

# Land Use Visioning Workshop Notes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Pink + Blue Routes Land Use Visioning Public Workshop
Date and Time	December 11, 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) Kait Campbell, DuBois & King Chris Sargent, DuBois & King Jim Gish, VHB (Project Community Liaison)

Number of attendees: Approximately 42

## 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 attendees live in Vergennes, followed by Panton, and Ferrisburgh. A smaller number of attendees live in Addison, New Haven, Waltham, Weybridge, or somewhere else. A majority of attendees work in Vergennes, followed by somewhere else. A smaller number of attendees work in Addison, New Haven, Waltham, Weybridge, Ferrisburgh, and Panton.

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

- Ferrisburgh: 6
- Panton: 10
- Vergennes: 20
- Other study communities (Addison, New Haven, Waltham, Weybridge): 4
- Elsewhere: 2

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

- Ferrisburgh: 3
- Panton: 2
- Vergennes: 15
- Other study communities (Addison, New Haven, Waltham, Weybridge): 3
- Elsewhere: 8
- 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 Pink and Blue Routes. The digital "birds-eye-view" fly-through visualization of the Pink and Blue Route concepts concluded this first portion of the presentation.

### **"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 five separate tables to brainstorm and discuss land use options if the Pink or Blue 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. 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:

- Preference to keep lands agricultural
- Light industry in a few places along the east side
- There is bike traffic/use along Panton Road and Macdonough Drive
- Rotaries at the intersections to slow trucks down
- Trucks currently are detoured onto existing back roads by GPS as it is often faster, concerns a new route could exacerbate this issue

### Notes:

- Current uses are primarily agricultural/working lands and maintained forested area. Some participants wish these to remain so.
- Keep housing and businesses closer to the center of Vergennes.
- "No one will want to live next to a raised [elevated] route."
- "I don't want to see it, but I understand the need."
- "You can have all the houses you want, but people need jobs."
- "Expanding the tax base will help the town."
- There is an active wildlife corridor in the Pink/Blue overlap area that needs to be protected.
- Little support in this group for expanded Industrial land use areas, in part given that there are enough empty buildings currently that could be used for Industrial uses.
- Concern (or lack of awareness) about water availability and sewer capacity for new development along a new road.
- Area southwest of Main Street is popular with cyclists, and supports business activity along Main Street. Would not want cyclists to leave Main Street via a new route, to help maintain this economic activity. Perhaps this is a limited access highway?
- Recognition that a driver's route choices are often driven by GPS software – is it possible to analyze routes relative to potential GPS directions? Will truck drivers

take a Pink or Blue Route? Would adding traffic signals on Main Street slow traffic enough to reroute to a (potentially) non-signalized Pink or Blue Route? (References to Smugglers' Notch stuck truck challenges.)

- Important to maintain access for farm vehicles – perhaps a new route improves access/transportation for farmers.
- Good local precedents: Hopkins Road, Comfort Hill.
- Bad local precedent: Shelburne Road.
- New road precedent: around Santa Fe, NM, in support of Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (located near Carlsbad, NM).
- Concern about the proximity of Otter Creek Mobile Home Park to the Pink Route. Would a sound wall help?
- New bridge construction could also support recreational use of Otter Creek. Perhaps construct an adjacent marina.
- Some support for roundabouts at the north end connection.
- Desire for recreational bicycle parking along a new route, directing cyclists to Main Street.
- Working lands could include solar panels and community gardens (potentially in proximity/on the same parcel).
- No Amazon Warehouses, please (limit square footage or distribution/warehouse use).
- Keep open views on Comfort Hill.
- Multi-use paths should be constructed on a Pink or Blue Route, connecting with existing paths and trails.
- Question: Who would own and maintain a new road? A: While constructed by VTTrans with federal money, the ownership and maintenance are to be determined.
- All of the roads that a Pink or Blue Route would cross have heavy bicycle uses. Intersections should safely support this use.

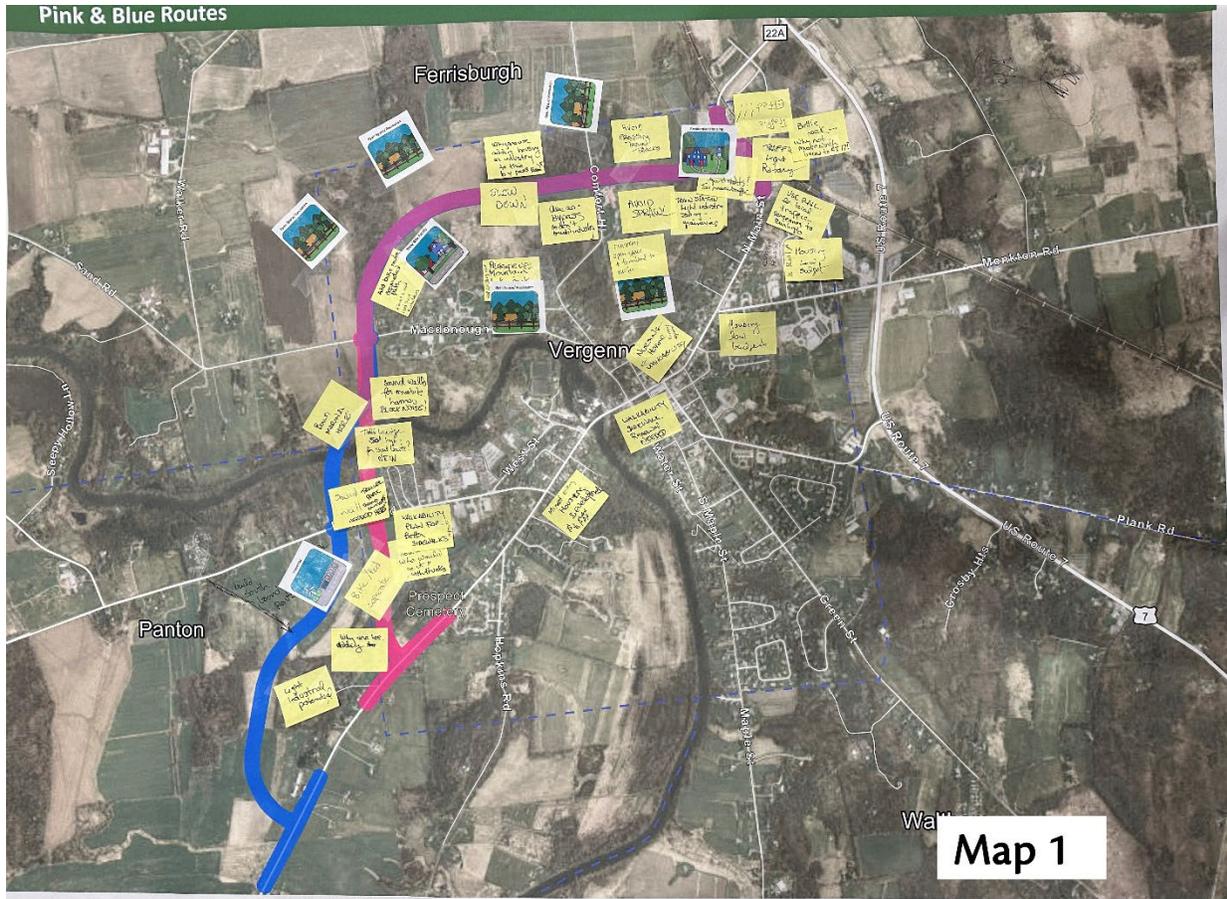


Table 2

Facilitator: Mike Winslow, ACRPC

Note-taker: Annabelle Dally, WSP

Highlights:

- Overall, the group was interested in maintaining existing agricultural lands and open spaces to the extent possible, adding pedestrian and bicycle connections along the route, and developing residential/housing or light industrial along the inside curve or at intersections to build up what already exists.
- Along either route with an emphasis on the west side and south of Pantan Road, there was a strong preference to maintain the existing agricultural lands and open spaces.
- There was some interest in potential development along the east side of the routes and near major intersections (Pantan Road, Macdonough Drive) including light industrial or residential expanding the current uses nearby.

- There was some interest in providing physically separated bicycle and pedestrian accommodations along the routes specifically between Panton Road and Macdonough Drive.

### Notes:

- Interest in retaining as much agricultural land as possible.
  - Protecting the vineyard on the south end of the Blue Route.
  - Landowner harvests timber in the area to the west of the Blue Route along the southern portion.
  - Could the southern portion of the Blue Route be shifted slightly to the west to reduce impacts to agricultural lands? Out past the forest?
- Potential development concentrated at the intersections.
  - Interest in light industrial use especially those that support agricultural needs.
- Concern that development along the south end of the blue would be difficult as there are a lot of wetlands, clay, and agricultural lands. The land is swampy.
- Concerns regarding impacts on wildlife in the area (bears, deer, turkey habitats/corridors along the Blue Route).
- The area of land near the northern portion is owned by the State. There is interest in potentially building a solar array on that parcel to service Panton, Ferrisburgh, and Vergennes.
  - Land is currently used for hunting.
- Suggestion regarding recreation as it is a big factor for tourism.
- Concerns that route will cause people to go around Vergennes and bypass the town. Need to consider ways to draw passenger vehicle traffic into town.
- Interest in retaining Vergennes' character and charm. Vergennes developed organically over time, and it is hard to recreate this type of area.
- How does each area relate to each other? How should areas transition? How should the place flow? We don't want the area to become overdeveloped or disjointed.
- There is concern that the drive of these projects is economic development and there will be a lot of pressure to see development in this area, but it needs to be done correctly.
- We don't want cars to take over. We don't want suburban development like Dorset Street or Spear Street. We don't want sidewalks that lead to nowhere. We don't want people over cars. We don't want to slap paint markings on the

roadway and call it back lanes. We want a certain feel of people, over everything else.

- Discussion around building what is already there. Building inside the curve (to the eastside of the routes) and leave the outside of the curve (the westside of the routes) as is.
- Interest in residential and retail development where appropriate along the inside of the curve. Not single-family dwelling with a lot of acreage – larger buildings, mixed use.
- More pedestrian oriented streetscapes could be built off a new route.
- Develop transition from the traditional grid pattern that exists.
- A road that comes off the route and builds off that – not individual driveways, minimize curb cuts.
- Concerns with noise mitigation and residential developments both future and existing – the trailer park, and Sunset Drive.
- Interest in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure between Panton Road and Macdonough Drive. Would have to be physically separated bike/pedestrian infrastructure.
- Discussion regarding the burden on Ferrisburgh and Panton residents. At least the Pink Route is almost completely within Vergennes.
- Although this process can be uncomfortable, we have never had this much input at the very beginning of a project or a thought. We may not have control over each individual property and what is done with it, but we can make recommendations that inform the future. For example, if we restricted curb cuts, then we restrict development potential.
- Something to keep in mind, truck drivers want the shortest, faster route.
- Continue the same concept along the entirety of the routes with development focused toward the City, complementing what is already there.
- Interest in development at the intersections as it makes sense – gas station, convenience store.
- Carefully designed intersections that encourage trucks to use the new route, but passenger vehicles to continue into downtown Vergennes. Needs to stay inviting to keep regular traffic on Route 22A.
- No roundabouts.
- There is interest in walking and biking to the train station from residential areas throughout Vergennes and the surrounding area.
- Concerns with street lighting and visibility.



### Table 3

Facilitator: Dan Mallach, D&K

Note-taker: Elaine Ezerins, WSP

#### Highlights:

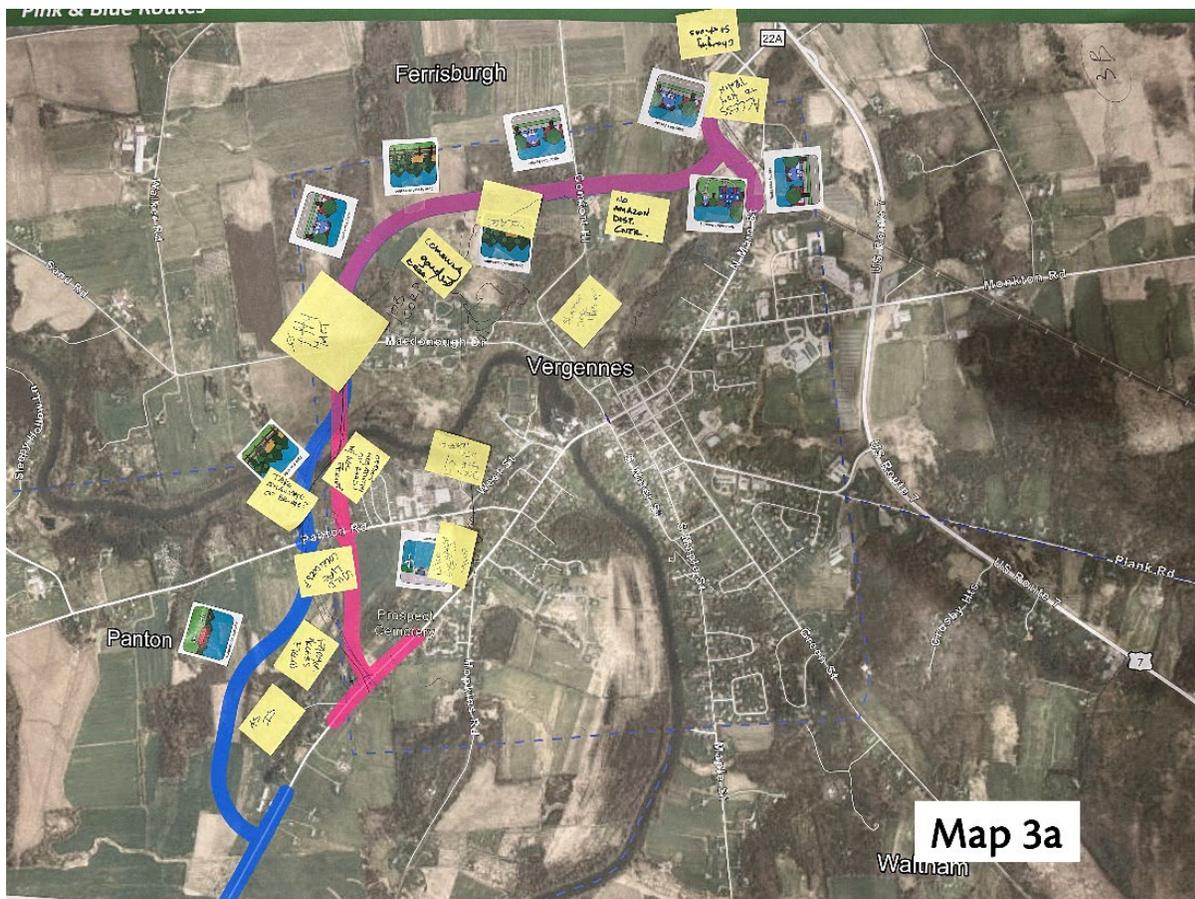
- Interest in keeping the energy toward Main Street – place for bicycle parking where people can park and then come down into the downtown or a loop all around
- Interest in residential specifically in expanding and developing where residential developments already exist
- Interest in potential solar or community gardens
- Preference for keeping the community identity and development with a local feel (e.g., local convenience store at an intersection rather than a warehouse like an Amazon Distribution Center)
- Interest in additional industrial uses near Collins along Pantown Road

#### Notes:

- The group wants industrial land use on the Pink Route and agricultural land use on the Blue Route near the southern intersection with Route 22A.
- The group proposes a recreation area near the bridge, including a small boat put in and picnic tables, and a new route option that avoids the Otter Creek MHP.
- The group also suggests an access point for pedestrians and bicyclists from the downtown area to the park and ride and the train station. Some members of the group would like to see a paved shared-use path constructed parallel to the alternative routes.
- The group noted there is conserved land between Otter Creek and MacDonough Drive, which they would like to keep as open space for wildlife. North of MacDonough Drive is state-owned land, though there may be a possibility of the state giving it to the City of Vergennes. If that were the case, they would like to see residential housing built using a super blocks model for the neighborhood layout and create clustered housing, not single-family homes with single-family lots.
- Toward the northern end of the Pink and Blue Routes, there is land in a trust on the northwest side of the alternative routes and multi-family residential housing on the southeast side of the routes. They also want to add commercial and

residential land use near this multi-family residential zone to tie into existing Vergennes commercial use along Route 22A.

- For the Blue Route, where it differs from the pink route, they would like to add residential housing and also keep the existing uses, which are agricultural farmland and open space.
- The group wanted to note that if something were to happen to the existing bridge on Main Street in Vergennes, the next river crossing is on Route 17.
- The group noted that deer and other small animals cross near the southern end of the Pink Route. The animals come from Otter Creek and head northwest, crossing Hopkins Road, crossing Prospect Cemetery, and then travel back into Otter Creek.



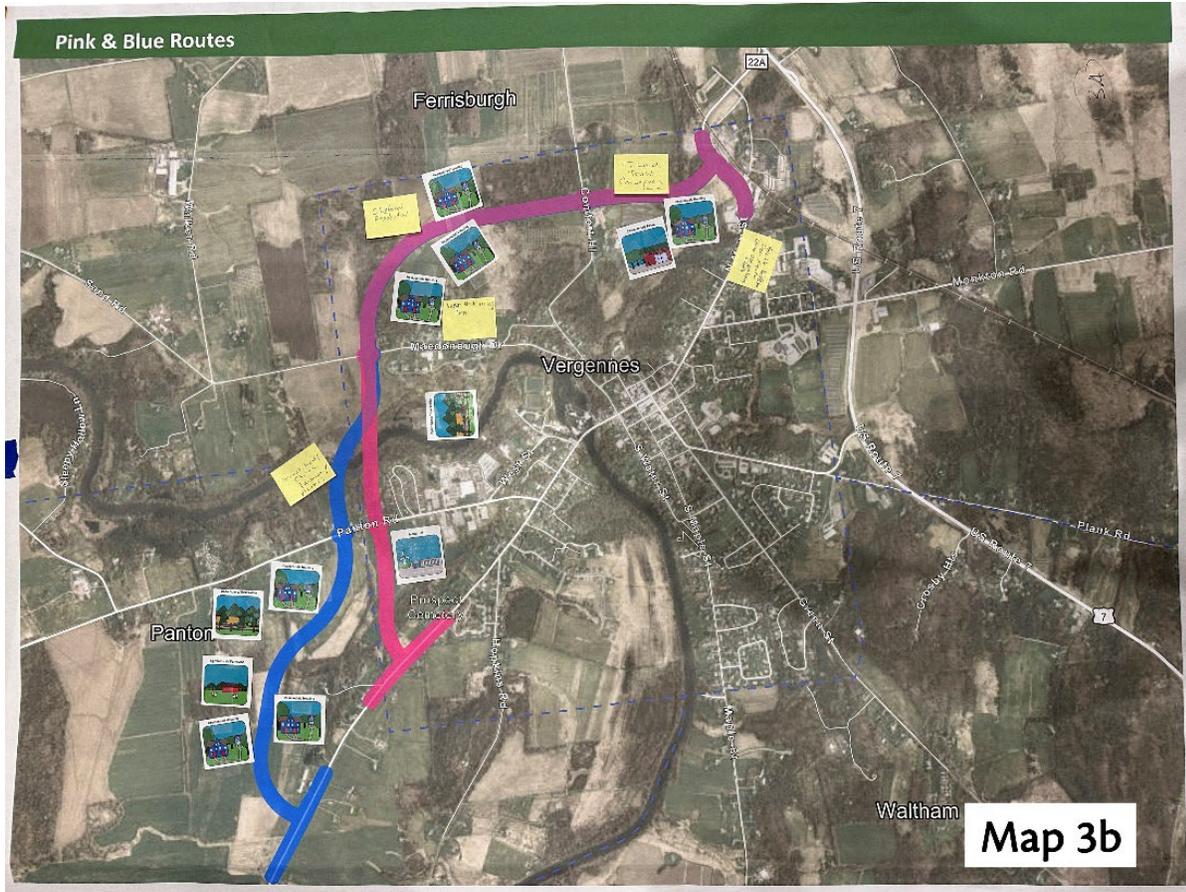


Table 4

Facilitator: Katie Raycroft-Meyer, ACRPC

Note-taker: Amanda Holland, VTrans

- Preference to keep existing open spaces and access to existing resources like bike trails and farmland open for walking and enjoyment
- The routes access multiple housing opportunities.
- Potential multi-use trail connection with exiting trail at MacIntosh Park.
- Industrial uses may be appropriate near the train station.
- Open views around Comfort Hill are important – housing could be clustered to preserve these views.
- Great potential at the Job Corps site for mixed use development.
- Create a bicycle route from the intersection with McDonough Drive, with information about Vergennes businesses and recreation opportunities.
- Keep vistas open at all intersections.
- Support all modes of travel, not just trucks and cars.

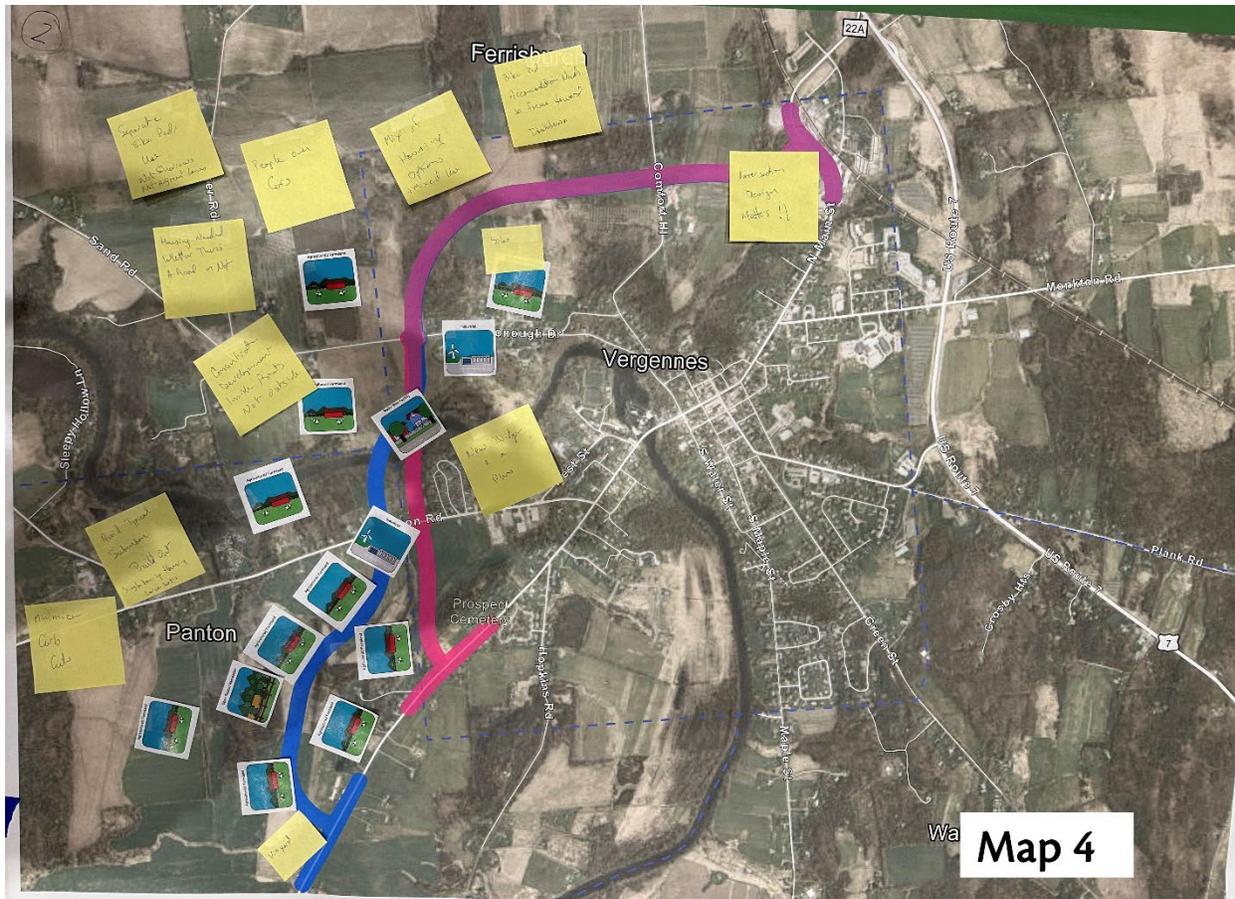


Table 5

Facilitator: Ken Robie, Dubois & King

Note-taker: Katharine Otto, VTrans

Highlights:

- Strong feeling to leave things as is, but to improve connectivity between existing land uses
- Some interest in increasing residential and retail but keeping it to one general area or along a singular node.

Notes:

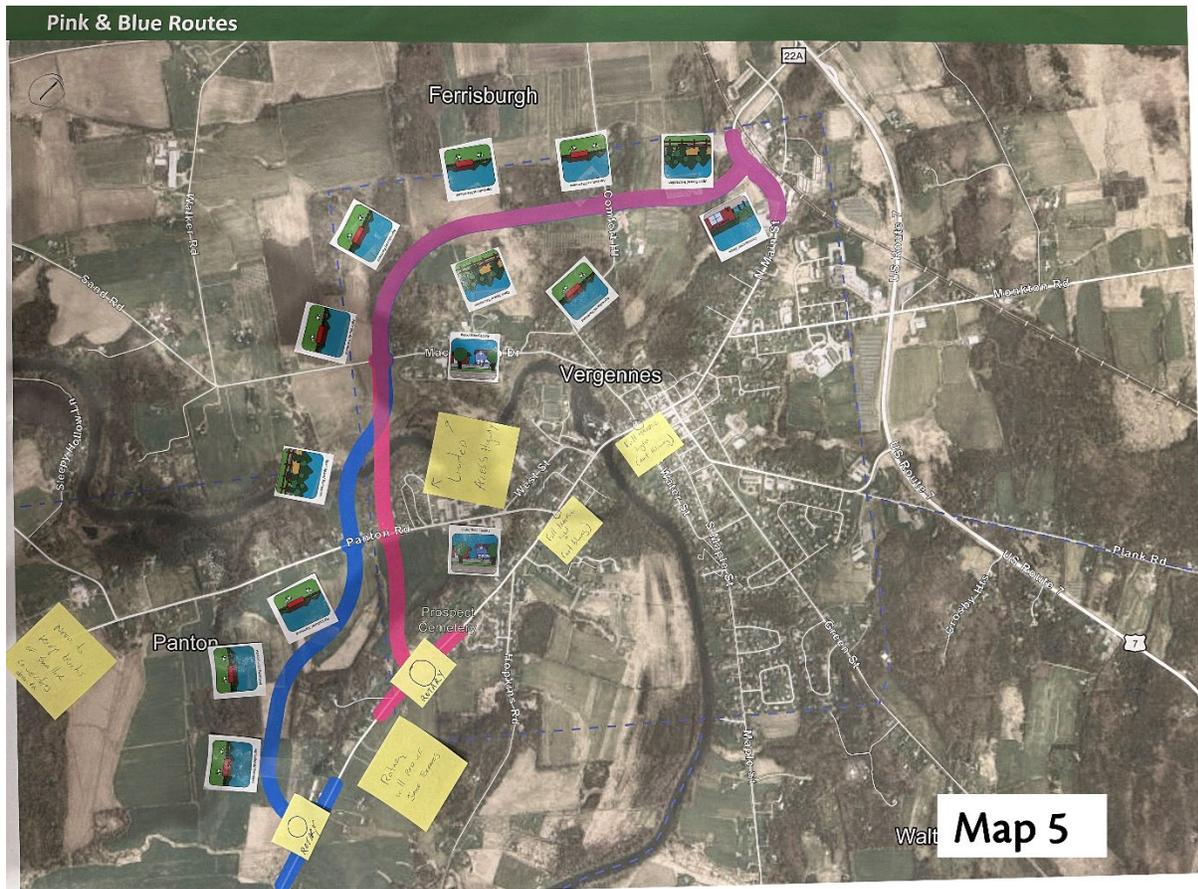
- There are wetlands near Otter Creek, so the land between Otter Creek and MacDonough Drive should remain as they are (Open Space/ Working lands – whichever that is)

- Keep the land between Comfort Hill and MacDonough Drive as it is. This is state owned land. Don't change how it feels!
- How much growth is projected for this area? What is needed to accommodate that growth?
- We already have some residential near Panton Road. Keep the way it is.
- Near 22A south of Panton Road – keep the way it is.
- Area close to the Police Station on Route 22A:
  - Some wanted to keep the way it is.
  - Some were open to what future planning/ needs are in the area – maybe commercial or residential. This area is closest to the existing density so most logical if anything new is developed.
  - It is important to keep density together so less cost to the City and individuals.
  - Potential idea of senior living and Grocery Store.
  - The train station is a tourist connection – as such the use of the land in this area should draw people into the city as a gateway.
- Bikeways and walkways are important to add along Pink and Blue Routes
  - Panton Road south to 22A is less important than northwards from Panton Road to 22A/Police Station.
  - Don't mind what kind of facilities – trust the engineers to work out what best meets their needs.
  - There is a lot of bicycling on Panton Road, MacDonough Drive and Comfort Hill, so safe connections between these bicycling routes are important.
- Make all the intersections, including Route 22A, roundabouts.
  - Helps keep the speed down.
  - Stop signs don't work!
  - (Traffic lights were needed to keep the speed down on Route 7).
  - Roundabouts also keep traffic moving off-peak – less waiting than roundabouts!

Other items of discussion not related to land use or Pink/ Blue Routes:

- Why did the red route get dismissed? Isn't it cheaper to re-construct a place with an existing roadway?
- Railroad siding along the ravine near Orange Route can be seen from two houses up on Comfort Hill and connects in to around the Train Station. It was used to transport materials from barges on the river up to the main train line.

- Adding a shortcut will be a downfall for the Vergennes downtown economy. How will you ensure trucks stay on the new route and passenger vehicles stay on Route 22A through downtown? Discussion about GPS routing and enforcement.



### 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.

- If the Pink or Blue route were to be constructed, who would own the alternative route, the City of Vergennes or the State of Vermont?
  - VTrans would construct the road, but it is still up for discussion on who would own and manage the new route.
- The Pink and Blue routes cross three roads: Pantou Rd, MacDonough Drive and Comfort Hill. These roads are heavily used by cyclists and have at-grade

crossings with the proposed alternative routes. Concern that the alternative routes will reduce the biking appeal of these roads and suggested that overpasses or underpasses for the intersections might be preferable.

- A marina could be built on Lake Champlain near Vergennes. VTrans should consider how people move around the area through alternate means of transportation.
- What is the proposed speed limit on this route?
  - The conceptual design assumes the route would be a state highway with a design speed of 50 mph, however, this is conceptual and would change based on roadway characteristics and recommended land use. It is currently undetermined.
- What is the proposed design for the intersections? Are there any assumptions? Will they be signalized?
  - The current conceptual design assumes the intersections are unsignalized with the side streets operating under stop-control. The intersection designs will be fleshed out a bit further in future steps in the process based on roadway characteristics, traffic analysis, and recommended land use. They could be roundabouts, traffic signals, over or underpasses, or other intersection types. It is currently undetermined.
- What are the future bridges being designed for in terms of height?
  - The bridges are being designed at 50 feet. Working with our federal partners and cooperating agencies, the bridges must be designed to accommodate a minimum height to allow a sailboat to pass beneath.
- I have never seen a 50-foot sailboat use that waterway.
- How do we get users to these roads and the plans for this City into these roads and into this area? I see people traveling to Otter Creek, bicycle connections bringing people into town, and I can imagine a future where we all use our bikes to get around from senior citizens to the disabled. Bikeways are not just important for recreation but for any type of internal traffic and walkways as well. That is a stronger consideration of how we move around the area through alternative means of transportation.