

Land Use Visioning Workshop Notes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Purple Route Land Use Visioning Public Workshop
Date and Time	December 12, 2023 - 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location	Tourterelle Restaurant & Inn, 3629 Ethan Allen Highway New Haven 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 40

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.

Attendees raised hands to indicate whether they lived or worked in the Study communities, or elsewhere. Most of the attendees lived in the communities along Route 17 of the Purple Route: Addison, Weybridge, Waltham and New Haven. A smaller number of attendees live elsewhere in the Study area: Ferrisburgh and Panton and Vergennes. Work location was mixed among the attendees who offered this information.

Approximately the following number of attendees lived in the following places:

- New Haven: 10
- Addison: 6
- Weybridge: 5
- Waltham: 8
- Other study communities (Vergennes, Ferrisburgh, Panton, Vergennes): 6
- Elsewhere: 5

Approximately the following number of attendees worked in the following places:

- New Haven: 4
- Addison: 3
- Weybridge: 1
- Waltham: 1
- Other study communities (Vergennes, Ferrisburgh, Panton, Vergennes): 6
- Elsewhere: 5
- Note: Some attendees did not raise their hand, potentially due to being retired

Katharine then proceeded with presentation slides that outlined the Purpose and Need, the screening criteria, and the status of the Study work. She offered preliminary highlights of the public survey as they related to the Purple Route. She noted that the digital "birds-eye-view" fly-through visualization of the Purple Route concept (and of the other concepts) would soon be available on the Study website.

Attendees asked the following questions.

- What is the history behind how/why the purple route was chosen and specifically who came up with that idea?
 - A year and a half ago the task was to brainstorm with the help of the community and our stakeholders all the possible methodologies to reduce truck traffic including water (e.g., barges), using rail, other roadways such as Route 4 and Route 7 or Route 7 and Route 17, potential new roadway. So that is how this route came to be, it was one of the potential ways that was created during that process. It was also recognized in previous studies as a potential option for reducing the impact of truck traffic. That is how it got on the list.
- Why not both directions?
 - One of the things we were looking at when we were scoring we looked at both directions versus one direction and it scored higher in just one

direction because it reduced impacts in some areas but didn't create significant impacts to other areas. You can read more about how these decisions were made specifically in the Technical Memorandum on the Study website. There is a page or two for each route on how each was evaluated and scored.

- But does this one fulfill the underlying purpose and need?
 - Yes, the Purple Route is reducing the impact of truck traffic in Downtown Vergennes, which is the purpose of this study.

"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 continued with 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 these elements are informing Study decision-making and design processes, and the evening's breakout groups.

Breakout Groups

As guided by Study Team facilitators, the breakout groups consisted of members of the public at several separate tables to brainstorm and discuss land use options if the Purple Route were built or improved. 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, current farm vehicle and truck travel, 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. All map work was photographed, and notes were taken by designated note-takers in order to document the breakout group conversations (see below for notes).

Table 1

Facilitator: Chris Sargent, D&K

Note-taker: Kait Campbell, D&K

Highlights:

- There was not a lot of motivation to propose any significant land use changes other than the fact that there needs to be some sort of separated blocked bicycle

facility particularly along Route 17 recognizing that it is such an important connection and it is also you have to be an expert to ride it and even then you are not necessarily comfortable doing it.

- Folks from New Haven indicated that they are in the middle of a wildlife study and are aware of some wildlife crossings along the route and they are going to provide that report to us once it is further along or completed.

Notes:

- Significant support for keeping the existing land uses along the route
- Quaker Village Road, Chalker Farm – this is a dangerous intersection (hill, twisting road, poor visibility) as well as a popular bike route.
- The existing bridge over the Otter Creek might be too narrow: If so, suggestion made to put a traffic signal on both sides of the bridge so that motorists “take turns” - one direction at a time.
- “Any improvement to any road needs to include pedestrian and bicycle routes separated from the road” - talk to bike tour groups.
- New Haven is doing a wildlife crossing study. Several places along Route 17 are key wildlife crossings. Also, it is important to maintain uninterrupted forest corridors.
- Train traffic in the area – how will this be affected by more trucks turning north onto Route 7. Is this a dual-freight mode opportunity?
- Burnham Road and Livingston Road are both dangerous intersections.
- Lots of questions regarding the impacts of the Purple Route on people and the environment.
- This route goes through a valley, which creates a sound corridor in the area, near Weybridge, etc.
- “Is there a good that can come of this, like the new bridge in Middlebury?”
- Positive precedents: Hopkins Road in Panton (but paved)
- Negative precedents: roadways in Bristol have new shoulders, but they still do not work for cyclists [potential follow-up: why not?]
- Discussed the challenge of interactions between tractor trailers and wide farm vehicles.
- “These are special places.”
- “The Addison Four Corners intersection is dangerous”
- Preserve the scenic view corridors along Route 17.

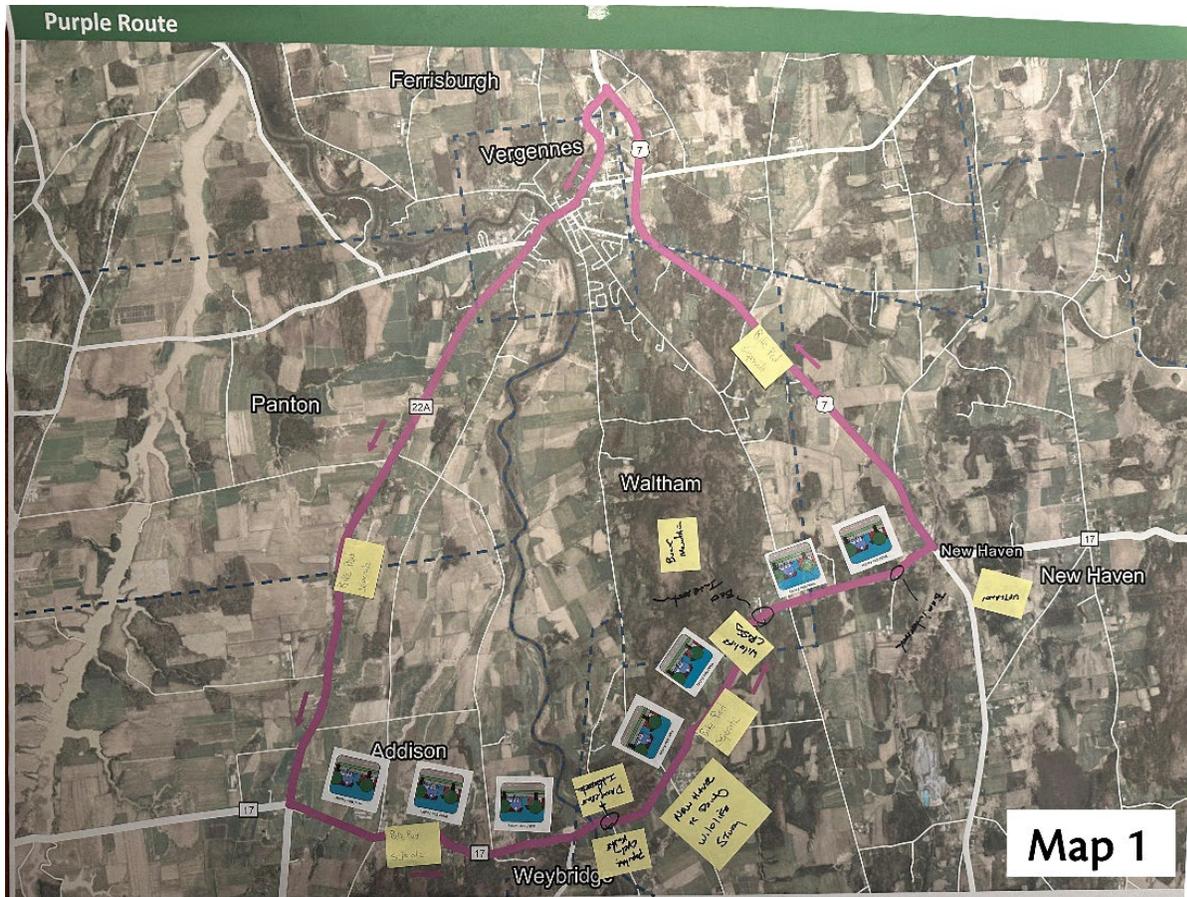


Table 2

Facilitator: Mike Winslow, ACRPC

Note-taker: Amanda Holland, VTrans

Highlights:

- No support for any housing along the route.
- Some discussion if there was any degree of commercial or retail it should be focused on the ends at Route 17 or Route 7, but not along the middle.
- Same notion of bike/pedestrian accommodations needing to be made along the entirety of the route.
 - Comment about the bridge being too small to accommodate that.
- A lot of discussion about wildlife crossings, but without the indication of specific locations or species. Note that this can be further developed as part of the New Haven study.

- Notion that there is a lot of agriculture along the route and that should be accommodated within the design.

Notes:

- The major destination, Addison County Field Days, is surrounded by working farmlands.
- It is important to know where conserved land already exists.
- Question about the process of working within the existing ROW, or the potential to need to modify the ROW for Purple Route improvements.
- If the road is modified, it may be an opportunity to improve utility infrastructure.
- Support for a bicycle lane between Addison and New Haven Junction.
- The intersection at New Haven Junction is dangerous, turning movements, wetland locations.
- Locate school bus stops at intersections. If there is increased development, there may be a need for additional school bus traffic.
- Concern relative to historic buildings along Route 17.
- Concern relative to noise
- Concern relative to wildlife safety
- Additional commercial use may make sense at the two ends of the Purple Route, and perhaps around Field Days if it were to be more active. However, we must work with existing ag lands and landowners.
- Increased road width and increased traffic could greatly impact wildlife travel – could wildlife underpasses make a difference?
- The Purple Route is the longest route, adding miles to the trip. This is a big increase in fossil fuel usage, and cost to the truck operator.
- Maintain/promote safe VAST trail crossing near the intersection with route 23.

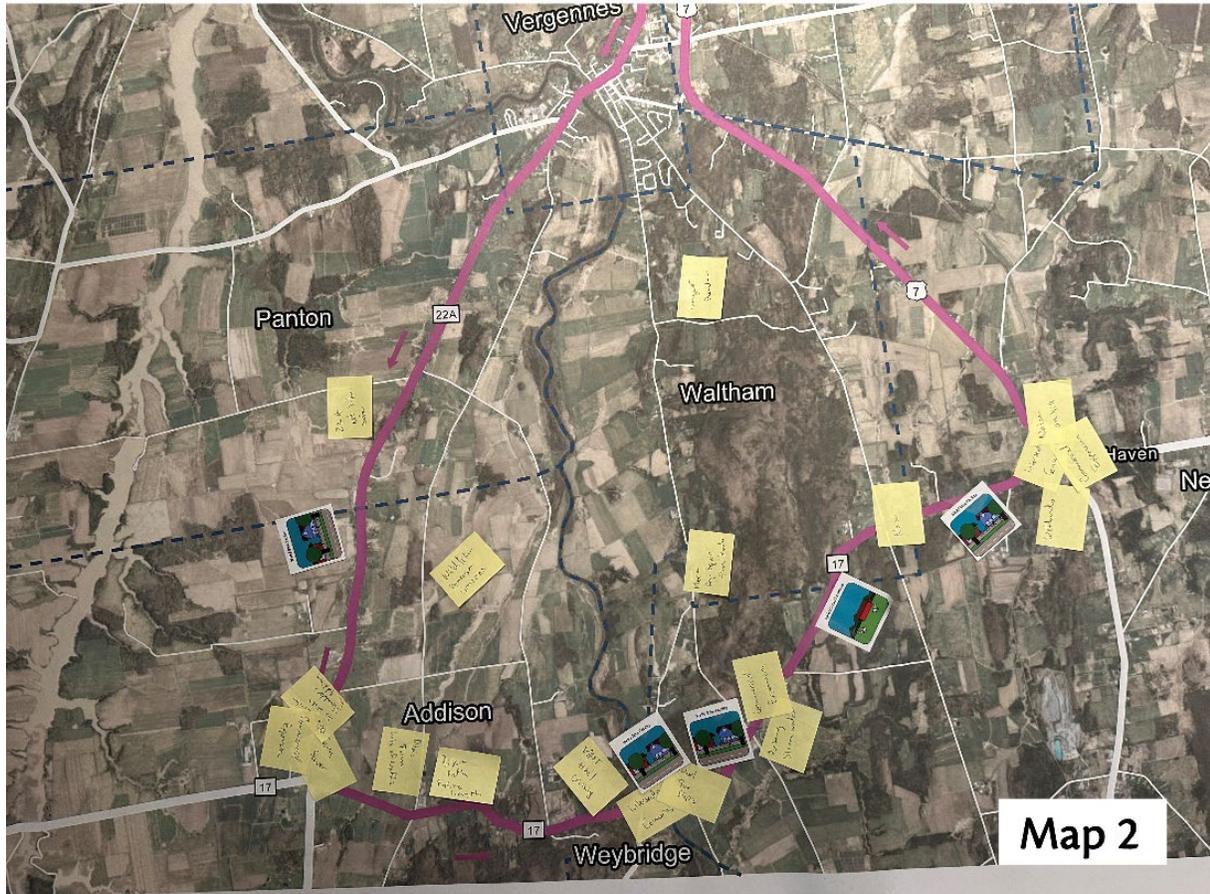


Table 3

Facilitator: Dan Mallach, D&K

Note-taker: Elaine Ezerins, WSP

Highlights:

- Safety was a priority from the perspective of being inside the cab of one of these trucks and knowing what they have to put up with and that there are also very wide farm vehicles.
- Cyclists use to do loops around the area perhaps before it felt unsafe to do so.
- In terms of new housing, some of the group considered Addison Four Corners and structures with a town hall, church, school, etc.
- Other improvements for cyclists along 22A and 17.
- A lot of interest in honoring and respecting the special places that are there now.

Notes:

- Safety and efficiency should be the guiding principles of this Study.

- Agricultural vehicles can be as wide as 21 feet. Good bit of farm traffic along 17.
- Some additional retail use could be appropriate along Route 7.
- Narrow shoulder areas are often due to ledge rock.
- It is important to know the travel habits of local farmers.
- Get in the cab of tractor trailer to better understand what driving it is like.
- The group expressed a desire to see a bike route between Quaker Village and Green Street along Route 17, as these are existing cyclist routes. They also suggested adding more solar fields on Route 7, as these are compatible with the current land use there.
- The group had different opinions on the potential land use along Route 17 and at the Addison Four Corners intersection of Route 17 and 22A. One person wanted to preserve the agricultural and farmland character of Route 17, while another person did not see residential housing as a feasible option due to the environmental impact. A couple of people proposed clustered housing at the Addison Four Corners intersection, as well as a space for community gathering, such as a coffee shop or a community center. Another couple of people envisioned a green space near the existing bridge on Route 17, similar to Crown Point State Park, with trails and picnic areas.
- The group also shared their worries about the possibility of turning Route 17 into a truck route, as this would affect the traffic flow and the safety of the road. They hoped that VTrans would factor in the cost and the impact of this decision, especially considering the presence of five large farms along Route 17 that use heavy machinery and have limited sight distance.

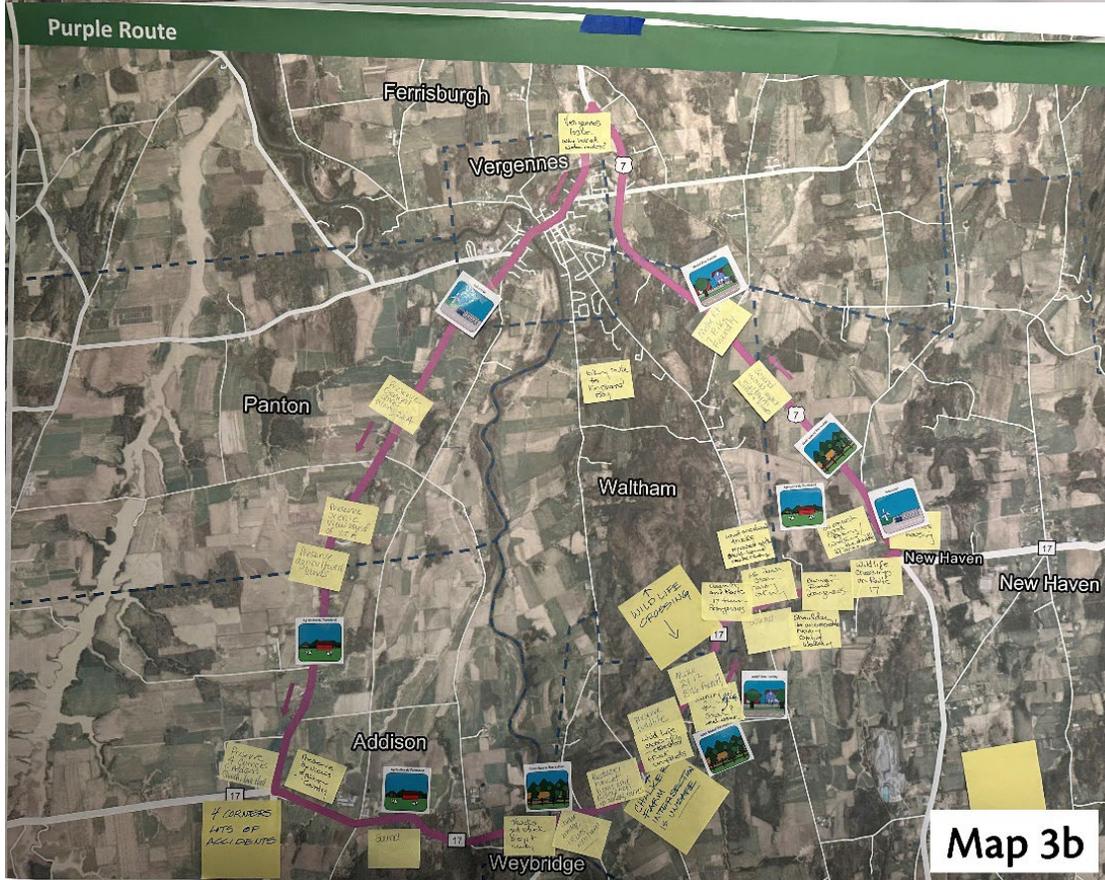
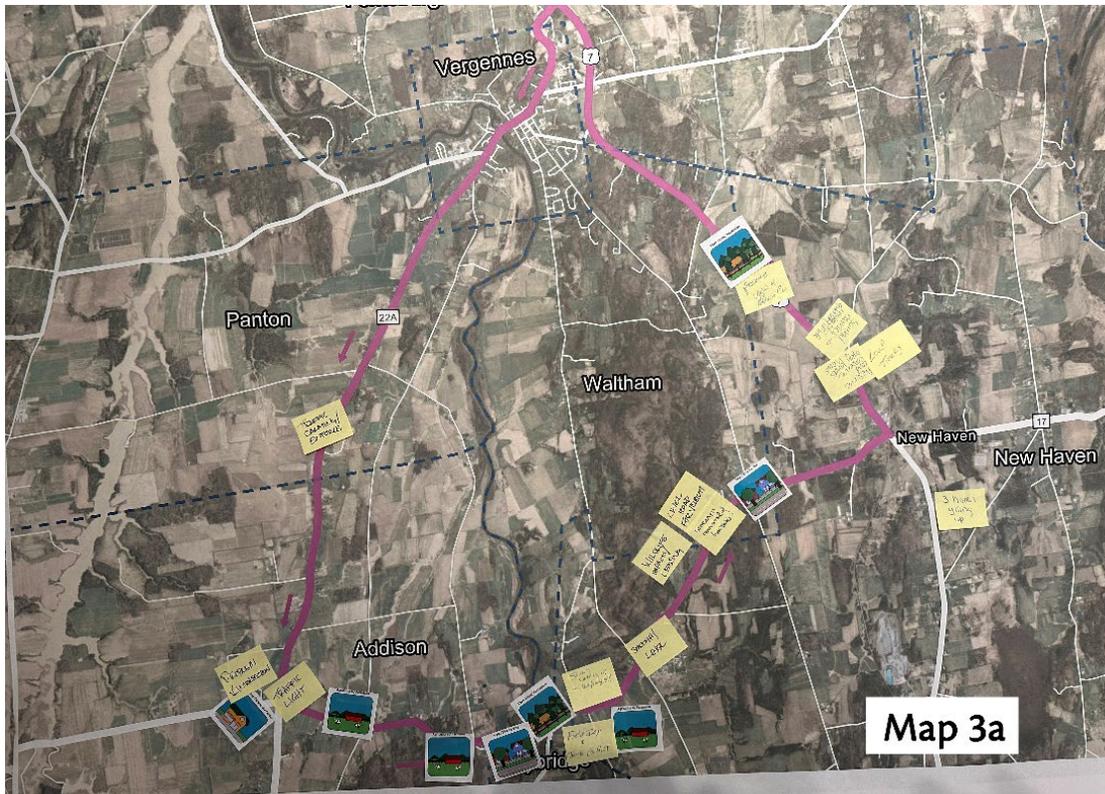


Table 4

Facilitator: Katie Raycroft-Meyer, ACRPC

Note-taker: Annabelle Dally, WSP

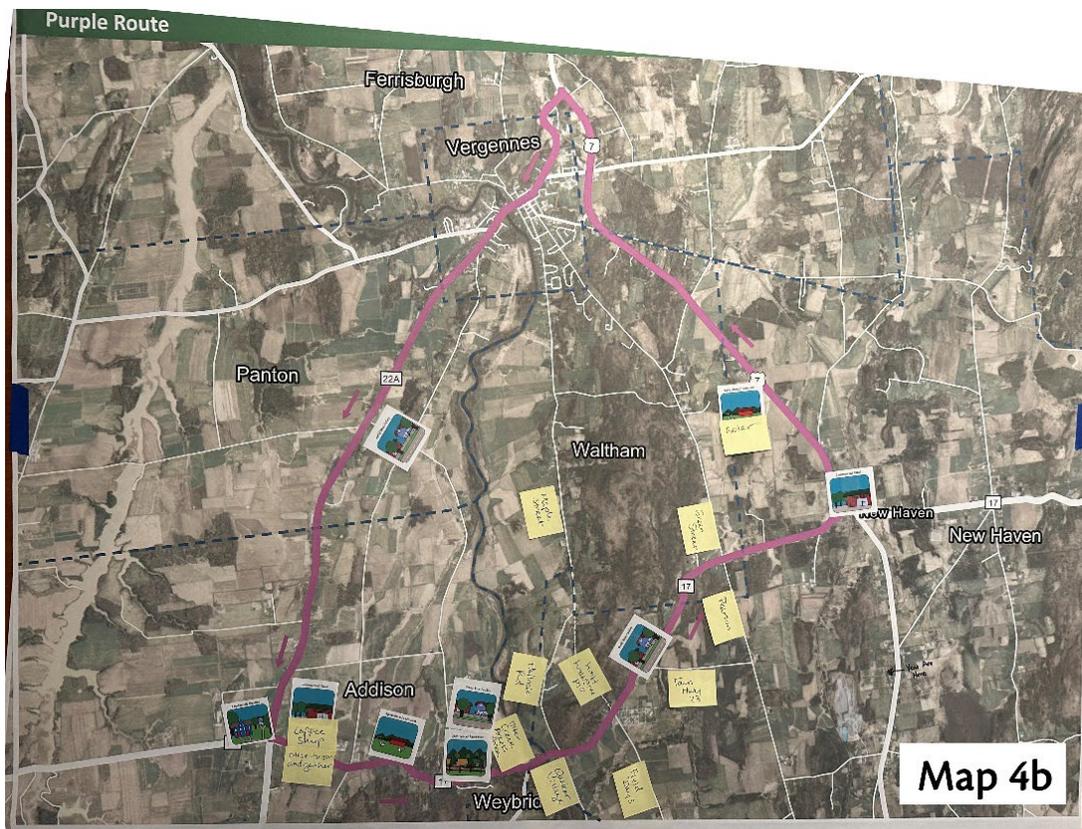
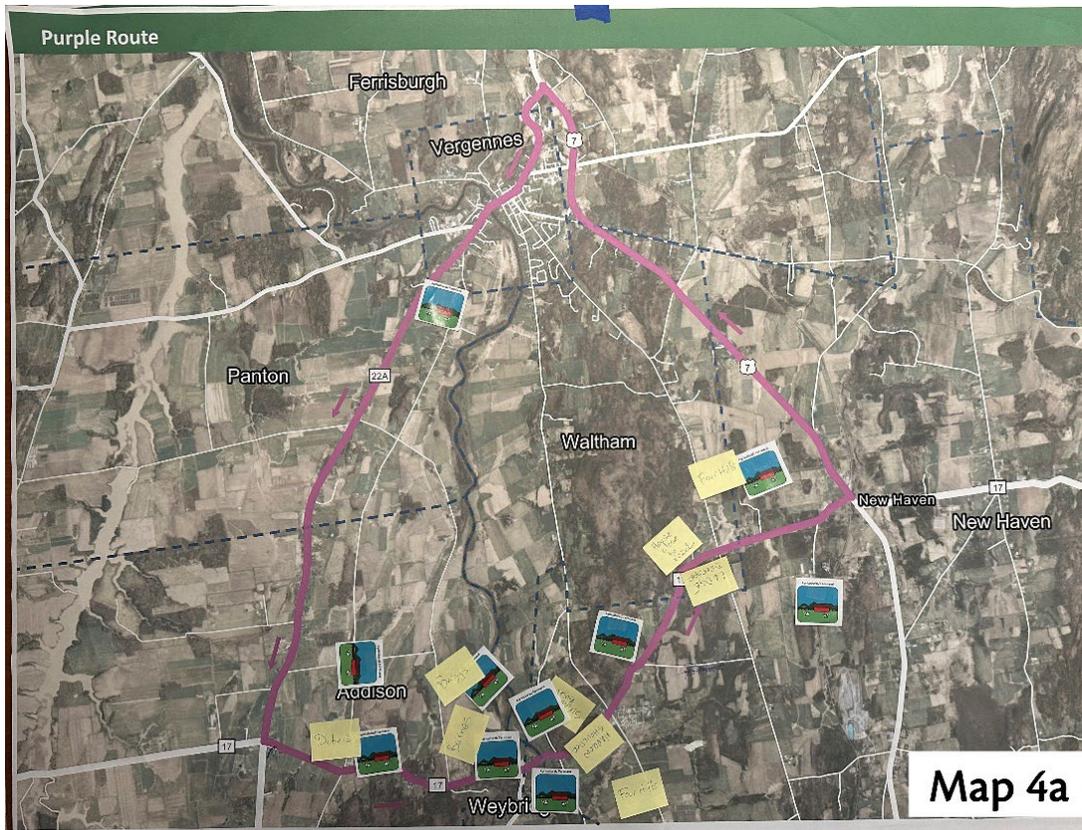
Highlights:

- Overall, there was a strong position to maintain the land uses that are there today and a major concern for safety in the current condition and increased danger with the addition of truck traffic.
- Overall, the group was focused on preserving what is there and making the routes safer for the existing users including agricultural vehicles, passenger vehicles (residential traffic), and bicycle accommodations.
- These routes exist whether this transportation solution is executed or not. Strong desire to preserve agricultural and open space uses along these routes.
- Some desire to add bicycle accommodations along these routes, particularly along Route 17, which feels particularly dangerous for cyclists and other locations where connectivity is lacking.

Notes:

- Interest in bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.
 - There is a lot of biking in this area. This stretch of Route 17 is fast moving and narrow. It would be nice to have bike accommodations along some of this route.
 - There are several routes in the region across Route 66 (Waltham), down Green Street, only on Route 17 for a short stretch
 - A loop out to Button Bay or Kingsland Bay
 - Most runners and bikers avoid Route 7 and Route 22A due to speed and danger
- Existing safety concerns for residents along Route 17 will be exacerbated by additional truck traffic along Route 17
 - “To get out of our driveways currently, one of us stands at the end of the driveway and looks and listens for oncoming vehicles because the sight lines are terrible. If an EV is coming you are doomed.”
 - Similar situation coming out of South Maple Street
- The entire section of Route 17 is difficult for trucks – steep and curvy with ledge on both sides
 - Also dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians

- Wildlife concerns lots of deer and bear along Route 17
- This would require enforcement. Who will pay for it?
- Noise concerns. Truck noise is amplified especially along Quarry and Laffin roads. It is a natural amphitheater for sound.
- Depending on the existing volume, this Purple Route could have a significant and noticeable impact, or it could not.
- Maintain agricultural lands
 - Consider agricultural vehicles when designing roadway improvements
 - Trucks have to drive slowly and are often unable to pass large farm equipment
- Maintain scenic views and preserve open spaces
 - Mentioned a view when coming downhill into Addison
- Keep Route 17 as it is – not much need for development
- Potential for some light industrial near Vergennes
- Interest in solar farm along the routes
- General question - If the bridge in Vergennes is closed what would traffic look like on Route 17 and Route 7?
- Need traffic calming along Route 22A between Vergennes and Addison
- Route 17 and Route 22A is a terrible intersection
- There needs to be visual cues to slow traffic down at the intersection. Northbound traffic is particularly bad, especially if motorists need to turn right or stop at a light. The speed limit should be lowered further south of the intersection and it should drop in stages from 40 to 30 to 25 etc. Trucks need to slow down before getting to Addison Four Corners.
- Noted that traffic along 22A moves very fast the need for coming up with some kind of traffic calming along the area and at the Four Corners Intersection which is already a dangerous intersection particularly if there is going to be an added movement of truck traffic turning.
- Noted the importance of agriculture and how much agriculture there is along Route 17 and how those agricultural vehicles currently interact and hold up traffic and the need to consider that interaction.
- Open space and wildlife crossings through the center area here.
- Interest in preserving the scenic views along portions of Route 7.
- Concerns regarding sound along Route 7 and along Route 17 as well. Noise is already a concern along these routes. Thinking of ways to mitigate existing and any additional sound from the increased truck traffic.



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.

- Participant from Waltham conveyed that surveyors had walked onto private properties without notifying the owners, and requested prior notice if that needs to happen again. Katharine Otto explained that members of the study team had conducted field inventories to verify the locations of environmental resources, mainly wetlands, and assured the participant that in the future they would communicate such visits in advance, but did not expect any additional field inventory to be needed.
- The Purple Route visualization will be posted on the website by the end of the year.