

Technical Committee Meeting Minutes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Technical Committee Meeting - Purpose and Need Statement Review
Date and Time	February 8, 2022 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Location	Zoom Virtual Meeting
Technical Committee Member Attendees	<p>Voting Members:</p> <p>Chair – Joe Segale (VTrans), Planning</p> <p>Fred Kenney (Addison County Economic Development), Economic</p> <p>Jim Larrow (City of Vergennes), Town Road Foremen</p> <p>John Bull (Town of Ferrisburgh), Town Road Foremen</p> <p>Katie Raycroft-Meyer (ACRPC), Planning</p> <p>Mike Winslow (ACRPC), Planning</p> <p>Shannon Haggett (City of Vergennes), Planning</p> <p>Bruce Martin (VTrans), Pavement*</p> <p>Jeff Ramsey (VTrans), Environmental*</p> <p>Rick Cloutier (Town of Panton), Town Road Foremen*</p> <p>Non-Voting Members:</p> <p>Chris Jolly (FHWA), Planning</p> <p>Elizabeth Shipley (FHWA), Environmental</p> <p>Jon Kaplan (VTrans), Bicycle and Pedestrian</p> <p>Katharine Otto (VTrans), Planning, Observer</p> <p>Adam Lougee (ACRPC), Planning, Observer*</p> <p>Ashley Atkins (VTrans), Maintenance*</p> <p>Nick Wark (VTrans), Structures*</p> <p>Patrick Kirby (FHWA), Planning*</p>
Study Team Attendees	<p>Ken Robie (D&K)</p> <p>Chris Sargent (D&K)</p> <p>Bryan Pounds (WSP)</p> <p>Stephanie Camay (WSP)</p> <p>Stephen Chiaramonte (WSP)</p> <p>Laura Toole (WSP)</p> <p>Delia Makhetha (WSP)</p> <p>Annabelle Dally (WSP)</p> <p>Rich Tetreault (D&K)*</p> <p>Lawrence Pesesky (WSP)*</p>

*Invited, but not present

Meeting Minutes

Joe Segale, Chair of the Technical Committee (the committee), called the committee meeting to order on February 8, 2022, at 9:03 am. Joe Segale reviewed the agenda for the meeting and provided a summary of the public engagement to date, explained that members of the Study Team had met with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and received comments on the Purpose and Need Statement, and notified the committee that the Policy Committee meeting on the Purpose and Need Statement will be held on March 7, 2022.

Delia Makhetha, WSP, conducted roll call. Seven of the ten voting members and four of the eight remaining non-voting members of the committee were present, and ten additional participants representing VTrans, WSP and DuBois & King (D&K) were in attendance.

General housekeeping notes raised by the group included; Ashley Bishop is now Ashley Atkins, Andrea Wright is no longer a member of the committee, she was replaced by Jeff Ramsey, and Rob Carter on the Policy Committee is no longer representing the Addison County Chamber, he was replaced by Phil Summers. Elizabeth Shipley, FHWA, was added as a non-voting member of the committee.

Laura Toole provided an update on public outreach activities conducted during the Summer, Fall, and Winter of 2021 and common feedback and reoccurring themes received during public outreach efforts. The committee was asked if there was anything that surprised them about the public feedback received to date.

Chris Jolly, FHWA, asked for clarification on the statistic from the Vermont Truck and Bus Association regarding “86% of respondents indicating that they would use Route 7 as an alternative route.” Mr. Jolly asked if the statistic was in reference to “if no improvements were constructed as a result of this process.” Bryan Pounds, WSP, clarified that 86% of respondents indicated they would use Route 7 as an alternative route if Route 22A was no longer available to them.

Fred Kenney, Addison County Economic Development, noted there was direct outreach to the Selectboards of each municipality impacted and representation of those municipalities in the various committees and focus groups. Fred Kenney asked if any of the municipalities had raised concerns through these interactions regarding steps they would need to take to deal with potential changes to land use and zoning. Joe Segale offered that Panton and Ferrisburgh would be the most impacted municipalities outside of Vergennes. Joe Segale explained that at the Panton Selectboard meeting, the Selectboard had indicated it was appreciative of being included this early in the process as it did not feel it was included adequately in the previous study. At the Ferrisburgh Selectboard meeting, the Selectboard raised more concern with the boundary between the municipalities and less about land use or zoning, however, they were concerned about affordable housing. Ken Robie, D&K, mentioned that the Waltham Selectboard had expressed the Selectboard’s desire to maintain the land use surrounding Route 17 as rural and to continue supporting economic growth in Vergennes.

John Bull, Town of Ferrisburgh, stated one of the questions that arose in Ferrisburgh was whether or not these alternatives would include designating any existing or proposed roadways

as a limited-access highway and how that would affect the zoning in Ferrisburgh. Joe Segale explained any alternative that designates roadways as a limited-access highway limits development potential as the adjacent lands and crossroads would have restricted/limited-access. He said these types of impacts will be evaluated as the alternatives are developed and the study moves forward and that these are the right kinds of questions for towns to ask during this process.

The committee was asked if there are any stakeholders, agencies, or specific parties which should be engaged that the Study Team did not consider. None were suggested.

No further comments were raised. Bryan Pounds and Joe Segale indicated that the public outreach process was vetted through this committee prior to implementation and the Study Team will take the lack of comment as a sign that public outreach is on the right track.

Bryan Pounds reviewed the Purpose and Need Statement and described common feedback from the public and the Select Boards/Councils, including the need to expand and further define the previous Purpose and Need Statement. For example, the Purpose and Need Statement identifies economic vitality and the general feedback was that this Need should be clearly defined.

Stephen Chiaramonte and Stephanie Camay, WSP, presented the Needs data and descriptions.

Joe Segale asked Elizabeth Shipley, FHWA, to share FHWA's initial reactions and comments regarding the Purpose and Need Statement. Elizabeth Shipley explained that the content and information presented and available in the Purpose and Need Technical Memorandum is what is needed, however, the overall statements need to be more concise. Elizabeth Shipley explained that the Purpose statement should be 1-2 sentences and the Need statement should be 3-4 sentences for easy incorporation into NEPA documents. Bryan Pounds indicated that the Study Team will work to narrow the Purpose and Need Statement while making sure the meaning is not lost.

Bryan Pounds reminded the committee of its role in this project which is to make recommendations based on their technical experience and he opened the floor for comments on the Purpose and Need Statement. The following two questions were proposed to the committee for consideration: Do you recommend the Purpose and Need Statement, as written, be presented to the public? Do you recommend the Purpose and Need Statement, as modified, be presented to the public?

Fred Kenney stated that he and others shared at the public meeting that the economic vitality piece mentions mitigating negative impacts but makes no mention of how this project can be used or leveraged to have positive impacts on economic vitality. There is interest in updating the language within the "Economic Vitality" piece to include positive impacts. In addition, Fred Kenney mentioned that while downtown Vergennes is most important in terms of economic vitality within this project, he would like to see the regional piece be more all-encompassing and not refer to agriculture alone. There is interest in making this component broader. His suggestion was rural economic development instead of regional agriculture.

Joe Segale and Katie Raycroft-Meyer, ACRPC, were both in support of including language related to leveraging positive impacts and expanding the reach of economic vitality outside of downtown Vergennes as a secondary benefit. Joe Segale suggested language such as “leveraging the investment to maximize the appropriate economic vitality in downtown Vergennes and the corridor” and incorporating “supporting rural economic development” as well.

Mike Winslow, ACRPC, reminded the committee that the original vision of this project was to alleviate truck traffic in downtown Vergennes and cautioned the committee to be conscious of vision creep. Shannon Haggett, Vergennes, mentioned that the planning commission expects to rework, revise, replan for the region and towns impacted by any alternative selected. Elizabeth Shipley reminded the group the main purpose of this project is transportation-related and the Purpose and Need Statement should be concise to be incorporated into future NEPA documentation and cautioned against vision creep.

Joe Segale asked FHWA if it is acceptable to include economic vitality in the Purpose and Need in a PEL study. Elizabeth Shipley and Chris Jolly indicated that economic vitality can be a need and criteria used for evaluation, but it cannot be the primary purpose. Through the NEPA process, economic vitality and impact will be evaluated. The committee needs to keep the focus on transportation.

Joe Segale asked if Fred Kenney was comfortable with that approach. Fred Kenney reiterated that he would like the language for economic vitality to not focus on a particular sector of economic opportunity (i.e. agriculture), but instead be stated more broadly as rural economic opportunities.

Joe Segale reiterated that the Purpose and Need Statement will be reorganized to make it more concise and include language within the economic vitality component to recognize other types of economic opportunities and add positive impacts. Joe Segale asked if there are any additional comments or anything lacking in the Purpose and Need Statement. No other comments were provided by the committee.

Bryan Pounds reviewed the next steps including circulating the Purpose and Need Statement to other likely participating and cooperating agencies including the FHWA, Coast Guard, and Army Corps of Engineers to review before the March 7 Policy Committee meeting where the Purpose and Need Statement will be presented for adoption prior to agency concurrence. The next step will be to gather input on the long list of alternatives and screening criteria at public workshops. The criteria will be used to narrow down alternatives to be presented at a public meeting, in Fall 2022.

Mike Winslow asked if the committee agrees to vote on recommending the Purpose and Need Statement to the Policy Committee with modifications. Mike Winslow questioned how we would obtain the Committee’s recommendation on the Purpose and Need statement after this meeting ends. Joe Segale suggested approval could be conducted through email correspondence or an additional committee meeting.

Fred Kenney supported Mike Winslow's idea to move forward with voting on the Purpose and Need Statement with modifications to the economic vitality component. **Joe Segale moved to make this a motion. Motion: To approve the Purpose and Need Statement with changes to economic vitality and concise expressions of Purpose and Need Statement. Katie Raycroft-Meyer seconded the motion.**

Delia Makhetha polled committee members:

Jim Larrow – in favor

John Bull – in favor

Fred Kenney – in favor

Chris Jolly – in favor*

Jon Kaplan – in favor**

Katie Raycroft-Meyer – in favor

Shannon Haggett – in favor

Mike Winslow – in favor

Joe Segale – in favor

The Motion passed unanimously.

*Chris Jolly's vote was stricken from the record as FHWA's role is advisory. Chris Jolly approved of the direction taken on the Purpose and Need Statement.

**Jon Kaplan is a non-voting member, however, his approval of the motion was noted.

Joe Segale informed the committee that those approved changes will be made to the Purpose and Need Statement which will be recirculated in or before two weeks. The Technical Committee members will confirm by email that they approve of the revised statement. Joe Segale asked if there are any more comments. Hearing none, Joe Segale closed the meeting.

Subsequent to the meeting, a revised Purpose and Need Statement was sent to the Technical Committee on Tuesday, February 22, 2022, asking for their confirmation that the statement addressed the Committee's feedback for conciseness and to include rural economy considerations. The Technical Committee reviewed the Statement and all voting members confirmed by Tuesday, March 1, 2022, that it addressed the purpose and needs of the Study.