

# Equity Focus Group Summary

<b>Subject</b>	Equity Focus Group
<b>Date and Time</b>	October 27, 2021 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
<b>Location</b>	Zoom meeting
<b>Presenters &amp; staff</b>	Laura Toole, WSP Joe Segale, VTrans Katharine Otto, VTrans Mike Winslow, ACRPC Ken Robie, Dubois&King Bryan Pounds, WSP
<b>Focus Group Participants</b>	Elise Shanbacker, Executive Director of Addison County Community Trust Cindy Seguin, Regional Manager of VocRehab Vermont Helena Van Voorst, Executive Director of the United Way of Addison County Monica White, Commissioner of Department of Aging, Disabilities and Assisted Living Ingrid Pixley, Counseling Services of Addison County

## Introductions

Joe Segale, Director of Planning and Research from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), welcomed participants and highlighted the need to consider equity concerns and emphasize that equity is a Study consideration.

Laura Toole, WSP facilitator, thanked everyone for participating and asked participants to introduce themselves.

## Presentation

Laura asked participants if they are familiar with the previous studies.

One participant is a Vergennes resident and sat in on a previous study meeting in 2019.

One participant also participated in 2019 study meeting and is Vergennes resident.

Laura gave a short presentation on the previous study and explained the work of a PEL Study.

Previous alternatives that were considered were referenced in the presentation but it was explained that all alternatives will be considered.

Presentation outlined Equity groups that need to be considered. Participants were asked if there are other groups that need to be included?

- People living with disabilities
- Aging populations
- Families with young children
- One participant asked how does equity connect the goal of moving the route or alternatives?
  - Study team explained that the user experience and the impact of changing routes and traffic may impact certain populations.
- A participant suggested that Xusana Davis (Executive Director of Racial Equity, State of Vermont) be part of the discussion for a racial justice perspective.
  - Study team noted that she has been engaged for this project.

### Discussion

Participants were asked; how is the experience of the current roadway for users?

- Otter Creek mobile home park has 73 mobile homes. There is also a number of low-income housing in Vergennes and Middlebury. In Vergennes, along Main Street, there are many old buildings that are exposed to the noise and fumes from the road.
- Mobile home park is multi-generational and residents struggle with walkability and job access.
- Residents in Otter Creek should be part of discussion.
  - Study team noted that notices of the Study and notices about the public meeting have gone out. Would they want a discussion to be held with them or would they like to be part of the larger discussion?
    - Participants said; it depends on the resident.
- Recommendation given to speak with Kelly Stoddard-Poor at AARP. AARP is working on livable communities. Any work on the Study should be geared towards all equity-impacted groups, not just existing communities.
- Recommendation given to speak with Peter Johnke from the Vermont Center for Independent Living for insight on people living with disabilities.

- Parking on Main Street is difficult, especially for anyone with disabilities. The Study should consider safety and health for those with disabilities.
- The Study should consider access to computers and internet when engaging with low/no-tech communities.
- Safe streets improvements for the visually impaired should be considered.
- Maneuvering downtown Vergennes for people in wheelchairs is difficult. Residents share concerns on social media outlets.
- There is a shortage of public transit options. If traffic is directed to Route 7 and Route 17 there aren't many walking options.
- There is a lot of affordable housing on 22A and taking truck traffic away will improve quality of life for residents.
- Low-income populations should not bear the brunt of construction and traffic.

What is the best way to reach key populations?

- Michelle Eastman is a Senior Meal Liaison in Otter Creek Park and is a good contact.

A participant asked if the PEL Study is in place to vet the previous list of alternatives or create a new list of alternatives?

- The PEL Study will create a new list which may include some of the previous alternatives.

One participant stated that Panton wasn't willing to participate in 2019.

- VTrans noted that Panton felt their voice wasn't heard in 2019, that their voices were drowned out by those in support of a by-pass. They are very much a part of the PEL Study conversation.