

Technical Committee and Agency Coordination Meeting Notes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Concepts Development and Screening, Technical Committee and Agency Coordination	
Date and Time	November 10, 2022, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon	
Location	Zoom Virtual Meeting	
Attendees	<p>Technical Committee</p> <p>Voting Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair – Katharine Otto (VTrans), Planning John Bull (Town of Ferrisburgh), Town Road Foremen Shannon Haggett (City of Vergennes), Municipal Planning Fred Kenney (Addison County Economic Development), Economic Jim Larrow (City of Vergennes), Town Road Foremen Bruce Martin (VTrans), Roadway Joel Perrigo (VTrans), Municipal Assistance Katie Raycroft-Meyer (ACRPC), Land Use Planning Jeff Ramsey (VTrans), Environmental Mike Winslow (ACRPC), Regional Planning Jim Cota (VTrans), Maintenance* <p>Non-Voting Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chris Jolly (FHWA), Planning Adam Lougee (ACRPC), Planning, Observer Elizabeth Shipley (FHWA), Environmental Jacqueline DeMent (VTrans), Planning, Observer* Jon Kaplan (VTrans), Bicycle and Pedestrian* James LaCroix (VTrans), Structures* 	<p>Agency Partners</p> <p>Federal Agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christopher Jolly & Elizabeth Shipley (FHWA) Mike Adams (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) Tim Timmermann & Beth Alafat* (U.S. EPA) David Robbins & Eric Kuns* (FEMA) Donna Fisher (U.S. Coast Guard)* Obediah Racicot (U.S.D.A. Natural Resource Conservation)* Susi Von Oettingen (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)* <p>State Agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yvonne Benney Basque & Laura Trieschmann (Community Development & Vermont Division for Historic Preservation) Amy Tomasso & Chris Cochran* (Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Department of Housing and Community Development) Billy Coster (Agency of Natural Resources)* Diane Bothfeld (Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets)* Eric Pembroke (Buildings and General Services, Vermont Agency of Administration)*

**Study Team
Attendees**

Katharine Otto (Vermont Agency of Transportation)
 Adam Lougee (ACRPC)
 Mike Winslow (ACRPC)
 Stephanie Camay (WSP)
 Stephen Chiaramonte (WSP)
 Delia Makhetha (WSP)
 Ken Robie (DuBois & King)
 Rich Tetreault (DuBois & King)

*Invited, but not present

Meeting Minutes
1. Call to Order

Katharine Otto, Chair of the Technical Committee (the committee), called the committee meeting to order and informed the committee that the meeting will cover the input received over the past six weeks. The study team is looking for direction and feedback from the Technical Committee and the agency partners to use for the next phase of the study.

2. Roll call

Delia Makhetha, WSP, conducted roll call. Ten of the eleven voting members and three of the six non-voting members of the committee were present. The following federal and state agencies had representatives present: Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and Department of Housing and Community Development. Eight members of the study team representing VTrans, ACRPC, WSP, and DuBois & King (D&K) were in attendance.

3. Agenda

Katharine Otto reviewed the agenda. She reviewed recent and upcoming meeting and noted that this joint meeting with the Technical Committee and the agency partners was in response to agency partners interest in the Technical Committee discussions. She reviewed the roles of the six groups in this process, VTrans, study team, Technical Committee, agency partners, Policy Committee, and the general public. Then she discussed the feedback and questions that the study team hoped to answer during the meeting.

4. Recent Activity and Concepts Proposed for Further Study

Steve Chiaramonte reviewed the thirteen concepts developed and their screening results, reasoning why some concepts were proposed to be dismissed, and the remaining were advanced for further study.

Tim Timmerman noted the Vermont 22A concept was dismissed and asked for clarification that it did not mean that that corridor improvements could not be hybridized or rolled into

whatever alternative selected? Steve responded that that is correct it is just no longer being considered as a standalone concept.

Steve reviewed the concepts proposed for further study and noted to Tim's earlier question that recommended concepts can be supplemented by elements of dismissed concepts. Steve asks the group if there are any questions on the concept screening.

Fred Kenney, Addison County Economic Development, asked for clarification; there realistically there's no other way for that to come into route back to Route 22A except by McDonagh drive, right? Steve responded that McDonough that is generally, correct. He states that they will discuss that further when discussing the feedback received/ the concerns raised. Because the swath for the orange concept is much narrower than some of the other new roadway concepts logically McDonagh Drive is the logical path.

Steve reviewed the feedback received from the Technical Committee, the federal and state agency partners, and the Public Meeting. Steve reviewed the Vergennes-Panton New Roadway [Blue Route], Katherine adds that in relation to the earlier map that showed all the new routes this route is halfway between where the blue and the pink route were originally shown. This new swath is less impactful on the town of Panton and where the agricultural lands are while getting as close to the Otter Creek Mobile Home Park as we could get without being intrusive. There were no additional questions or comments on the Blue Route.

Steve reviewed the Vergennes Main Street New Parallel Route [Orange Route] feedback. There were no additional questions or comments on the Orange Route.

Steve reviewed the VT-17 Northbound /VT 22A Southbound [Purple/Yellow Route] feedback.

Fred Kenney, Addison County Economic Development, asked if the choice of northbound versus southbound was based on the number of truck traffic. Are there less southbound truck trips on route 22A? Steve responded that the decision was not focused on the truck volumes, rather it focused on the challenges of northbound truck trips along 22A (grade change and interactions with parking through downtown).

Tim asked what environmental impacts were listed during the public meeting for the Route 17 corridor? Steve and Stephanie respond that they mentioned impacts to air quality and noise impacts from shifting truck traffic to Route 17. Adam Lougee adds that there are going to be substantial improvements that need to be made to Route 17 regarding curves and alignment. Additionally people have suggested moving the connection from Route 17 to Route 7 which could have potential environmental impacts and costs associated with new construction.

Steve reviewed Panton-Vergennes-Waltham New Roadway (Southeast Routing) [Green Route] feedback.

Chris Jolly, Federal Highway Administration, commented that he was surprised that the green route scored a zero. He asked if they knew if there were going to be any wetland or topographical issues with the proposed blue route. Steve responded that based on high-level screening of topographic issues and environmental impacts there were fewer potential conflicts associated with the Blue Route compared to the Green Route.

Chris followed up by asking if it was possible to keep the Blue Route entirely within the City of Vergennes. Steve responded that the Blue Route is as far east as possible without impacting the Otter Creek mobile home park. Whether or not it could remain completely in Vergennes, will be something that will be considered in a subsequent phase of this study. Steve added that the connection back to Route 22A is particularly challenging given the location of the cemetery, which forced the connection further south than the most direct Route 22A connection.

Mike Adams, Environmental Protection Agency added that he has caution about ruling out some of the new routes without looking a map with overlays showing, floodplains, wetlands streams, typography, known contaminated sites that assist with comparing the routes. He asked if that was something that will be done at some point? He noted that he is comfortable dismissing concepts that have gross reasons they are not suitable such as barge and rail. In contrast, he added that if the route near the Otter Creek Park ends up being the least environmentally damaging alternative, he does not think it should be dismissed so quickly.

Mike Adams added that Otter Creek from the mouth up to the falls is a federal navigational project. There is a channel that runs all the way up there that the Army Corps owns. In addition to height requirements, there are concerns with crossing of that federal navigational project. He said that would be something he would have to do more consulting with the Army Corps out of New York, District on any necessary permitting (section 10 and section 404 permits) and additionally section 408 permits that the EPA navigation section would have to deal with. Upstream of Vergennes there is not that issue, so concepts like the Green Route would not have that as a potential concern associated with the Marine Corps.

Mike Adams added that the EPA only dictates height requirements of power lines and communication lines above section 10 waterways. This was a result of an electrocution in Otter Creek and is now something that is in nationwide EPA regulations.

Steve reviewed the Panton Ferrisburgh New Roadway Route (West Routing 1) [Red Route] feedback.

Chris Jolly asked if there was any feedback from landowners that said that any of the concepts would impact their specific land or farmland? Steve responded the public raised concern on how many properties each of these concepts might be impacting, but the comments were not specific to particular agricultural landowners.

Katharine added when they visited the selectboard in Waltham, they spoke to someone who works on farmland adjacent to Route 17 and received more specific information.

Shannon added the largest landowner around the Blue Route is the state of Vermont, which would minimize the impact to individual residents. He also added the City of Vergennes is open and flexible to land use planning changes to support a new alignment because it would potentially open up underutilized areas.

Katharine brought up that they received a comment from, Amy Tomaso, Agency of Commerce and Community Development before she had to hop off related to opening up new land uses and other topics that might led to further discussion by the attendees. Katherine shared the following comments/questions from Amy Tomaso, Agency of Commerce and Community Development:

1. The Vergennes-Panton new roadway and Vergennes Main Street new parallel route both indicate a bypass of the downtown. From an economic vitality perspective, it is essential that a bypass does not diminish vital activity in downtown Vergennes. As discussed last week, if an option is presented for a truck-only bypass, how will this be regulated so that all traffic does not bypass the downtown?
2. The VT 17 Northbound/VT 22A Southbound proposal may present the possibility of rural sprawl that would be counterproductive to overall land use planning goals. Additionally, this plan may infringe on historic structures in the neighboring towns through which the new route would pass. We want to be cautious about both these possibilities.
3. Per the Vergennes Better Connections report, pedestrian improvements, wayfinding, and increased connectivity were identified as key needs. It is important that these concepts continue to be brought into the conversation at every step from a larger active transportation-friendly perspective.
4. Even though the new proposed routes do not directly abut Otter Creek Park, have outreach and engagement initiatives been taken with residents of the Park in an effort to improved environmental justice and equity outcomes of the project?

Katharine responded to that the study team hosted a specific workshop at the Otter Creek Mobile Home Park in May to hear their perspectives.

Steve responded that the need to maintain trips through downtown plays a role in how the new routes would be laid out. In response to urban sprawl or impacts to existing land uses, these concerns will be considered during the next phases of the study. In response to pedestrian and wayfinding, Steve said while the Route 22A corridor improvements was proposed to be dismissed, there are elements from it that could play a part in one of the concepts that advance forward.

5. Additional Feedback and Next Steps

Stephanie shared the comments and concerns raised that will be considered in next steps specifically in the Conceptual Engineering, Land Use Visioning, and Public Outreach and Engagement. She asked attendees to provide any additional feedback by November 23.

6. Additional Discussion

Jim Larrow, City of Vergennes stated that he sees no reason to continue efforts on the Orange Route. Katherine asked Jim if he could expand on his statement that there is no reason to continue with the Orange Route. Jim did not have a response.

Tim asked if the comments related to topographical challenges received in at the public meeting was the main reason for reconsidering the Orange Route? Stephanie responded that topographical considerations along with concerns whether it would reduce the noise impacts, traffic concerns on Main Street, and it does not provide an additional Otter Creek Crossing were all reason for reconsideration.

John Bull, Town of Ferrisburgh, asked if there were members from surrounding communities that would be weighing in here. Katherine clarified that the Technical Committee comprises subject matter and technical experts. Local officials and representatives are included in the Policy Committee.

Chris Jolly asked if after further investigation they identify an issue in a route will it be eliminated or are they committed to doing a full investigation on all. Katherine responded that she doesn't have an answer now, it is a nuance that we'll have to work through in terms of what best serves the project and how PEL will be received.

Ken suggested a secondary screening to satisfy what Mike Adams was looking for and to answer some of the questions raised by the public.

Liz Shipley said she thinks it would be beneficial to meet with Chris to discuss the PEL limitations and whether it would be feasible to do a 'two-step process'. If it is feasible, she stated that she would lean more towards including more of the concepts, the ones that the public

supported and then if/when we end up finding information that would exclude them, we can drop them as we go.

Katherine stated that it was a good suggestion and with that in mind a meeting may be needed. She added that she feels like there's extra homework to be done. She asked if the group could do a quick raise of hands to show that they are comfortable being updated via email, having an optional meeting to provide additional information and then provide their decision/consensus later. Attendees raised their hands

Ken adds that he agrees and thought there was agreement on the majority of concepts removed from consideration, for the three that were on the fence he thinks it makes sense to take a look at those key areas of concerns to see if we can discern any differences between them. Or find that they all have the potential to have similar impacts.

Liz Shipley says she will look into the PEL rules and thinks that type of investigation makes sense before moving to a much deeper evaluation during NEPA. She added that doing further evaluation would help the public feel like their concerns have been addressed.

Katharine closed the meeting at approximately 11:35 a.m.