

Land Use Visioning Workshop Notes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Orange Route Land Use Visioning Public Workshop
Date and Time	December 4, 2023 - 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location	Vergennes Opera House, 120 Main Street, Vergennes, Vermont
Invitees	All Members of the Public
Study Team	Katharine Otto, VTrans (Project Manager) Amanda Holland, VTrans Mike Winslow, ACRPC Katie Raycroft-Meyer, ACRPC Annabelle Dally, WSP Elaine Ezerins, WSP Ken Robie, DuBois & King Dan Mallach, DuBois & King (Land Use Lead) Emily Lewis, DuBois & King Kait Campbell, DuBois & King Chris Sargent, DuBois & King Jim Gish, VHB (Project Community Liaison)

Number of attendees: Approximately 44

Welcome, Introductions, Study Overview, and Current Status

Katharine Otto, Planning Coordinator with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and Project Manager for the Vergennes Planning and Environment Linkages Study (Vergennes PEL Study) welcomed attendees, stated the purpose of that evening's meeting, and introduced the members of the Study Team in attendance that evening. She then proceeded with presentation slides that outlined the Purpose and Need, the screening criteria, and the current status of the Study work and preliminary highlights of the public survey, with a focus on the Orange Route, including digital "birds-eye-view" fly-through visualization of the Orange Route concept.

"Land" and "Use" Overview

Dan Mallach, landscape architect and planner with DuBois & King (D&K) and Task 5 Land Use Lead for the Vergennes PEL Study gave an overview of planning considerations as they pertain to "Land" (soils, rocks, waterways, wetlands, slope,

contours, forests, fields) in the Study area, and "Use" types (residential, working lands, commercial, institutional/civic, industrial, open space/recreation) as they will inform Study decision-making and design processes. This information led to an introduction of the workshopping.

Breakout Groups

As guided by Study Team facilitators, the breakout groups consisted of members of the public at 4 separate tables to brainstorm and discuss land use options if the Orange Route were built. Each table had various tools including maps and Land Use icons (uses noted above, plus one for walk/bike facilities), as well as post-it notes, markers, paper. Discussion and documentation addressed existing natural features and public amenities, local history, desire for certain types of uses and not others, connectivity and accessibility, public safety and noise. The breakout groups lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The maps were photographed, and notes were taken by designated note-takers in order to document breakout group conversations (see below for notes).

Table 1

Facilitator: Chris Sargent, D&K

Note-taker: Kait Campbell, D&K

Highlights:

- There is significant bicycle traffic coming up Comfort Hill and MacDonough Drive. Whatever is proposed or designed for that area will need to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic.
- There is interest in creating some type of shared use path in the gully area. One that is more similar to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail than the Intervale Shared Use Path. Something that is more integrated into the natural environment.
- Generally speaking, participants favored housing, however, development is limited as there is a significant portion of protected lands in this area.
- There was some interest in potentially adding a connector road or roads between Comfort Hill and the new route.

Notes:

- Housing is very important.
- Lots of community bicycle riders, as well as bicycle groups from in and out of town; bike tours are a source of tourism income.
- An Orange Route could facilitate recreation in the "gully" that it parallels, if access, safety, and road noise are addressed effectively.

- Query: in the future, might trucks be smaller and/or quieter?
- Query: how will trucks get up hills on McDonough Drive, etc.?
- Housing: don't like "cookie cutter" houses
- If the land along an Orange Route is not fit for housing, then recreation may be more suitable.
- If a new road has extensive truck traffic, concern that people would not wish to live along it.
- Some support for high-density housing.
- Commercial: less support along an Orange Route, so as to not draw activity away from Main Street.
- Potential additional road connection to Comfort Hill, for housing and trail head parking.
- Sidewalks, walkability, and access are important.
- Bicycle trails near Comfort Hill have been refurbished recently.
- Support expressed for gravel paths as opposed to asphalt.
- Comfort Hill gets a lot of bicycle use - the intersection of this road with McDonough, and how it relates with a new Orange Route roadway would have to be designed with bicycle safety and access in mind.
- Precedent from elsewhere:
 - Morrisville: how they diverted truck traffic away from downtown; it seems to have benefited the community (and it doesn't look like a truck route now).
- Desire for access to nature
- What do you not want:
 - A multi-use path right next to the road - desire for more separation, like a rail trail.
 - Lots of grading



Table 2

Facilitator: Mike Winslow, ACRPC

Note-taker: Amanda Holland, VTrans

Highlights:

- Need for a pedestrian path and significant pedestrian traffic out to King's Bay and also to the docs where the boats come up. It was important to maintain or improve a connection from the boat launch to downtown.
- Support, but not unanimous, for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations along the new route. Separated from the route itself so that the truck traffic is not a deterrent.
- No support for housing. Support was mostly for preserving the natural landscape. Significant wildlife populations throughout this area. Concerned with impacts to those populations and interest in reducing additional impacts through increased development.

- There was interest in light industrial development up near the northern intersection and a mix of interest between light industrial versus open natural space along the route itself.

Notes:

- Important to consider wildlife impacts and protect habitat and facilitate corridors and crossings.
- Query: who makes decisions as to routes and potential land acquisitions?
- Concern about safety at intersections.
- The walking and cycling connection between the basin and the downtown should remain an enjoyable experience.
- In currently undeveloped areas, some support for keeping them "as is" and open, some support for a mix of agricultural and industrial uses, some support for industrial uses.
- There was not support for new housing along the Orange Route. Participants felt housing plus a truck route would just lead to future conflicts.
- Walkability is very important.
- Support for separated (i.e., off-road) bicycle facilities.
- While most of the group supported bicycle and pedestrian facilities along new roads generally, some expressed concern that such facilities along an Orange Route could divert desirable bike/ped traffic from Main Street.
- MacDonough Drive & Main Street intersection and existing residential areas: need to design this to minimize impacts to residents.
- Desire for bike/ped connections to the train station, as well as commercial/retail near it, such as a rental car facility.
- Concern about a new road drawing economic activity away from Main Street, but this could be addressed in part with more bike/ped accessibility throughout the City.
- Support for more recreation along an Orange Route, as well as employment destinations.
- Precedents from elsewhere:
 - Highway thru Franconia Notch, NH, benefited the community [more research warranted]
 - Shared Use Path next to road that connects roadways to lake ferry (Plattsburgh, New York)
- Noise concerns - no rumble strips wanted.

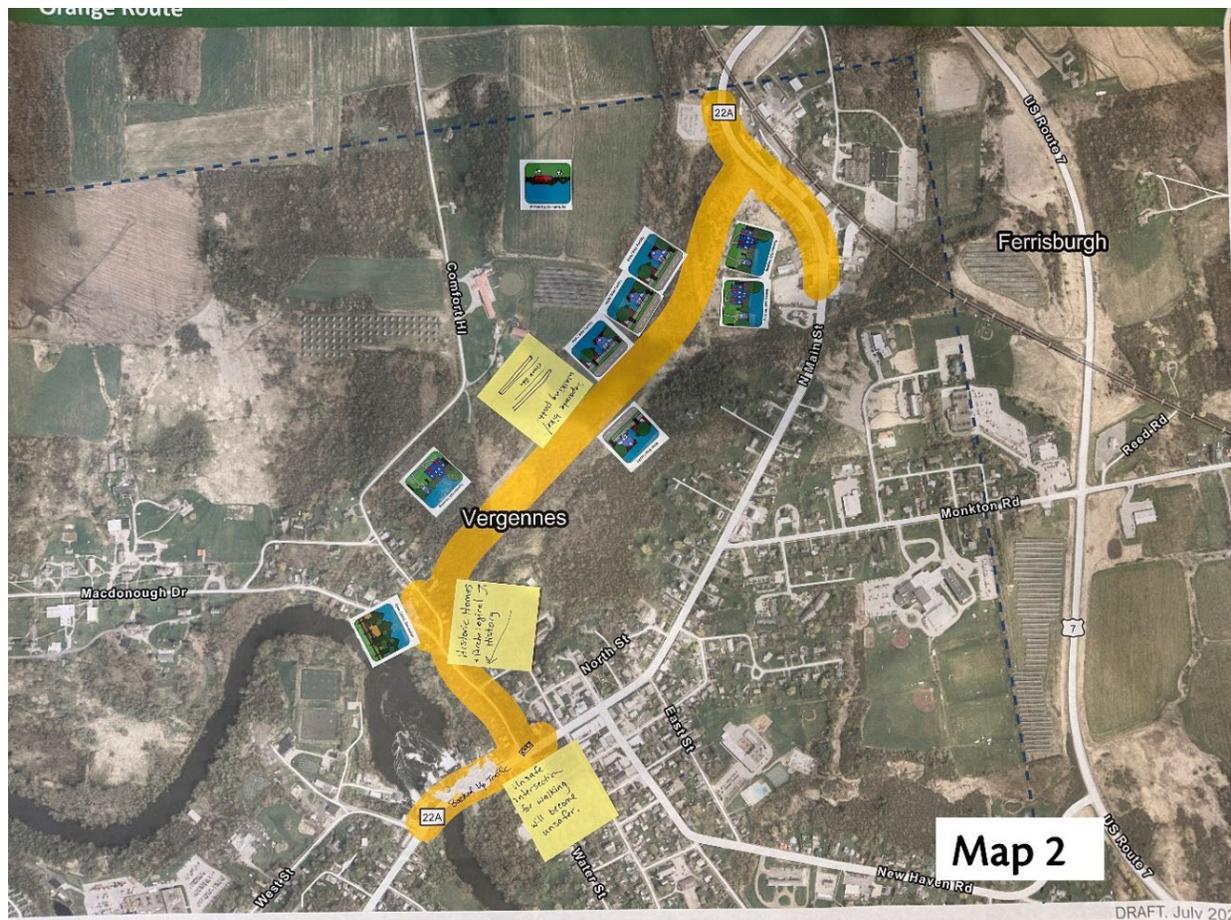


Table 3

Facilitator: Dan Mallach, D&K
Note-taker: Elaine Ezerins, WSP

Highlights:

- Interest in maintaining what exists there today in terms of historic structures and areas, as well as the soils themselves.
- Rail trail had been explored through this area and that was an interesting idea.
- Opportunities for some housing in various places and some plans already in place for additional housing.
- Conserved land to the north should be retained for agriculture.
- Discussed a layering effect for housing with the natural features remaining how they are.
- Given the proximity of the Orange Route to Main Street, there was concern about how this could affect the vitality of Main Street. There was some interest in potentially adding some civic or retail uses at the gateway of the new route.
- Interest in moving recreational parking off Main Street and closer to the trails.

- Concern regarding the archeological and historic overlay of the area.

Notes:

- The intersection of Main Street and MacDonough Drive has historical and cultural significance. It is important to keep this corner recreational and avoid industrial use here.
- The soil stability and infrastructure of MacDonough Drive is a concern, as there was a natural gas pipeline just installed along this road. The road is incredibly unstable and may be redone again in 2024. We wonder where this would put us in 15 years when/if the Orange Route would be constructed.
- The northern corner of the proposed Orange Route and Route 22A is already slated for residential housing. The style of housing would be multi-family or apartments.
- The southern section of Comfort Hill near the proposed Orange Route is also slated for residential housing. The style of housing would be single-family homes or duplexes.
- We would like to see a multi-use path along the Orange Route, not immediately next to the road but through the natural areas around the route.
- We do not want to see any community centers, city services, or civic spaces along this route.
- The agricultural lands on Comfort Hill are in a land trust. The southern part of Comfort Hill is state owned land.
- There is an archaeological overlay district by the Otter Creek on MacDonough Drive.
- Recreational areas already exist on MacDonough Drive. The Otter Creek falls, basin and corresponding wetlands are environmentally sensitive. Vergennes has been working for the past 15 years to promote this area for its recreational usage and accessibility to the downtown. It would be nice to add more parking along the Orange Route to the recreational trailheads. There is already a walk/bike facility in between MacDonough Drive and Comfort Hill, including Macintyre Trail.
- We would like to see some residential housing along the Orange Route and be in the style of clustered housing. Some examples for layout design could be the nearby communities: Claybrook Homes on Commodore Drive, Country Commons condos, or Hillside Acres.
- We do not want to see any industrial on the Orange Route. We would love to see most of the land on the Orange Route be open space and recreational, creating a trail system.
- The max speed in Vergennes is 30 mph.

- We do not want to see any retail, commercial, industrial or civic facilities on the Orange Route due to its proximity to downtown Main Street. We do not want the route to compete with the existing downtown. These land uses would also not work for the shape of the land. If the point of the project is to reduce truck noise in the downtown area, we do not want to create a downtown area on the Orange Route and have the same issue again.
- We would like to see simple trails or a multi-use path that connects to existing infrastructure by Otter Creek. This would be part of a larger vision of having recreational trails surrounding downtown Vergennes.

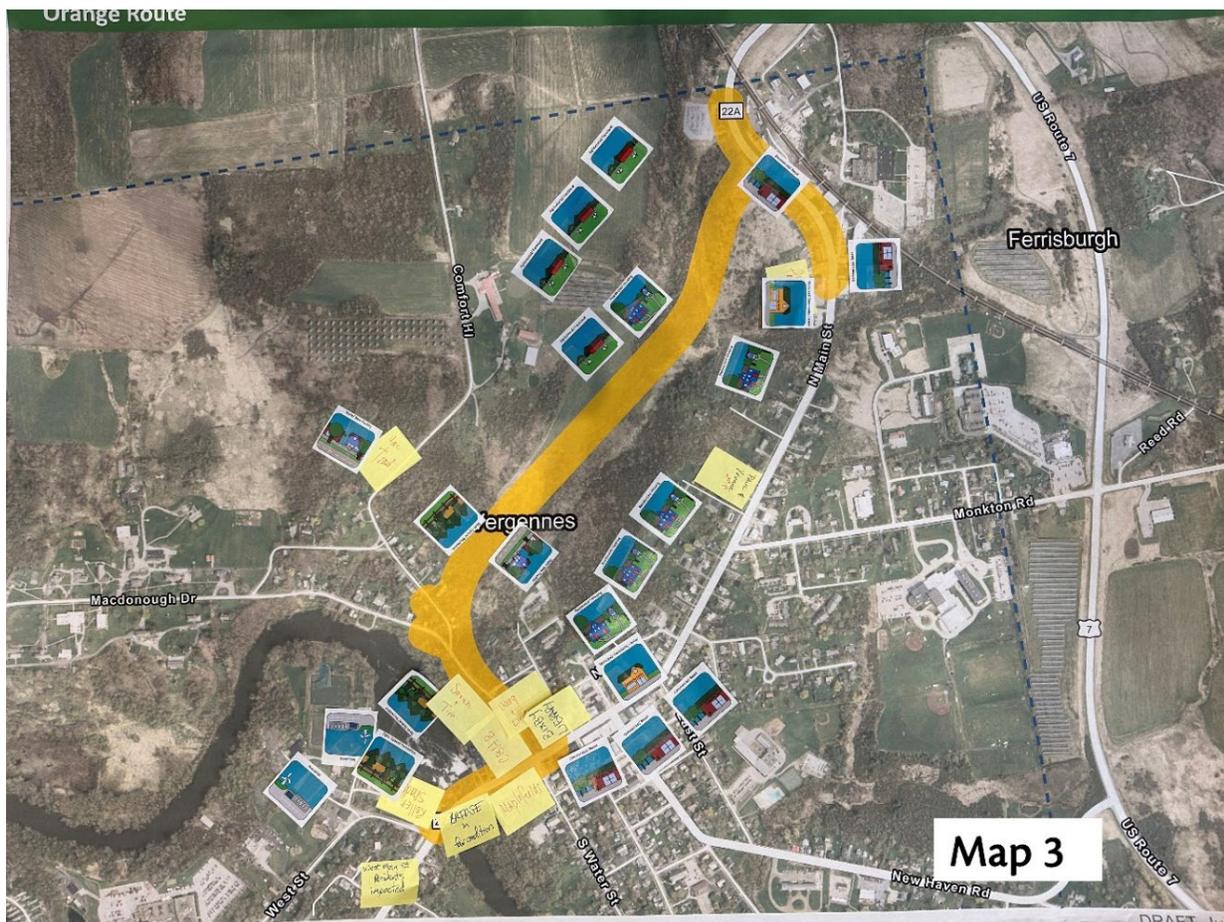


Table 4

Facilitator: Emily Lewis, D&K

Note-taker: Annabelle Dally, WSP

Highlights:

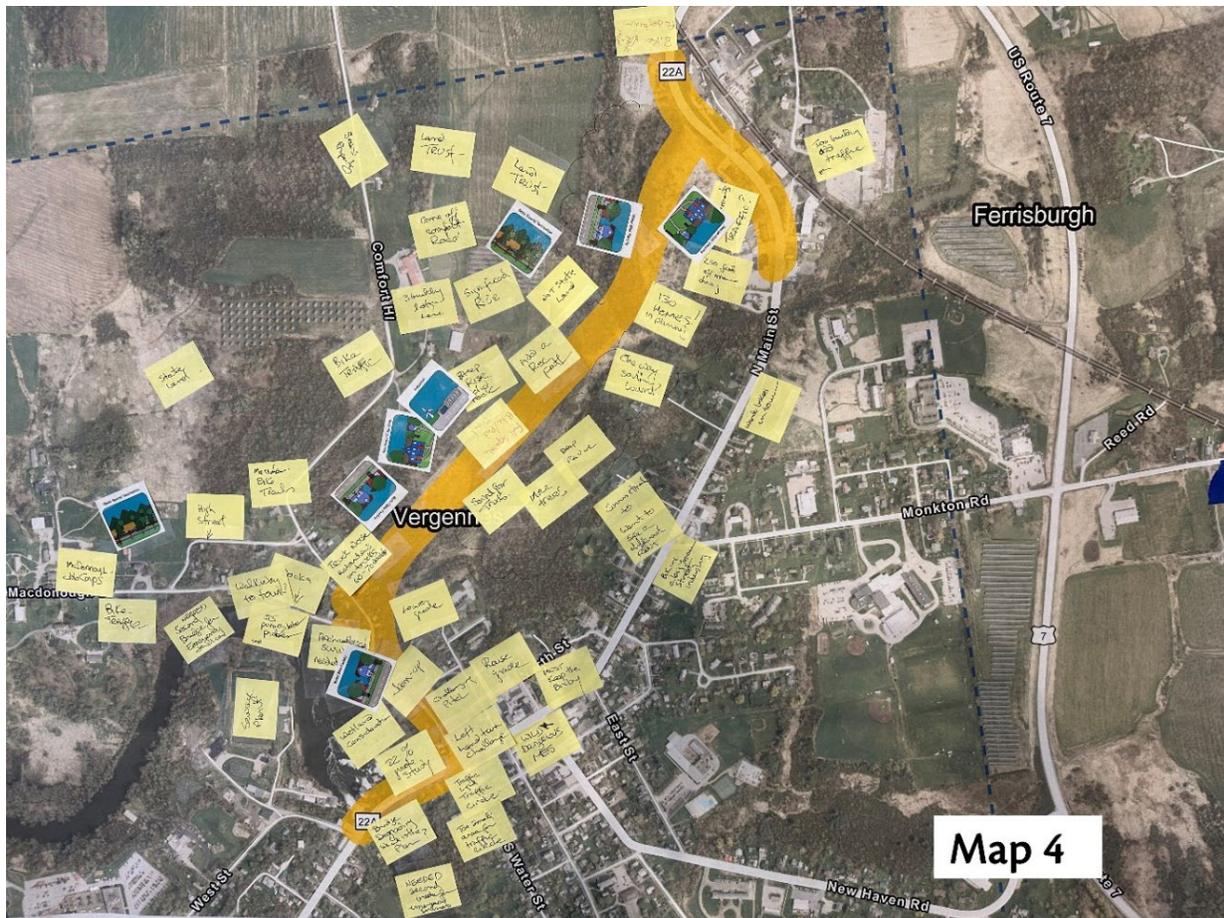
- Overall, there was interest in improving pedestrian and bicycle connections, maintaining open space and recreation, and developing residential/housing wherever appropriate.
- Along the east side of the route there was concern that any development would be difficult due to the topography of the area. The group felt the area should remain undeveloped. There was interest in adding more trees or other noise mitigation efforts.
- Along the east side of the route at the northern terminus there is a plan to develop 130 residential units. There seemed to be support for this, however, there was concern regarding increased traffic at the intersection.
- Along the west side there was interest in adding a shared-use path completely separated from the roadway with trees between to make a connection to the Park and Ride to the north, bike trails to the west, and the downtown and other recreational opportunities to the south.
- Along the west side at the northern terminus the land is in a large trust and cannot be developed. As such the group marked this area to remain open space.
- Along the west side of the route and Comfort Hill to the south of Sherman Ridge there was interest in adding residential/housing. There was some talk of light industrial, however, there was concern regarding access as Comfort Hill is not equipped for increased vehicular traffic.
- Less interest in developing the southern terminus aside from the pedestrian/bike connections due to historical and archeological sensitivity and wetlands considerations.

Notes:

- Places/Areas of note:
 - Docks off of Macdonough Drive.
 - Sewage Plant off Canal Street.
 - Proposed residential development at the northern intersection.
 - Three vacant lots off of Sherman Ridge.
 - Park and Ride north of the Orange Route
 - Land Trust along the east side of Comfort Hill towards the north.
 - State lands along the west side of Comfort Hill towards the north.
 - Recreational areas along the river and bike trails west of Comfort Hill and north of Macdonough Drive.
 - Significant archeological and historical sensitivity at the Macdonough Drive and 22A intersection

- Concerns regarding constructability of the route due to topography challenges along the proposed corridor.
- Comment that there is an old railroad corridor through there along the alignment of the new route which helps the topography challenges for the construction of the roadway.
- Discussion regarding steep pitch and a ravine along the east side of the proposed route. General consensus that it would be challenging to develop. Group recommended keeping it a natural, undeveloped space.
- Concerns were raised regarding noise especially if the orange route is constructed at a higher elevation than Main Street. Truck noise will be heard at 60-70 decibels. Concerns for how this sound will be dispersed. There is a clear line of sight between the route and Main Street. The neighborhoods along Main Street and Macdonough Drive will be exposed to a lot of noise. Interest in using the space between the route and Main Street to plant trees and implement other noise mitigation measures. Comment about not installing the high sound barrier walls, not the aesthetic that participant is looking for. Seemed to be some agreement there.
- Interest in building separate bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Separated physically and visually with trees from the roadway as to not deter vulnerable users. Main Street is not equipped to handle cyclists and there isn't the room to expand to accommodate proper bicycle facilities. Interest in building connections from the Park and Ride to Downtown, to the existing recreational facilities along the river, to existing recreational facilities and bike trails north of Macdonough Drive and west of Comfort Hill.
- Interest in the roadway looking rural. Two lanes surrounded by undeveloped green space on either side.
- There is interest along the west side south of Sherman Ridge for potentially adding housing or light industry. Some opposition to light industrial as Comfort Hill is not appropriate for truck traffic and there was some opposition to adding connections to the orange route itself.
- The west side north of Sherman Ridge is in land trust and cannot be developed. The general consensus was to leave it as is.
- The west side of Comfort Hill is predominantly owned by the State and therefore cannot be developed. There are also recreational facilities in that area. The general consensus was to leave that area as it is.
- The northern intersection currently has plans for the development of 130 residential units. There was general support for additional housing, however, there was concern regarding additional traffic in that area.

- Concerns regarding adding a full traffic signal at the intersection of Main Street and Macdonough Drive, and potentially causing backups to the west on Main Street.
- The southern intersection would be hard to develop due to historical and archeological sensitivities. There is interest in improving the recreational areas by the river and docks.
- Major concerns regarding the construction and operation of the southern intersection. There is a 22% grade at the bridge from the water line up to the intersection which will need to be addressed. The comment was made that it is extremely difficult making a left from 22A onto Macdonough Drive due to the existing grade. There is concern about how regrading would impact properties in that area. In addition, there were concerns regarding the existing bridge both its condition and the grade.
- There was concern regarding the lack of a secondary bridge as part of this alternative.
- There was also a question about potentially having the orange route just accommodate one direction of truck traffic and maintaining one direction of truck traffic on 22A.
- There were a couple of areas that were considered for housing including at the northern intersection where housing is already planned and several designated lots near Sherman Ridge. Some interest in potentially converting lots into light industrial with potential access off of the orange route as opposed to off of Comfort Hill to prevent increased truck traffic on that existing roadway.
- There was a desire for a separated pedestrian and bicycle path along the new route to connect a lot of the existing natural resources, open spaces, and recreational facilities. We talked a lot about the docks along Otter Creek and the importance of maintaining that connection.
- Concern regarding how the southern intersection would be designed and would operate.
- Desire for the overall road to feel rural with trees along either side to maintain the current aesthetic and not to over development especially with the topography constraints.



Additional Public Comments

After a "report out" and discussion commentary from the breakout groups, attendees reconvened for a presentation on next steps and any additional comments related to the PEL study. The following comments were made.

- The Orange Route does not appear to address the "bottleneck" on the bridge over the Otter Creek.
- From a MacDonough Drive resident: the land is washing into the Creek. This Orange Route could make this worse.
- Southbound left turn onto MacDonough Drive seems problematic.
- There is a long history of "exporting the negative impacts" of Vergennes' industry onto other communities; these impacts should be borne by Vergennes.
- Any solution should be efficient in terms of resource uses, with reduced adverse environmental impacts, which may suggest that the shortest route would be preferred (i.e., the Orange Route).
- Revisit consideration of the barge system, such as to ship fuel to Burlington and elsewhere on Lake Champlain. [Note: a barge concept has been considered

during this PEL Study, and constituted an earlier concept that did not meet the Study's screening criteria].

- A second bridge for emergency services would be a benefit; working on the existing bridge is on VTrans' project list.
- Concern about noise, and how it may travel along the ravine adjacent to an Orange Route. Perhaps special asphalts or other pavement material can be utilized that reduces tire noise.
- Perception by some that Vergennes would benefit from improvements from a new road such as the Orange Route, but surrounding communities will be adversely impacted, such as by noise.
- Speaker lives on MacDonough Drive, which is part of the proposed Orange route. They said that the roadway is collapsing, and the bank is sliding toward the river, and would be unsafe to add additional truck traffic. They said adding truck traffic to this road would destroy the work the City has put in to develop the area into a recreational and downtown destination. They also pointed out that turning at the intersection of MacDonough Drive and Main Street is not feasible from an elevation point of view. They suggested that the Orange route should be discarded as an option.
- Advocate for principles that should be considered when evaluating the routes, such as fairness and equity, energy usage, greenhouse gas emissions, and community impact.
- There is a need for a second bridge as an emergency route in case the existing bridge fails or is closed for maintenance. They acknowledged that one bridge would save money, but they argued that a second bridge is needed for safety and security reasons.
- Concern expressed about the noise level that the truck traffic could generate, especially for the nearby farming communities that may see less benefit from the increase in business or tax income.