VERGENNES PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT LINKAGES (PEL) STUDY

Public Involvement Plan

Approved by Vergennes PEL Technical Committee on August 5, 2021





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Acronyms

ACP	Agency Coordination Plan
	Addison County Regional Planning Commission
	Americans with Disabilities Act
	Environmental Impact Statement
	Federal Highway Administration
	National Environmental Policy Act
	Planning and Environment Linkages
	Public Involvement Plan
	Vermont Agency of Transportation

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1. Introduction

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is preparing a Planning and Environment Linkages Study (Vergennes PEL Study) to evaluate transportation alternatives to reduce the impacts of large trucks on VT Route 22A in Downtown Vergennes, while also enhancing the quality of life and economic vitality for residents in the City and surrounding towns. The PEL Study will build off previous planning efforts completed over the last twenty-five years that considered alternatives at different levels of detail. Two of the primary outcomes will be the preparation of a statement of purpose and need and the identification of a list of reasonable transportation alternatives that may move forward for evaluation in a future environmental review as required in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Another important outcome will be coordination of a short list of transportation alternatives with local land use visioning; the result of which would be advanced through separate environmental reviews. The Vergennes PEL Study will also include an implementation plan.

The environmental provisions in 23 U.S.C §139 require that lead agencies establish a plan for coordinating public and agency participation and comment on the environmental review process for a project. Accordingly, the FHWA and VTrans have prepared this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) for the PEL study to describe the process and communication methods for disseminating information about the study and for soliciting input from the public and agencies. The PIP complies with the current federal surface transportation law, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act).

The PIP is a flexible, "living" document that can be amended as needed during the process. Changes to the PIP are documented in Section 10: Revision History.



1.2

STUDY OVERVIEW

In May 2019, the VT 22A Truck Route Study was completed by the Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) in partnership with VTrans in response to renewed interest in addressing the impact of trucks passing through VT 22A in Downtown Vergennes. It is the most recent study which evaluated several alternatives and recommends moving forward with a new bypass road on the west side of Vergennes with connections to VT 22A north and south of Downtown.

As the study evolved, the City of Vergennes recognized the potential opportunities a new road could provide and reframed the truck route alternative as the Vergennes Economic Corridor. VTrans recommended that a PEL Study be conducted to consider how transportation alternatives would support the land use and economic development visions of Vergennes and surrounding communities and evaluate alternatives including those explored in previous planning efforts and others that may emerge through a comprehensive planning process. The recommendation was supported by Vergennes and the six proximate municipalities.

PEL provides a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision making that considers benefits and impacts of proposed transportation system improvements to the environment, community, and economy during the transportation planning process. The Vergennes PEL Study includes robust public engagement to help inform the planning decisions made during the Study. When completed, the PEL Study will improve the efficiency of the NEPA environmental review process by supporting the adoption of purpose and need and a preliminary range of reasonable alternatives. The PEL Study will also support a more efficient environmental review by identifying potential environmental impacts that require detailed analyses in a future environmental review.



2. Goals & Objectives of the Public Involvement Plan

The purpose of this PIP is to establish a process for soliciting early and frequent feedback from the public and stakeholders; encouraging open discussion of study details and issues of concern; and providing opportunities for public comments and questions related to the Vergennes PEL Study throughout the study development process. The PIP will be updated during the study development process to incorporate new information, methods, and mechanisms employed during public outreach, as needed.

Specific goals of the public and stakeholder involvement process include:

- Provide clear and timely information to promote public understanding and dialogue on the purpose, benefits, and outcomes of the study process
- Seek ideas and insight from the public related to identifying potential issues, developing a Purpose
 and Need Statement, a reasonable range of alternatives, and community land use visions to be
 considered in the PEL Study
- Gather public feedback on draft concepts and materials at well-defined stages of the process
- Provide transparency throughout the study process

Means to help meet these goals include:

- Identify community and industry organizations who can aid in the dissemination of information pertaining to public outreach efforts and opportunities
- Provide forums and venues where members of the community can participate in the public involvement process
- Provide timely notice of public meetings and the release of study documents
- Endeavor to provide stakeholders with meaningful and equitable access to study information and the opportunity to provide comments, as described in Section 3



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3. Equitable Engagement Guidelines

3.1 LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY

The Vergennes PEL Study will take steps to provide meaningful access to information for individuals in the study area who may not speak English as their primary language and/or who may have limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. Individuals will have the ability to request that the Agency of Transportation provide both written and oral interpretation services at public meetings or workshops (virtual or in-person) upon advance request of at least 5 business days prior to the meeting. In addition, web-translation of the study website will be accessible online in multiple languages.

3.2 AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

Public workshops that take place in -person will be held in locations that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to assure that stakeholders who are people with disabilities or elders may have convenient access to meetings. Sign language interpreters will be available at public workshops, and other meetings, if requested. See 3.1 for additional information on translation services. Public notices announcing public workshops will provide instructions for requesting special accommodations. The Vergennes PEL Study website will be designed to accommodate people with visual impairments (i.e., adjustable text size, compatibility with screen readers).

3.3 MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

The Vergennes PEL Study will ensure access to equal opportunities for participation among all stakeholder communities, with focused attention to the categories defined below:

Title VI Communities: As stated in the "Federal Highway Administration Title VI Program Implementation Plan: 2021" (<u>Title VI Plan – 2002 (vermont.gov</u>), the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT) is a recipient of federal funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation modal agencies, including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). All recipients of federal funding must comply with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other nondiscrimination statutes, regulations, and authorities. VTrans requires that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination in any federally assisted program or activity. The VTrans Title VI Nondiscrimination Statement issued September 4th, 2020 by Joe Flynn (Secretary, Agency of Transportation) can be found here: <u>TitleVINondiscrimStatement.pdf</u> (vermont.gov).

Environmental Justice Communities: Executive Order (EO) 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, dated February 11, 1994, requires consideration of whether a proposed action would disproportionately affect minority or low-income groups (59 Fed Reg. 7629 [1994]).



Traditionally Underserved Communities: The Federal Register defines underserved communities as "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life" (https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-09109/p-28)

Underserved communities could include: women and girls; Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; persons facing discrimination or barriers on account of gender identity; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality (https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-09109/p-27).

Per the definitions above, the following communities may be impacted by work in the Vergennes area:

- Migrant farmworkers
- People with low incomes and/or experiencing poverty
 - Tenants
 - o Families with children, particularly single parents
 - o People living with disabilities
- People experiencing housing instability/homelessness
- Mobile Home residents/parks
- New Americans

The study team will identify marginalized populations and engage these populations in public outreach efforts throughout the PEL study. The following principles will be adopted to support involvement of local Title VI, Environmental Justice and Traditionally Underserved communities in the Vergennes PEL Study area:

- Documents, notices, and meetings will be made concise, understandable, and readily accessible to the public
- When appropriate, notices and meeting materials will be provided in languages other than English as requested
- The study website will be developed in English and the platform will be translatable based on user language preference
- Public events will be scheduled at convenient and accessible locations and times
- The study team will collaborate with local groups to attend and participate in regularly held local meetings/events to share study information and garner feedback as appropriate
- The study team will collaborate with key community leaders, stakeholders and local organizations on the development and dissemination of messaging and notification pertaining to public events and encouraging community participation
- Study materials will be provided both digitally and in paper-based form whenever possible to increase
 accessibility to persons who may not have internet access. Paper-based study materials will be



strategically distributed as appropriate through partnership with local libraries, schools, community organizations, and faith-based organizations.



4. Vermont Open Meeting Law

Per the June 14, 2021 memorandum issued by Secretary of State Jim Condos, the state of emergency declared in Vermont as a response to COVID-19 has expired. As of June 16, 2021, all public and municipal bodies must once again comply with the Vermont Open Meeting Law that requires a physical meeting location for public participation to be provided, with continued options for remote participation encouraged. The Vergennes PEL Study will arrange physical meeting locations for meetings of the Policy Committee, public information meetings, public workshops, and Land Use Community Visioning Meetings, with an opportunity to attend virtually. Technical Committee and Study Team Management meetings will be recorded and made available to the public. The study will remain attentive to any changes to the Vermont Open Meeting Law requirements due to COVID-19 pandemic or other unexpected circumstances, and adjust accordingly.



5. Committee Oversight and Agency Coordination

Throughout the PEL study, the Vergennes PEL study team will consult with specialized committees/working groups that will provide topic-specific input and play a role in guiding the direction of the study. Members of the committees will include but not be limited to representatives from regional, state agencies and local businesses and organizations. Committees will be notified of the availability of study results and will be given opportunities to provide comments and consultation at various stages throughout the planning process. Technical Committee, Policy Committee, and Interagency Coordination efforts are outlined below.

5.1 TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee consists of subject matter experts that review and verify the scope of work, methods and assumptions used by the consultants to carry out the study and any resulting recommendations. The Technical Committee's role is to ensure that the Policy Committee has reliable information on which to base its findings and decisions. Membership includes VTrans planning, highway design, structures, bicycle and pedestrian, and environmental staff, ACRPC and municipal land use planners, FHWA staff, municipal public works and road foreman, and economic development specialists. The Technical Committee will meet approximately every two to three months while the study is underway.

5.2 POLICY COMMITTEE

The Policy Committee is charged with endorsing the findings in the PEL and making recommendations to VTrans on study planning decisions (i.e., Statement of Purpose and Need, Initial Short-list of Alternatives) which would be carried forward into a future environmental review. It will function as a body with wide knowledge that can speak on behalf of many communities impacted by this study and will take into consideration recommendations from the Technical Committee in its decision-making process. It consists of representatives from the seven municipalities potentially affected by the alternatives (Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, New Haven, Vergennes, Waltham, and Weybridge), VTrans, and other stakeholders representing the region, environment, and economy. The Policy Committee will meet approximately every two to three months while the study is underway.

5.3 AGENCY COORDINATION

In addition to this PIP, an Agency Coordination Plan (ACP) has been prepared to identify likely cooperating and likely participating agencies and the roles and responsibilities of each agency in the study process consistent with 23 U.S.C 139. In anticipation of initiating future NEPA environmental reviews for projects in the Vergennes PEL Study corridor, VTrans, in cooperation with FHWA, will





collaborate with likely cooperating and participating agencies in reviewing and refining the Vergennes PEL Study purpose and need, preliminary range of alternatives, and methodologies for documenting environmental conditions, and assessing impacts. While consensus is not required in the development of impact assessment methodologies, VTrans, in cooperation with FHWA, will consider the views of the agencies with relevant interests before making a decision on a particular methodology. After collaboration has taken place, VTrans, in cooperation with FHWA, will make the decision on the methodology and level of detail to be used.

The agencies will be notified of the availability of the key Vergennes PEL Study documents and given 30 days to provide comment. Agency comments will be documented in a comment matrix and responses will be provided.



6. Public and Stakeholder Meetings / Events

For more details on the schedule of outreach activities, see Section 9, Public Involvement Schedule and Key Milestones including Table 9-1 Schedule of Outreach Activities.

6.1 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings will be scheduled to gather input in support of and coincide with the completion of major Vergennes PEL Study milestones. Two meetings are anticipated – one to present the purpose and need statement and another to share the draft screening results and gather further input to finalize the initial screening step. Notice for public meetings will be advertised at least two weeks in advance, and public meetings will be offered in a hybrid approach with both a physical location and virtual option (with call-in number) offered for participation. Meetings will also be recorded and posted to the study website to allow for viewing later and additional public comment.

Public meetings will be accessible to persons with disabilities and persons who speak a primary language other than English. Special services, such as an interpreter or sign language services, will also be available upon advance request of at least 5 business days prior to the meeting. Public notices announcing these meetings will provide instructions for requesting these services.

Physical venues that will be considered for public meetings include the Vergennes Opera House, the Bixby Memorial Free Library, and the Vergennes Volunteer Fire Department station.

The study website, meeting flyers, media releases, and VTrans social media will be used to publicize all public workshops. WSP, in cooperation with VTrans, will seek out the involvement of community leaders, elected officials, and other stakeholders in the Vergennes PEL Study area. It is anticipated that these individuals and organizations will assist in understanding and addressing local concerns, including those of the environmental justice communities that could be affected by the study.

6.2 WORKSHOPS

Public workshops will be scheduled to gather input in support of and coincide with the completion of major Vergennes PEL Study milestones. Each workshop series will share the same information, but will be conducted separately to accommodate area communities, area businesses and residents to provide ample opportunity for stakeholder input.

- Three workshops will be held to support Task 3, Transportation Alternatives Initial Screening. These workshops will be designed to obtain input on alternatives that will be considered in initial screening, as well as feedback on the proposed initial screening criteria. Feedback will be collected through live comments, online comment forms, and in-meeting polls.
- Three public workshops will be held to support Task 4, Alternative Refinement. These
 workshops will present the draft concept plans for the alternatives and obtain public comments
 and input.



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• Three public workshops will be held to support Task 6, Alternatives Evaluation and Recommendations. These workshops will present the draft results of the evaluation of the transportation, land use and environmental effects of the alternatives.

6.3 LAND USE VISIONING

Land use visioning will be conducted as part of Task 5, Develop Integrated Transportation and Land Use Alternatives for the Vergennes Economic Corridor. Kick off meetings will be held with Planning Commissions in the key stakeholder communities (City of Vergennes, Town of Panton, and Town of Ferrisburgh) to begin the process of developing a vision within each community. As part of this process, the team will conduct a brief discovery process that will allow for the identification of any key stakeholder groups that should be directly involved.

Visioning sessions will be held in each stakeholder municipality (City of Vergennes, Town of Panton, and Town of Ferrisburgh) to introduce the broader community to the study and provide an opportunity for them to communicate their vision for the future of the VEC. The format of these visioning sessions will be determined with input from the stakeholder municipalities and are anticipated to include both a group and breakout component to tackle key questions related to the development of a vision. The input gleaned from these sessions will be used to inform the development of each community's preferred land use scenario, which will ultimately be compiled into a cohesive land use vision for the corridor.

6.4 STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS AND ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS:

Four focus group meetings will be held to discuss specific Vergennes PEL Study considerations with affected and interested groups. Focus group meetings will be held in person, or in a hybrid format depending on preferences of invitees. Residents, business, agricultural and environmental organizations and community-based groups will be targeted to provide specific insight to community concerns that may provide guidance on public involvement and study approaches. One-on-one interviews may be carried out to supplement input from focus groups for key stakeholders who were not able to participate.

An initial list of groups to approach for targeted outreach includes:

- Mobile home park residents on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd streets in Vergennes
- The Vergennes Partnership
- The Addison Chamber of Commerce
- The Addison County Economic Development Corporation
- Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)
- Vermont Natural Resource Council
- Vermont Public Interest Group (VPIRG)
- Vermont Chapter of AARP
- ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee
- Local Motion

- Vermont Truck and Bus Association and other freight users within the area
- Addison County Farm Bureau
- Champlain Valley Farmer's Watershed Alliance
- Champlain Valley Crop & Soil Pasture Team
- Addison County Walk-Bike Council
- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity
- John Graham Housing and Services
- Addison County Community Trust (ACCT
- The Open Door Clinic
- Addison County Parent Child Center





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6.5 MUNICIPAL MEETINGS

Individual meetings with each of the seven communities in the study area will also be conducted through the following City Council and Selectboard meetings:

Meeting Type	Meeting Date
Vergennes City Council	2 nd and 4 th Tuesday of each month at 6:00pm
Panton Selectboard	2 nd and 4 th Tuesday of each month at 5:30pm
Ferrisburgh Selectboard	1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month at 6:30pm
Addison Selectboard	1st or 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm
Weybridge Selectboard	1st Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm
New Haven Selectboard	1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm
Waltham Selectboard	1st Monday of each month at 7:00pm

6.6 LOCAL EVENTS

Additional opportunities for outreach will be identified that may arise throughout the study, such as having kiosks at local gatherings (i.e.: Addison County Field Days), coordinating to provide materials for use at other community events (i.e.: Vergennes Day), and partnering with community-based organizations to share information and feedback opportunities.



7. Communication Tools

Public engagement is a powerful tool in the identification of study priorities and developing transportation strategies that are specific to the needs and realities of the seven communities and their residents and businesses. The following methods of outreach and information sharing will be employed to facilitate a robust approach to sharing information with and receiving input from the public and stakeholders on the Vergennes PEL Study.

- Website: A website will be developed for the Vergennes PEL Study [website link TBD]. This website
 will include information on the PEL process, study activities and progress, public participation
 opportunities, and contact information. Study documents and videos will be available for download
 and review. The website will be kept up to date with information on the study and will provide a link
 to allow people to sign up for the mailing list and submit comments electronically.
- Surveys: Surveys will be developed and deployed preceding each iterative alternatives analysis. Surveys will be used to elevate study awareness and to better understand views on transportation strategies from the perspective of both community members and local businesses and organizations. The results will guide development of the study's proposed recommendations. The surveys will be web-based, and formatted paper versions of the survey will be distributed throughout the Study area at locations like libraries, local businesses, town offices, and other convenient locations accessible to persons unable to complete the survey online.
- Mailed and Emailed Information: A stakeholder mailing list will be developed that includes elected officials, public agency contacts, stakeholders and community groups, and members of the public with an interest in the Vergennes PEL Study. The mailing list will be used to distribute meeting announcements and information about the study. Where email addresses are available, announcements will be distributed electronically. The mailing and email list will be updated throughout the life of the study to include new contacts obtained from meetings and the study website.
- Additional Outreach Materials & Communication Tools: User-friendly informational materials on technical elements of the study and notice of opportunities for input will also be utilized and made widely available to the general public. These materials will be developed on an as-needed basis in coordination with the VTrans for posting on the study website and/or for use in stakeholder/public meetings. The outreach materials could include a 1-2-page quarterly project newsletter focused on a different "item of interest" for each edition, presentations, fact sheets, press releases, door hangers or mass-mailers, and poster boards. The study team will also look for opportunities to share study information through established methods of communication such as the ACRPC newsletter, and articles in the Addison County Independence newspaper.
- Social Media Posting & Monitoring: The study team will coordinate with VTrans to push study information to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (VTrans) and with municipalities to push to their social media accounts (as available). These social media posts will include basic information on the Vergennes PEL Study, provide links to the study website, as well as information about public



participation opportunities, study contact information, and how people can submit comments or sign up for the study mailing list. Study information will also be pushed to other local resources such as town listservs and Front Porch Forum where possible.

A media log will be maintained by the WSP Team over the course of the study as an archive of news media articles about the Vergennes PEL Study. The media log will be shared quarterly with VTrans.

• Local Media Usage: The study team will coordinate with Vermont Community Access Television/Channel 17, local radio stations WIZN (106.7) WVTK (92.1), and WVPR (107.9), the Addison County Independent newspaper, and other local media to communicate study updates and notice of opportunities for public input.



8. Reporting

8.1 DOCUMENTATION OF PUBLIC OUTREACH AND COMMENTS

As part of PEL study process, public outreach efforts for the study will be tracked and included the PEL Report. Efforts to engage the public will be documented, including a list of public and stakeholder meetings, a summary of notices, flyers, media releases and other study information distributed to the public, and any other outreach efforts that occur. Attendance lists at meetings and workshops will be tracked and documented. All formal comments received will be cataloged in a comment log, which will be updated throughout the study development process and included in the PEL Report.

8.2 PROGRESS REPORTS

Monthly progress reports will be submitted by the Vergennes PEL Study consultant team that shall include updates on public outreach activities completed during the past month and look ahead at upcoming activities.



9. Public Involvement Schedule and Key Milestones

A schedule of outreach activities has been developed (Table 9-1) and will be considered a living document to be updated as appropriate throughout the duration of the study. The schedule outlines components of the outreach program for Tasks 1-8, along with associated timelines and responsibilities, and reflects the overarching strategy for broad engagement early and often throughout the study.

Table 9-1 Schedule of Outreach Activities -

Note: Schedule is preliminary and subject to change as the study progresses

TASKS	OUTREACH DELIVERABLES	ANTICIPATED DATE	
TASK 2A: Public and	Study website live	21-Aug	
Stakeholder Engagement Plan	Informational mass-mailer developed and sent to study area communities	21-Sept	
	Technical Committee Meeting	21-Aug	
	Meeting/Communication	21-Aug	
	PIP/ACP approved	21-Aug	
TASK 2B: Purpose and Need Statement	Meeting with Vermont Truck and Bus Association	21-Jul	
	Survey to Vermont Truck and Bus Association	21-Aug	
	Presentation at 6 municipal selectboard meetings (Ferrisburgh, Addison, Panton, Weybridge, New Haven, Waltham) and 1 city council meeting (Vergennes)	21-Sep	
	Outreach meeting with CLF	21-Sep	
	Outreach meeting with ACPRC Transportation Advisory Committee and full Commission	21-Sep	
	Focus group meeting with Vergennes mobile home park residents	21-Sep	
	Cooperating and Participating Agency Communication	21-Oct	
	Survey developed and launched	21-Oct	
	Introductory Public Meeting	21-Nov	
	Technical Committee Meeting	21-Dec	
	Cooperating and Participating Agency Communication	22-Feb	
	Policy Committee Meeting	22-Mar	



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TASK 3: Transportation	1st quarterly newsletter launched	21-Dec
Alternatives Initial Screening	Technical Committee Meeting	22-Feb
	Public Workshop Series	22-Mar
	Technical Committee Meeting	22-Apr
	Cooperating and Participating Agency	22-Aug
	Communication	ZZ-Aug
	Technical Committee Meeting	22-Jul
	Public Meeting	22-Oct
TASK 4: Alternatives	Technical Committee Meeting	22-Nov
Refinement	Technical Committee Meeting	23-Feb
	Public Workshop Series	23-Mar
	Cooperating and Participating Agency	23-Apr
	Communication	·
	Policy Committee Meeting	23-May
TASK 5: Develop Integrated	Technical Committee Meeting	23-Jan
Transportation and Land Use	Technical Committee Meeting	23-Mar
Alternatives for the VEC	Kick off meetings with Planning Commissions	23-Apr
	Vision presentations to Planning Commissions	23-Jun
	Community Visioning	23-Jul
	Policy Committee Meeting	23-Jul
TASK 6: Alternatives Evaluation and	Cooperating and Participating Agency Communication	22-Dec
Recommendations	Technical Committee Meeting	23-May
	Cooperating and Participating Agency Communication	23-Jun
	Technical Committee Meeting	23-Jul
	Public Workshop Series	23-Aug
	Cooperating and Participating Agency Communication	23-Sep
	Policy Committee Meeting	23-Oct
TASK 7: Implementation		
Plan	Technical Committee Meeting	23-Dec
TASK 8: Draft and Final	Technical Committee Meeting	24-Jan
Reports	Policy Committee Meeting	24-Mar
		2 : 17101



10. Revision History

The PEL Public Involvement Plan will be updated on a yearly basis, or more frequently if any notable change in dynamics necestates action.

Table 10-1 Revision History

VERSION	DATE	NAME	DESCRIPTION