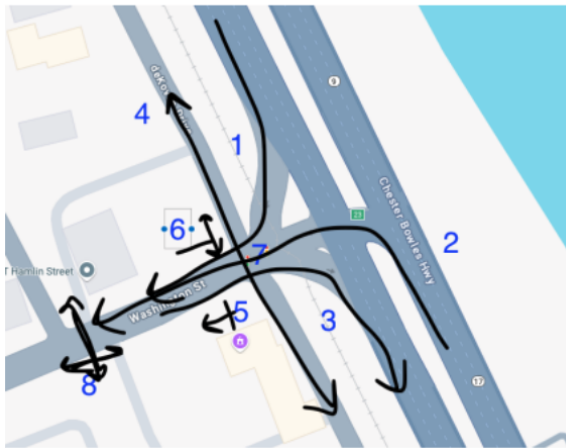


Traffic Survey of Three High-Volume Intersections:




#	Date	Time	Big Trucks / Bus	Commercial Vehicles	Pass. Vehicles	Bikes	Peds	Comments
1	10/25	8:45-9:15 am	12	20	199	0	0	
2	10/25	8:45-9:15 am	4	5	51	0	0	
3	10/25	8:45-9:15 am	15	20	218	0	0	Far more northbound traffic coming out of Middletown, especially big trucks and commercial vehicles
4	10/25	8:45-9:15 am	1	8	67	0	0	
		Morning	32	53	535			Total Morning = 620
1	10/23	4:45-5:15 pm	0	1	434	0	0	
2	10/23	4:45-5:15 pm	5	7	73	3	0	
3	10/23	4:45-5:15 pm	7	2	331	3	0	Started slowing towards the end of 30 mins
4	10/23	4:45-5:15 pm	0	1	55	0	0	
5	10/23	4:45-5:15 pm						N/A
		Evening	12	10	459			Total Evening = 481
			44	63	994			TOTAL = 1101

β = Intersection Washington St. and Rt.9



- 1 = South bound on Rt 9, turning Rt into Middletown
- 2 = North bound on Rt. 9, turning Lt. into Middletown
- 3 = Heading out of Middletown South Bound on Rt. 9
- 4 = deKoven through traffic (either/both ways)
- 5 = deKovan → Washington Street
- 6 = Washington Street → deKovan
- 7 = deKovan → Rt. 9 and Rt 9 → deKovan
- 8 = Any and all pedestrian/bike traffic

#	Date	Time	Big Truck / Bus	Comm. Vehicles	Pass. Vehicles	Bikes	Peds	Comments
1	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	2	3	25	0	0	
2	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	4	2	59	0	0	
3	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	9	25	109	0	0	one motorcyclist
4	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	0	4	58	0	1	
5	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	0	1	15	0	0	
6	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	0	0	5	0	0	
7	10/23	8:45-9:15 am	1	1	71	0	0	
8	10/23	8:45-9:15 am					3	
		Morning	16	36	342			Total Morning = 394
1	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	0	0	37	0	0	The light works in 3 cycles with 1 devoted to DeKoven cross traffic. 30-45 seconds where no cars would go b/c the DeKoven light was green, but there were no DeKoven cross traffic vehicles. This led to Washington St becoming very backed up
2	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	2	10	129	0	0	
3	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	4	1	104	0	0	
4	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	0	1	117	0	0	
5	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	0	0	23	0	0	
6	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	0	0	24	0	0	
7	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	1	2	74	0	0	South rt 9 going S on deKoven
8	10/17	4:45-5:15 pm	0	0	0	0	8	
		Evening	7	14	508			Total Evening = 529
TOTAL			23	50	850			TOTAL = 923

C = Main St. at St. John's							<p>1 = From Route 9 to Arrigoni Bridge</p> <p>2 = From Route 9 to Main Street (southbound)</p> <p>3 = From Main Street (northbound) to Route 9</p> <p>4 = From Arrigoni Bridge to Route 9</p> <p>5 = From Arrigoni Bridge to Main Street (southbound)</p> <p>6 = From Main Street (northbound) to Arrigoni Bridge</p> <p>7 = Any pedestrians/bikes crossing the intersection any direction</p>
							
#	Date	Time	Big Truck s / Bus	Comm. Vehicle s	Pass. Vehicl es	Peds	Comments
1	10/14	8:45-9:15 am	6	27	192		
2	10/14	8:45-9:15 am	4	6	45		Number of trucks and larger vehicles increased at 9:10am.
3	10/14	8:45-9:15 am	3	3	50		
4	10/14	8:45-9:15 am	10	9	161		
5	10/14	8:45-9:15 am	7	15	173		
6	10/14	8:45-9:15 am	6	14	97		35 cars and 7 smaller trucks to both enter and exit N. Main St. Vehicles entering/exiting N Main St was 50%-50%.
7	10/14	8:45-9:15 am				1	
		Morning	36	74	718		Total Morning = 828
1	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm	1	5	88	0	
2	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm	1	0	70	1	
3	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm	5	6	163	3	
4	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm	3	13	269		This was the direction most stuck in a traffic jam and then blocking cars coming from direction 6 (and 3), because they'd just stand in the middle of the intersection. Also, cars from both this direction and 3 would be going sometimes past their green light, causing near accidents.
5	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm	2	14	224	3	
6	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm	4	10	321	0	1 car turned into this direction from the opposite lane, which was probably illegal.
7	10/24	4:45-5:15 pm					2 buses used secret corridor (N. Main St.) and 1 car straight from Main Street.
		Evening	16	48	1135		Total Evening = 1,199
		TOTAL	52	122	1853		TOTAL = 2,027