

Policy Committee Meeting Summary

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Policy Committee Meeting – Concept Development and Screening Review
Date and Time	December 21, 2022, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 Noon
Location	Zoom Virtual Meeting
Policy Committee Member Attendees	<p>Voting Members:</p> <p>Chair – Adam Lougee (ACRPC)</p> <p>Brent Rakowski, (ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee)</p> <p>Diane Lanpher (State Representative from Vergennes), Legislature</p> <p>Ian Huizenga (City of Vergennes), Municipal Appointee*</p> <p>Jeff Nelson (Town of Addison), Municipal Appointee</p> <p>Jesse Devlin (VTrans)</p> <p>Katharine Otto (VTrans)</p> <p>Mary Rudd (Town of Panton), Municipal Appointee*</p> <p>Matt Birong (State Representative from Vergennes), Legislature</p> <p>Mike Audy (Town of New Haven), Municipal Appointee*</p> <p>Tim Glassberg (Town of Waltham), Municipal Appointee*</p> <p>Bill Smith (Vermont Truck and Bus Association), Trucking**</p> <p>Brian Shupe (VNRC), Environmental**</p> <p>Clark Hinsdale (Town of Ferrisburgh), Municipal Appointee**</p> <p>Dickie Austin (City of Vergennes), Municipal Appointee**</p> <p>Harvey Smith (State Representative from New Haven), Legislature**</p> <p>Renny Perry (Vergennes Partnership), Business**</p> <p>Phil Summers (Addison County Chamber of Commerce), Business**</p> <p>Non-Voting Members:</p> <p>Chris Jolly (FHWA), Observer</p> <p>Mike Winslow (ACRPC), Observer</p> <p>Jaqueline DeMent (VTrans), Observer</p> <p>Joel Perrigo, (VTrans), Observer</p> <p>Elizabeth Shipley (FHWA)**</p>
Study Team Attendees	<p>Amy Bell (VTrans)</p> <p>Ken Robie (D&K)</p> <p>Rich Tetreault (D&K)</p> <p>Stephanie Camay (WSP)</p> <p>Steve Chiaramonte (WSP)</p> <p>Annabelle Dally (WSP)</p> <p>Laura Toole (WSP)</p> <p>Maya Miller (WSP)</p>
Members of the Public Attendees	None

*Joined late

**Invited, but not present

The official meeting minutes are available on the Vergennes PEL Study website (<https://vergennesspel.com/committees>) and contain the meeting times and major decision points. This meeting summary provides more details.

Meeting Summary

Adam Lougee, Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) and Chair of the Policy Committee (the committee), welcomed everyone to the Policy Committee meeting before turning the meeting over to WSP.

Annabelle Dally, WSP, conducted roll call and noted that as of January 2023, Jubilee McGill, State Representative Elect from New Haven, Weybridge and Bridport, will join the Policy Committee as a voting member. Ten of eighteen voting members and four of the five remaining non-voting members were present. An additional voting member joined later in the presentation. Eight additional participants were in attendance, including representatives from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), the ACRPC, WSP, and DuBois & King (D&K). A quorum was met, and the meeting was officially called to order by Adam Lougee, the Chair of the Policy Committee, at 10:10 a.m. on Wednesday, December 21, 2022. Annabelle noted that when possible, the study team would prefer to have consensus among the Policy and Technical Committees when making decisions throughout the life of the study. If or when consensus is not possible, discussions will then be made by majority vote with documentation of all dissenting views at that time.

Adam Lougee paused to ask the Policy Committee members if there were any changes to be made to the agenda or any questions at that time before reviewing the agenda as presented. He stated the meeting would begin with a review of the roles and responsibilities of each key group involved and the overarching goals of the study. The consultant then reviewed the concepts proposed for further study and the evaluation process that led to determining those concepts before gathering feedback from the Policy Committee. Finally, the study team will provide next steps.

Adam reviewed the roles and responsibilities of each key group involved in the study as follows:

- Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) & Study Team
 - Consists of VTrans leadership
 - Funds and manages the study
 - Considers recommendations on how to proceed with implementation
 - Study Team
 - Consists of VTrans Project Manager (Katharine Otto), the ACRPC, WSP, and DuBois & King (D&K)
 - Conducts the study
 - Supplies materials and engages stakeholders to allow committees to make informed decisions throughout the process
- Other Roles
 - Technical Committee
 - Consists of subject matter experts from State and local government and the region
 - Guides, reviews, and validates the consultant's methods and analysis

- Makes recommendations for the Policy Committee to consider
- Agency Coordination
 - Consists of federal partners including Federal Highway, Amry Corp of Engineers, Coast Guard, EPA, etc.
 - Involved in the process early on to guide input before the NEPA process
- General Public
 - Consists of residents and business owners from Vergennes and the surrounding communities and representatives of the trucking industry
 - Provides local input, knowledge, and preferences to support the technical work and inform the decision-making process
- Policy Committee
 - Consists of municipal representatives from VTrans, ACRPC, FHWA, and stakeholders representing varying interests from economic development to the environment
 - Decision makers, makes final recommendations to VTrans

Adam reviewed the purpose of the meeting, which was to share updates since the previous meeting, provide a high-level overview of feedback that has been received to date, seek feedback from the Policy Committee, and help prepare the Policy Committee for the next meeting. No decisions were anticipated to be made at this meeting.

Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Study Goals

Stephanie Camay, the WSP Project Manager, provided an overview of what a PEL study is, why PEL studies are beneficial, and why one is being conducted to address truck traffic in downtown Vergennes. She provided a breakdown of the various phases of the Vergennes PEL study (the study), explaining that the study is currently in the initial screening of concepts phase and working towards alternative/concept refinement. She reviewed the Purpose and Need statement, which served as criteria to screen the long list of concepts.

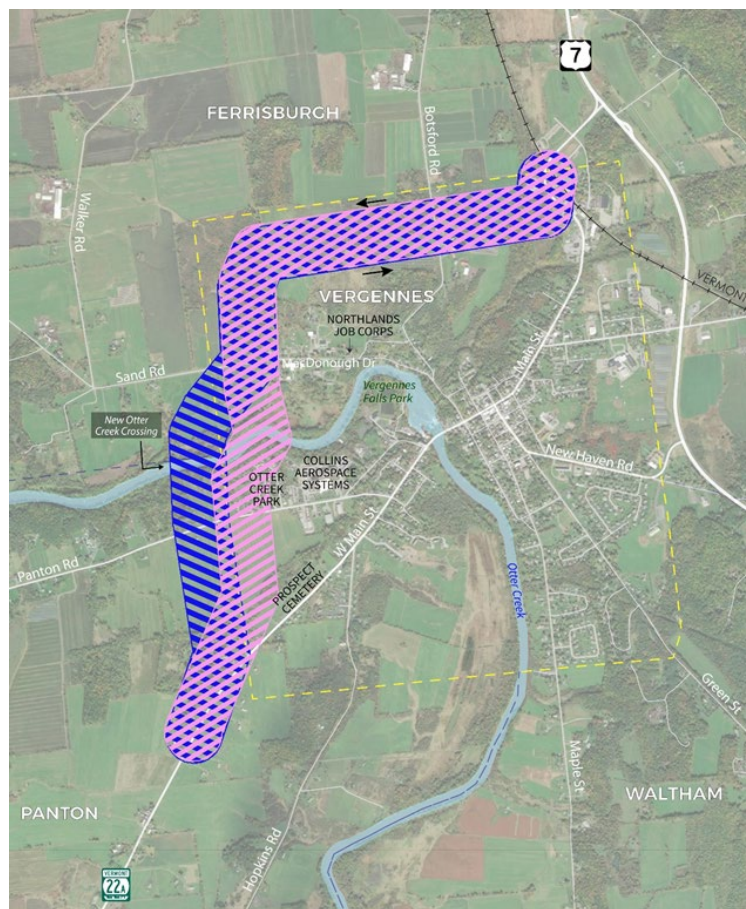
Initial Screening of Concepts for Further Study

Steve Chiamonte, from WSP, reminded the Policy Committee that the purpose of today's meeting is to provide the members of this committee with information to allow them to understand the work that has been completed to date to help them make an informed decision at the upcoming Policy Committee meeting in February. He explained that an exhaustive list of concepts that could potentially address the Purpose and Need was created through a collaboration of alternatives/concepts from previous studies and suggestions from the public and public agencies. He reviewed the exhaustive list of concepts which included existing road concepts, VT 22A corridor concepts, new road concepts, and other freight modes. He discussed the screening criteria derived from the Purpose and Need statement used to evaluate and cull the exhaustive list of concepts. The screening criteria include quality of life and environment, equity, mobility and access, economic vitality, safety, circulation and resilience, and land use.

Steve explained that each concept was assigned a rating under each criterion ranging from substantial positive to substantial negative effect. These ratings, in addition to feedback collected through forums such as committee, agency, local government, and public meetings were used to develop the short list of concepts. He briefly summarized the scores of each of the concepts and identified fatal flaws and whether the concept met the Purpose and Need before reviewing the specific concepts proposed for future study in detail.

Feedback on Initial Screening and Concepts

Vergennes-Panton New Roadway Concept [Pink and Blue Routes]



Steve explained that this concept was proposed for further study due to the total score, the proximity to Vergennes, and the general support during the public meeting siting the avoidance of moving truck traffic to another community, adding a secondary Otter Creek crossing and the potential for additional housing. Concerns were raised at the Pantan Selectboard due to the concept not being compatible with the existing agricultural land use and the noise/engineering challenges of building a bridge over Otter Creek in the proposed location.

Jeff Nelson, Town of Addison, commented that it should state this concept avoids moving truck traffic to other communities because it is more than just one, as it includes Addison, Waltham, New Haven, and more.

Mary Rudd, Town of Panton, commented that this concept does not avoid moving truck traffic to other communities because it moves truck traffic into Panton. Additionally, this concept will likely increase truck traffic from the bridge onto Lake Street through West Addison and Panton which is a very narrow road and a scenic bikeway thereby exasperating an existing problem of trucks using Lake Street as it would be shorter than using Route 17.

Jeff Nelson commented in response that these routes have weight limits that should preclude truck use.

Mary Rudd responded that the trucks use these routes despite the restrictions.

Jeff Nelson pointed out that while that is a valid concern, the issue is with enforcement and not with the issue brought forward as part of this planning study and it should be treated as a separate and unrelated issue.

Tim Glassberg, Town of Waltham, commented that an additional benefit of this concept is the potential for commercial development along this proposed corridor including within the Vergennes City limits.

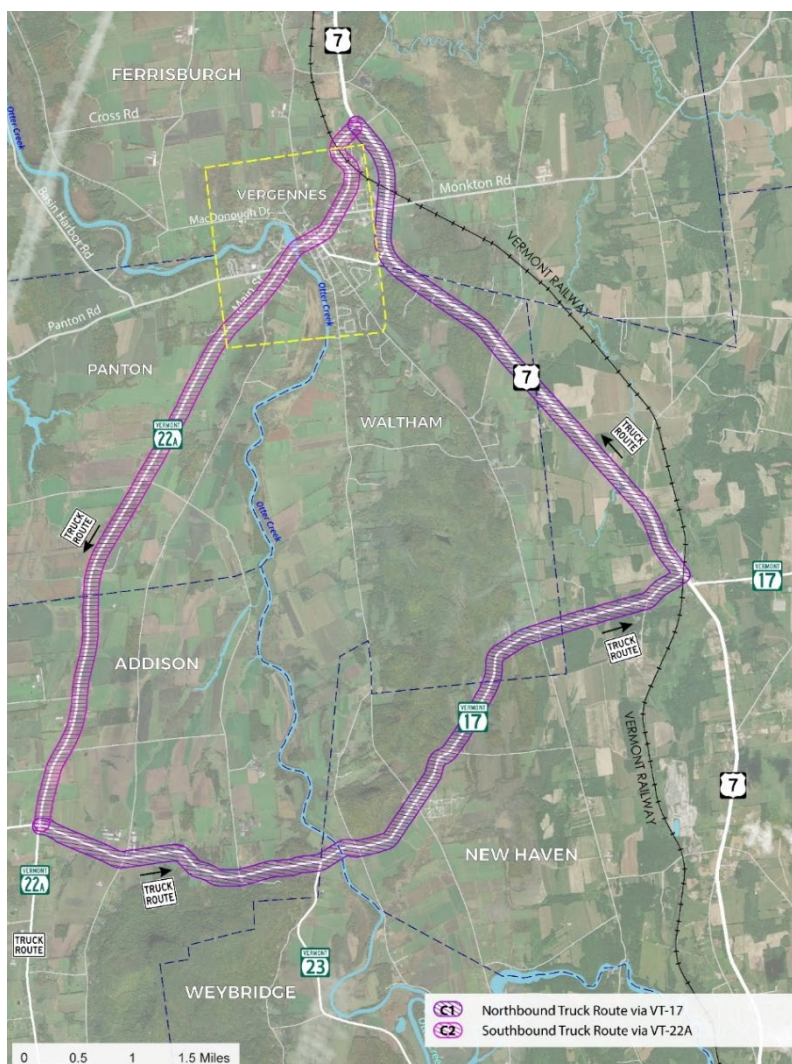
Vergennes Main Street New Parallel Route Concept [Orange Route]



Steve explained that this concept was proposed for further study due to the total score. The concept was proposed during a public workshop to keep the benefits and impacts contained within Vergennes. The public was not supportive of advancing this concept at the public meeting. Concerns were raised at the public meeting and the subsequent Technical Committee meeting due to topographic challenges at MacDonough Drive, the need for intersection improvements at MacDonough Drive and Main Street, the lack of redundancy for crossing Otter Creek, the concept not being compatible with the existing agricultural land use, and challenges with noise mitigation.

No additional feedback was provided by the members of the Policy Committee.

VT-17 Northbound/VT 22A Southbound Concept [Purple Route]



Steve explained that this concept was proposed for further study due to the total score and general support from agencies and the public due to the use of existing roadways therefore not requiring new infrastructure. Concerns were raised during the public meeting and by local

selectboards due to challenges improving safety along the roadway and at the intersection of Route 7 and Route 17, existing agriculture vehicle use, moving the problem to other communities, environmental impacts along Route 17, and enforcement concerns.

Jeff Nelson asked for clarification regarding the difference in scoring between the Route 7 and Route 17 concept and this blended concept.

Steve stated that clarification regarding the difference in scoring between those concepts would be provided to the Policy Committee in a separate document.

Tim Glassberg commented that this concept does not provide the opportunity for economic or residential development in the area along these routes as it is zoned agricultural.

Jeff Nelson asked for clarification regarding public feedback on whether this concept was supported or not.

Steve stated that there was mixed feedback on this concept from the public with some general support, but there were concerns raised as well.

Panton-Vergennes-Waltham New Roadway (Southeast Routing) Concept [Green Route]



Steve explained that this concept was proposed for further study due to the total score. The concept received some support during the public meeting citing the addition of a secondary Otter Creek crossing and the proposed location of the new bridge being less challenging than in other concepts. Concerns were raised during the public meeting and by local selectboards due to the wetland and topographic issues, proximity to existing schools and residents, and the concept not being compatible with the existing land uses.

Tim Glassberg stated that he wanted to reiterate his concern that this concept also does not provide any opportunity for economic or residential development in the area along this route as it is not zoned for those uses. He wanted to highlight that this concept proposes accessing Route 7 at an already dangerous intersection that will be difficult to improve. He stated he is only 30 years of age and can remember at least two fatalities in his lifetime. Tim suggested that if that intersection will be the access point, the Policy Committee might not want to consider this concept at all.

Representative Matthew Birong, State Representative from Vergennes, Ferrisburg, Waltham, Panton, and Addison, commented that he agreed with Tim Glassberg's points.

Brent Rakowski, ACRPC TAC, commented that the study team will find that there are some significant challenges topographically with steep slopes between Maple and Green Streets and land use restrictions associated with the Christian school on New Haven Road which are prime agricultural soils.

Steve explained that these types of concerns will be evaluated in more detail in the next stage of the review process.

Representative Diane Lanpher, State Representative from Vergennes, Ferrisburg, Waltham, Panton, and Addison, asked for clarification as to why this concept is still being considered if it received no support. She also states that she agrees with Tim and Matthew's statement regarding the lack of development opportunities early on when options were being considered. The idea was to deal not only with the truck traffic but also to help support smart growth and create housing and economic opportunities.

Steve stated that the overall score for these concepts was low comparatively. However, the public did share substantial positive feedback at the public meeting so in the interest of transparency and collaboration this concept is being revisited and presented for additional feedback.

Panton-Ferrisburgh New Roadway Route (West Routing 1) Concept [Red Route]



Steve explained that this concept was ultimately proposed to be dismissed for further study due to the total score and concerns raised by the local selectboard despite marginal support during the public meeting. The local selectboard raised concerns due to the proximity to existing schools and the concept not being compatible with the existing land uses.

Tim Glassberg stated that he wanted to reiterate his concern that this concept does not provide any opportunity for economic or residential development in the area along that corridor.

Representative Matt Birong commented that in addition to what Tim Glassberg stated, this concept contradicts the study’s intent to not push the burden onto other communities.

Mary Rudd stated this concept is not compatible with Ferrisburgh’s town plan as it goes through prime agricultural land and the proposed bridge would cause additional issues, including noise.

Stephanie asked Mary Rudd if she would have the same concerns regarding the proposed bridge associated with the Vergennes-Panton New Roadway concept {WHICH COLOR?}.

Mary Rudd clarified that this concern would also apply to that concept. She elaborated that the land in this area is prime agricultural land meaning there is no opportunity for economic development along those corridors and the bridge that would be required to cross at this location would need to be at least 50 feet tall requiring a large footprint for abutments. It would be difficult to contain and mitigate the noise pollution associated with a bridge of that size in this location.

Steve concluded the review of the concepts proposed for future study by reminding the Policy Committee that the supporting documentation of the evaluation of each of these concepts will be provided separately for their review prior to the next meeting in February.

Next Steps

Stephanie discussed the next steps. The study team is working to compile all the comments. While specific comments may not impact the initial screening, they may be evaluated in the secondary screening process. She reviewed the secondary screening process, which will include taking a deeper dive into the concepts to analyze items such as topographic challenges, historic/cultural resources, wetlands, agricultural soils, potential displacements, and more.

Jesse Devlin, from VTrans, commented that VTrans has been holding internal conversations, specifically with VTrans' legal section, regarding the enforcement and understanding of what can and cannot be done regarding restricting or prohibiting trucks on certain roadways. He stated that it is important to consider during this secondary screening process because the outcome will impact some of these concepts moving forward. He added that the benefits to the City of Vergennes and the trucking community need to be considered when reviewing these concepts because without benefits to these communities, these solutions won't be successful.

Stephanie continued to review the next steps, explaining that based on comments and concerns raised during the initial screening, the study team will be considering conceptual engineering, land use visioning, public outreach/engagement, and other topics.

Jeff Nelson asked if noise issues along Route 17 would be assessed as part of the secondary screening process.

Stephanie responded that additional noise analysis will be conducted on the concepts that move forward including the Route 17 concept if it is ultimately selected for further study.

Stephanie reviewed the schedule for the next few months. The study team will continue to work on incorporating comments into the technical memorandum and start the secondary screening process. In January, the Technical Committee and Agency Partners will meet to review the final concepts recommended for further study. In February, the Policy Committee will meet again to review and come to a consensus on the concepts recommended for further study.

Representative Diane Lanpher stated that it sounds like the Policy Committee needs to come to a consensus between now and February. She asked how the study team and the Policy Committee could work together toward that goal and how many concepts the Policy Committee are intended to recommend for further study.

Stephanie explained that there is no requirement for the number of concepts recommended to move forward. From her experience, three is a goal to strive for; however, the Policy Committee should not include a concept they do not feel is viable or exclude a concept they support to fit that goal.

Representative Diane Lanpher stated that the Policy Committee is getting close to where the rubber meets the road and reminds the committee that they have been “hired” at the behest of the public to come up with concepts that address these issues, but that cannot happen without consensus.

Michael Audy, from the Town of New Haven, stated that the Route 17 option would require major upgrades to be feasible, including roadway widening and changes to the junction with Route 7.

Jeff Nelson asked if it would be three concepts in addition to the no-action alternative.

Stephanie confirmed.

Ken Robie stated that this is only the first round of reductions. There will be a second culling after the refinement and evaluation of the shortlist and yet another reduction to a single alternative/concept during the formal NEPA process.

Representative Diane Lanpher asked if the Policy Committee recommends two alternatives to move forward can those involved in the NEPA process go back and choose another alternative that was not recommended in this study if the recommended alternatives have a fatal flaw or is the NEPA process limited/restricted to the alternatives that the Policy Committee recommends as part of this study.

Chris Jolly, from FHWA, responded that the short answer is yes. He explained that this process gets us to a place to begin the NEPA process, and is supposed to prevent that from happening, but it is always a possibility. He explained the PEL process does not limit or restrict the NEPA process from bringing a different concept forward.

Representative Diane Lanpher responded that it is helpful for the Policy Committee to know and understand that the NEPA process will not be limited or restricted by the decisions made during this study. She went on to say that this knowledge will help to eliminate any trepidation

committee members might have felt when making these decisions knowing they are not final or limiting to the future NEPA process.

Adam Lougee provided an overview of what the Policy Committee should expect at the next Policy Committee meeting. He stated that the members should come prepared to come to a consensus on which concepts should move forward for further study. He encouraged members to reach out with questions or concerns, review the documents shared by the study team, dig into the additional resources, and reach out to the people in their constituency. He defined what the study team means by consensus. He stated that the study team would love to have all members on board with the concepts moving forward but understood that is unlikely. He noted the study team will be looking for the members of this committee to be able to live with the decision despite it not necessarily being their preferred option.

Chris Jolly, from FHWA, asked that if the Technical Committee is meeting in January, will the Technical Committee be making a recommendation on what should move forward and will that be shared with the Policy Committee for their consideration in February?

Adam explained that the Technical Committee would make a recommendation to the Policy Committee which would be shared at the upcoming Policy Committee meeting, but the decision is ultimately up to the Policy Committee.

Representative Diane Lanpher noted that several towns are not represented at this meeting and asked how those committee members will be brought up to speed prior to the February meeting.

Adam stated that the study team share the meeting recording, meeting summary, and supporting documents to allow absent members of the Policy Committee to review the information discussed today prior to February.

Adam provided an overview of the upcoming technical work and outreach activities. The study team will complete technical work, including concept engineering, transportation and land use integration, and the evaluation of concepts. There will be several public workshops in the spring, summer, and fall of 2023.

Representative Diane Lanpher motioned for the meeting to be adjourned. Jeff Nelson seconded the motion. **The meeting was officially adjourned at 11:42 a.m.** by Adam Lougee, the Chair of the Policy Committee.