

# Planning & Environment Linkages (PEL) Study

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## VERGENNES PEL STUDY PUBLIC WORKSHOPS SUMMARY

### Summary report

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Vergennes PEL Study team (VTrans, ACRPC, WSP and D&K) conducted three workshops between May 2022 and June 2022 to present the draft long list of alternatives to the public and to develop screening criteria to be used in the next phase of alternative evaluation. To engage with as many people as possible, workshops were provided both in-person and virtual and one workshop specifically targeted key stakeholders in the Otter Creek Park Community. The following report will highlight key themes discussed at each meeting and the guiding points on the next steps for the study team based on stakeholder input.

#### OTTER CREEK PARK MEETING

**Meeting Description:** The first workshop conducted was held on the grounds of the Otter Creek Park Community on Tuesday, May 24 from 5-7 PM. This workshop featured an open house format which allowed attendees to arrive between 5-7 PM and visit four stations which described the different groups of alternatives. Attendees had time to review the alternatives, ask questions and provide comments.

The stations were:

- **New Road Alternatives** (new road alternatives to divert through truck traffic)
- **Existing Road Alternatives** (VT 17, US 4, US 7, I-87, etc.)
- **VT 22A Alternatives** (changes to improve the route without redirecting traffic, No-Build)
- **Other Freight Modes** (rail, water, freight technologies, etc.)

A board with the draft screening criteria was present and discussed at the Otter Creek workshop.

Hard copy pamphlets were handed out to attendees providing an overview of each of the Alternatives and the draft screen criteria. Attendees were encouraged to take the pamphlets home and if any other thoughts came to mind to share with the PEL team.

38 residents of Otter Creek Park and the surrounding neighborhood signed in at the workshop and over 40 residents attended. The majority of residents were from Otter Creek Park, however, there were several residents from Pantown Road.

#### Participant Feedback:

##### General Notes:

- Appreciated the opportunity to see all options and give input
- Pleased with the variety of options presented
- Displeased with the outcome of the previous study and lack of public input
- Concern with how potential new road alternatives would impact Otter Creek Park
- Mixed opinions about whether truck traffic in downtown Vergennes is a problem
- Concerns about how the real estate market in the area may be negatively affected by the project

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- Concerns regarding lack of redundancy and efficiency for emergency vehicles
- Concerns regarding parking loss and parking safety in Downtown Vergennes

### Frequently Asked Questions:

- Who makes the final decision?
- When will the final decision be made?
- When would an alternative be constructed?
- Estimated cost of each alternative?

### VT 22A Alternatives:

- Current Projects and Policies Alternatives (No Build)
  - Overall positive reaction to VT 22A (Fair Haven to Addison improvements) getting attention
- VT 22A Corridor Improvements
  - VT 22A was built to be a truck route
  - Curious where the improvements would be located
  - Pedestrian flashers are good, but many pedestrians don't use them
  - Crosswalk curb extensions make it tough for larger vehicles to turn and are uncomfortable for pedestrians
  - Concerns at the intersection with Elm Street – needs a traffic signal
  - Concerns regarding steep grade off Otter Creek Bridge
  - Concerns with trucks carrying hazardous materials
- VT 17 Northbound/VT 22A Southbound Alternative
  - Overall positive reaction to alternative
  - VT 22A would still need improvements
  - Concern with current state of VT 17, would need major improvements
  - Concern with vertical and horizontal alignment of VT 17 and US 7

### Existing Road Alternatives:

- Systemwide Alternative
  - Overall support for using systemwide alternatives
    - Support using US 4 and US 7
    - Concern with VT 30 and VT 125 due to the need for significant reconstruction and improvement
  - Support incentivizing trucks to use a different route instead of forcing them through restrictions
- VT 17/US 7 Alternative
  - General support for VT 17/US 7 alternatives
  - More cost-effective than other alternatives
  - VT 17 is currently a truck route which is used to divert traffic during special events in downtown Vergennes
  - Concern with current state of VT 17, would need major improvements

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- Concern with vertical and horizontal alignment of VT 17 and US 7
- A few respondents recommended moving the intersection of VT 17 and US 7 northwest to remedy the steep vertical grade for trucks traveling north on US 7

### New Road Alternatives:

- General Comments
  - Concern these alternatives are not cost-effective
  - Mixed opinions on whether a bypass would impact Vergennes economy negatively and reduce passenger vehicle traffic through downtown Vergennes
  - Concern regarding new bridge and impacts to tourism from boating – height allowance for sailboats and other recreational boats
- Red Route (Panton-Ferrisburgh, West Routing Option 1)
  - General support for this alternative
  - Minimizes impact to residents (mostly farmland)
  - More room for trucks
  - Close to gas station
  - Concern at the intersection with Panton Road – would require traffic signal
  - Concern the route is too long
  - Concern for cultural/historic/environmental/recreational impacts (Native American burial sites, eagle nesting site, proximity to campground)
  - Concern Panton and Ferrisburgh wouldn't agree to this alternative
  - Concern about routing trucks onto Little Chicago Road near Ferrisburgh Central School
- Light Blue Route (Vergennes, West Routing Option 2)
  - Drastic impact to Otter Creek residents
  - Concern for cultural/historic impacts (near a cemetery and the historical area between River and McDonald Road)
  - Concern about lack of space (Aerospace company needs to expand parking)
  - Concern regarding river crossing by basin being a challenge
  - Concern about trucks approaching a bridge from a slight hill close to residents
- Pink Route (Vergennes, West Routing Option 3)
  - Drastic impact to Otter Creek residents
  - Concern about trucks approaching a bridge from a slight hill close to residents
  - Concern regarding river crossing by basin being a challenge
- Purple/Dark Blue Route (Vergennes-Panton, West Routing Option 4)
  - General support for this alternative
  - Less impact to residents compared to pink or light blue routes
  - Concern at the intersection with Panton Road – would require traffic signal
  - Provides better connection for emergency services
  - Most palatable for Otter Creek residents compared to pink or light blue routes
  - Noise and quality of life concerns (engine braking)
- Green Route (Panton-Vergennes-Waltham, Southeast Routing)
  - General support for this alternative

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- Minimized impact to residents
- More room for trucks
- Close to gas station
- Simpler bridge crossing
- Concern at the intersection with New Haven Road

### Other Freight Modes:

- General Comments
  - Hope alternative freight is being considered in all alternatives as alternative freight is happening already
- Rail Mode Options
  - Support for rail
  - Rail brings jobs
  - Support for new Amtrak passenger rail stop in Vergennes
- Water Mode Options
  - Interest in canal and barges – everything once came by boat including fuel
- Smart Freight Options
  - Concern for loss of trucking jobs
  - Concern technology is not advanced enough

## IN-PERSON MEETING

**Meeting Description:** The second workshop conducted was held at the Vergennes Opera House on Thursday, May 26 from 6-8 PM. This workshop started with a short presentation about the Vergennes PEL Study, the draft long list of alternatives and the screening criteria. After the presentation, attendees were separated into two groups to review the various alternative types. The groups rotated after 20-minutes to allow attendees time to review, ask questions and comment on all alternatives presented. The stations were:

- **New Road Alternatives** (new road alternatives to divert through truck traffic)
- **Existing Road Alternatives** (VT 17, US 4, US 7, I-87, etc.)
- **VT 22A Alternatives** (changes to improve the route without redirecting traffic, No-Build)
- **Other Freight Modes** (rail, water, freight technologies, etc.)

Following the small group discussions, the larger group returned to share highlights from the discussion and discuss next steps in the Vergennes PEL process.

Hard copy pamphlets were handed out to attendees providing an overview of each of the Alternatives and the draft screen criteria. Attendees were encouraged to take the pamphlets home and if any other thoughts came to mind to share with the PELS team.

15 members of the public signed in at the workshop and approximately 24 members attended. No Otter Creek residents were in attendance. A majority of attendees were from Vergennes; however, the remaining were from Addison.

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## Participant Feedback:

### General Notes:

- Interest in the overall opinions heard at the Otter Creek Park workshop
- Concern for the residents of the Otter Creek Park and potential impacts on their residences
  - Affordable housing is already unavailable
- One attendee noted that the purpose and need captures the need to consider impacts to surrounding towns, but expressed concern that this is lost in the screening criteria
- General support for grouping alternatives or elements of alternatives together in any final recommendations
- General concern regarding the lack of redundancy in the transportation system and the need for an additional bridge – especially in relation to emergency vehicle access
- Cost should be represented in the screening criteria
- Coordination and planning with neighboring towns is important
- Screening criteria needs to include impacts on other, nearby communities

### VT 22A Alternatives:

- Current Projects and Policies Alternatives (No Build)
  - Significant noise from truck brakes
  - Some noted they want the bump outs removed, others said they do not want the bump outs removed
  - There is a lack of left-turn lanes
  - Concerned about losing parking spaces, Vergennes will be more crowded
- VT 22A Corridor Improvements
  - Trucks skip weigh station on US 7. There needs to be a weigh station on VT 22A
  - If this route is selected there need to be a way to slow traffic
  - No rumble strips
- VT 17 Northbound/VT 22A Southbound Alternative
  - VT 17 should not be here. Look at the grade and curve/bridge issues on VT 17
  - Already too much speeding and overweight trucks on VT 17. Roughly 75 trucks per day
  - This route is already a truck route and this route needs police enforcement
  - This route has some high crash locations
  - Concern that moving trucks to VT 17 will only spread out the problems and it is not equitable. This will decrease the quality of life in surrounding areas
  - There will be costly impacts to land owners
  - VT 17 alternative will be easy to implement and more cost effective – could there be a trial with a sunset?
  - Could VT 17 be supplemented with rail?

### Existing Road Alternatives:

- General Comments:
  - Concern that any of these alternatives pushes the problem on neighboring towns
- Systemwide Alternative

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- Overall mix of support and caution due to design deficiencies and needed improvements on VT 17, 30, 125, and US 4
  - Horizontal/vertical alignment
  - Roadway reconstruction and reclaim
  - Safety improvements at various intersections
  - Additional signage
  - Improved delineation
  - More enforcement
- Local truck traffic would need to be permitted into Vergennes for deliveries
- Long haul trucks need to be restricted or prohibited
- Suggestion that long-haul truckers need to be included in the discussion
- Trucks would hate US 4 through Rutland and it is cost prohibitive
- Interest in spreading out truck traffic along various existing routes
- VT 17/US 7 Alternative
  - Overall mix of support and concern for prohibiting through trucks from using downtown Vergennes
  - Concern this alternative pushes the problem from Vergennes to other communities
  - VT 17 is already a truck route, but would require improvements and upgrades
  - Intersection of VT 17/US 7 would require improvements – suggested roundabout
  - VT 17/US 7 poses significant problems – also VT 125 and VT 30 need significant upgrades
  - What is the additional mileage for US 4 to US 7?
  - Roundabouts work where there is space – it may work for the junction of VT 17 & US 7?

### **New Road Alternatives:**

- General Comments
  - Concerns with cost for any new road alternative
  - Concern these alternatives push the problem from Vergennes to other communities
  - Concern regarding new bridge and impacts to tourism from boating – height allowance for sailboats and other recreational boats
  - Is there a potential for a route closer to downtown within Vergennes, but not the existing route? “Western Avenue”
    - Comfort Hill has a challenging grade
    - Would mitigate wildlife concerns
    - No need for a new bridge
- Red Route (Panton-Ferrisburgh, West Routing Option 1)
  - Concerns about trucks traveling through farmland and conflicts with tractors
  - Concern about bridge issues on Little Chicago Road
  - Wildlife impacts including eagle habitat on this alignment
- Light Blue Route (Vergennes, West Routing Option 2)
  - Could this be contained in the Vergennes limits?

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- Could provide good sidewalk connections.
- Pink Route Vergennes, West Routing Option 3)
  - Appears to have less ROW impacts
  - Could this be contained in the Vergennes limits?
  - Could provide good sidewalk connections.
- Purple/Dark Blue Route (Vergennes-Panton, West Routing Option 4)
  - Concern regarding impacts to wildlife in Northland Job Corps Park (bobcats, geese, bear)
  - Minimized impacts to residents
  - Potential for development (industrial and residential)
  - Concern with how the development would be regulated
  - Concern Panton or Ferrisburgh might not support this option
  - Could this be contained in the Vergennes limits?
  - Could provide good sidewalk connections.
- Green Route (Panton-Vergennes-Waltham, Southeast Routing)
  - Ravine and water tower makes this a challenging route

### Other Freight Modes:

- General Comments
  - Interest in rail and water freight modes
  - Improvements would need to be made to the water and rail system to make these freight modes economically viable
  - Move less time sensitive freight items by rail or water such as gravel, fuel, etc.
  - Interest in other freight modes to help reduce truck traffic, but not necessarily the entire solution
- Rail Mode Options
  - Interest in private rail
    - Private entity rather than the state owns the rail corridor which doesn't allow the state to control what is transported by rail
  - Benefits to the infrastructure exists, just needs upgrades
  - Benefit to rail - uses less fossil fuels than trucks
- Water Mode Options
  - Interest in water freight modes
  - Water modes existed, but declined due to environmental concerns
    - Double hulls to reduce spill risks exist now
- Smart Freight Options
  - Interest in electric trucks through downtown Vergennes - less noise pollution and better air quality
    - Concern electric trucks have heavy batteries so truck volumes would increase to move the same amount of cargo
  - Increased fuel costs might cause trucks to go electric or might reduce truck volumes naturally
  - Technology is not there yet, hard to know when it will be viable

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## VIRTUAL MEETING

**Meeting Description:** The third workshop was conducted virtually via Zoom meeting on Wednesday, June 1 from 6-8 PM. The virtual workshop started with a short presentation about the Vergennes PEL Study, the draft long list of alternatives and the screening criteria. Attendees were divided into two breakout rooms with two facilitators, each representing one of the alternative categories. After 20 minutes to discuss each category, the facilitators rotated to the other breakout room so that all attendees could provide feedback on all alternative options in a small group, virtual format. Attendees had time to review the alternatives, ask questions and provide comments. The breakout rooms were:

- **Room 1**
  - **VT 22A Alternatives** (changes to improve the route without redirecting traffic, No-Build)
  - **Existing Road Alternatives** (VT 17, US 4, US 7, I-87, etc.)
- **Room 2**
  - **New Road Alternatives** (new road alternatives to divert through truck traffic)
  - **Other Freight Modes** (rail, water, freight technologies, etc.)

Following the breakout rooms, the group reconvened to share highlights from the discussion and discuss next steps in the Vergennes PEL process.

46 members of the public registered for the virtual workshop and 24 members attended.

### General Notes:

- Cost should be represented in the screening criteria
- Cost should be considered:
  - Early on in the screening process to avoid eliminating financially viable solutions in favor of financially non-viable solutions
  - In terms of time the more expensive options will take longer to fund and construct
  - In other forms in addition to the direct cost to build for example the associated costs on the user such as fuel consumption between alternatives
- Public needs to be included at every point in the process
- Outreach needs to be expanded to the Town of New Haven, Panton, Waltham and Ferrisburgh
- Participants appreciate the process and gathering public feedback
- Appreciate allowing the public to review

### Frequently Asked Questions:

- Will cost be part of the decision-making process?
- Can multiple alternatives be explored (combination of different alternatives/different modes)?
- Who will do the rating of alternatives and when?
- How would legal truck route compliance be enforced?

### VT 22A Alternatives:

- Current Projects and Policies Alternatives (No Build)



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- Attendees looking for clarification on what “No Build means”
  - Team explained that the No Build alternative includes all planned projects and policies currently advanced by VTTrans
- VT 22A Corridor Improvements
  - People drive too fast along VT 22A – the roadway as it is, is a problem
  - This area is not qualified for heavy trucking but lobbying by Middlebury and Brandon caused VT 22A to be a trucking route
  - VT 22A is a fast route which is why trucks like it
  - Improvements to VT 22A will only encourage more traffic
- VT 17 Northbound/VT 22A Southbound Alternative
  - Attendee expressed interest in this alternative but noted that it would need to be more attractive for trucks to use
  - Trucks know the VT 17 route is windy and can be difficult to navigate in winter
  - VT 17 east/north has large hills and tight corners which would be problematic for trucks
  - If VT 17 is selected, it eliminates one hill in Vergennes and adds three hills along VT 17
  - If VT 17 is designated for northbound traffic, will the road have asymmetrical lanes?

### Existing Road Alternatives:

- Systemwide Alternative
  - Mix of support and concern about using existing networks since currently there are design deficiencies and considerable upgrades would need to be made to VT 17, 30, 125 and US 4.
  - Concern with not having a second bridge for emergency service access to Vergennes
  - Would like US 4 from Fair Haven to Rutland then north on US 7 to be considered as a possible preferred route
  - Disappointed not to hear more about the US 4 and US 7 option
- VT 17/US 7 Alternative
  - The New Haven Road intersection with US 7 is bad. There would need to be a traffic signal, however truck traffic coming down the hill on US 7 may have trouble stopping, especially during winter.
  - Would like an all VT 17 option to be considered
  - When VT 22A is closed, trucks are routed to VT 17 and trucks do not like the route because of narrow roadways and winding roads.
  - VT 17 was recently rebuilt/repaved between the Addison 4 Corners and the New Haven Junction, and the construction team ran into stone, which may make future improvements along the route more difficult.
  - US 4 to US 7 option may be more cost effective and worth looking into
  - If VT 17 is selected, what improvements would be needed?
  - Concern with using VT 17, US 17 has a lot of problems

### New Road Alternatives:

- General Comments

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- New road alternatives seem like a recipe for sprawl
- There are benefits to a second bridge crossing over Otter Creek
- Would land-owners be compensated at fair market value for any land required for new routes?
- Prefer any existing alternative to adding another road and another bridge over Otter Creek
- Green Route (Panton-Vergennes-Waltham, Southeast Routing)
  - Southeasterly route would prevent problem at New Haven Road. Would likely require a light or vehicle stoppage traveling northbound down the hill.

### Other Freight Modes:

- General Comments
  - Need to engage with Vermont Truck and Bus Association
  - Preference for using a combination of existing routes and other alternatives (barge, rail)
- Rail Mode Options
  - Enhancement of rail transload facilities would be required if utilizing rail
  - Attendee curious if the Amtrak improvements will also help freight or just passenger travel
- Water Mode Options
  - NY state canal system is only open part of the year (Erie canal is drained October to April)
  - Water would be a great option if the issue of year-round operation can be addressed
  - Would have to consider noise if a high bridge is built over the waterway
  - There are bridge height concerns over the waterway that the team needs to be aware of
- Smart Freight Options
  - EV/CV is about addressing the quality-of-life aspect