

Policy Committee Meeting Notes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Policy Committee Meeting – Conceptual Design & Community Engagement
Date and Time	January 22, 2024, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Location	Zoom Virtual Meeting
Policy Committee Member Attendees	<p>Voting Members:</p> <p>Chair – Adam Lougee (ACRPC), ACRPC Brent Rakowski, (ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee), ACRPC Clark Hinsdale (Town of Ferrisburgh), Municipal Appointee Diane Lanpher (State Representative from Vergennes), Legislature* Dickie Austin (City of Vergennes), Municipal Appointee Ron Redmond (City of Vergennes), Municipal Appointee Katharine Otto (VTrans), VTrans Mary Rudd (Town of Panton), Municipal Appointee Matt Birong (State Representative from Vergennes), Legislature Mike Audy (Town of New Haven), Municipal Appointee Renny Perry (Vergennes Partnership), Business Bill Smith (Vermont Truck and Bus Association), Trucking** Brian Shupe (VNRC), Environmental** Jubilee McGill (State Representative from New Haven, Weybridge and Bridport), Legislature** Jeff Nelson (Town of Addison), Municipal Appointee** Jesse Devlin (VTrans), VTrans** Phil Summers (Addison County Chamber of Commerce), Business** Rhonda Williams (Town of Waltham), Municipal Appointee**</p> <p>Non-Voting Members:</p> <p>Elizabeth Shipley (FHWA), FHWA Jacqueline DeMent (FHWA), FHWA Mike Winslow (ACRPC), Observer Joel Perrigo, (VTrans), Observer** Amy Bell (VTrans), Observer**</p>
Study Team Attendees	<p>Ken Robie (D&K) Jim Gish (VHB) Stephanie Camay (WSP) Stephen Chiaramonte (WSP) Laura Toole (WSP) Delia Makhetha (WSP) Maya Miller (WSP) Annabelle Dally (WSP)</p>

*Joined late

**Invited, but not present

The Policy Committee meeting presentation is available on the Vergennes PEL Study website, Committees and Agency Coordination Section (<https://vergennesspel.com/committees-agency-coordination>) under Policy Committee Meeting Materials: [Policy Committee Meeting Presentation – January 22, 2024](#).

Meeting Summary

Adam Lougee, Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) and Chair of the Policy Committee (the committee), started the meeting at 1:05 p.m. on Monday, January 22, 2024, by welcoming everyone to the Policy Committee meeting before turning the meeting over to Delia Makhetha, WSP, for a Zoom Orientation and Roll Call. Ten of the eighteen voting members (one additional member joined later in the presentation) and three of the five non-voting members were present. Non-voting members included the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC). Six members of the study team from WSP and Dubois & King (D&K) and the study’s community liaison were also in attendance.

A quorum was met, and the meeting was officially called to order by Adam Lougee, the Chair of the Policy Committee, at 1:10 p.m. on Monday, January 22, 2024.

No changes were made to the agenda as presented.

Study Background and Overview

Stephanie Camay, WSP, started the presentation by providing a background and overview of the study, presentation slides 6-10. The Route 22A corridor has been studied for over 25 years, the goal of this study is to link planning efforts with an environmental review with those previous studies hence the PEL, planning and environment linkages. The previous studies indicated a regional agreement that truck traffic in downtown Vergennes should be addressed. Through the PEL study, a concentrated public outreach and community engagement effort will be used to develop transportation solutions.

The three-year study is approximately halfway through. The PEL study is a planning process and part of the project initiation phase of the VTrans project lifecycle and will be completed in 2025. After funding and authorization, any future alternatives would move forward into conceptual design, environmental review, preliminary and final design, right of way, and finally construction. Those processes will include public engagement.

The conceptual designs, Technical Memorandum, and visualizations were provided before the meeting. Today, the study team is looking for the Policy Committee to recommend moving the conceptual designs forward for further evaluation. The study team will answer and address any questions or comments, and then look to the committee for their recommendation. As a PEL study, recommendations will not be binding until the NEPA process is complete.

Stephanie asked if the committee had any comments or questions, hearing none, the meeting was opened up to public comment. No members of the public were in attendance.

Conceptual Designs

Stephanie and Stephen (Steve) Chiaramonte, WSP, provided an overview of the conceptual designs, presentation slides 12-43. Stephanie reviewed the Purpose and Need stating the Purpose

defines the transportation problem needing to be solved through the study and the Need provides evidence that supports the Purpose. The Purpose and Need for this study builds upon the previous 25 years of study and reflects the public outreach and data collection efforts to date. The Purpose and Need was used to develop the Screening Criteria which was later used to screen the alternatives and develop these concepts. The current concepts include four new roadways, the utilization of existing roadways, and a “no build” alternative which assumes no changes beyond routine maintenance.

Steve explained he would be present each route separately, highlighting key elements and locations and pausing after each route for discussion.

Steve reviewed the design methodology or the elements that directed the process of laying out each conceptual design. Design constraints considered included right of way, existing land uses, environmental constraints, and the presence of existing roadways. Each conceptual design aligns with the Purpose and Need and focuses on reducing the impacts of truck traffic along Route 22A within downtown Vergennes. These corridors were identified to provide a footprint to allow the evaluation of each concept and the associated impacts. The concepts were prepared using the current State roadway design standards with respect to lane and shoulder widths, design speeds, grade, sight distances, and vertical clearances over Otter Creek, which is governed by the U.S. Coast Guard. Each route has its own needs based on the surrounding context and terrain. Each route was designed with practicality in mind and with care to avoid environmental constraints and minimize property acquisition. The concept designs focused on ways to encourage passenger vehicles to remain on Route 22A/Main Street through downtown Vergennes through the maintenance of character of the downtown core.

The typical roadway sections, based on the Vermont Highway Design Standard, include one lane in each direction with shoulders and a pavement width ranging from 30 to 36 feet. The actual design and roadway characteristics of these proposed routes will be refined in a subsequent part of this study.

To focus the discussion and the committee’s feedback and questions, Steve, reminded the committee that the study is an iterative process and there will be topics that will continue to be discussed moving forward, but the focus of this meeting’s discussion should be on the conceptual designs that have been approved by the Technical Committee for further evaluation. Each concept will be reviewed. Context will be provided for how each route will integrate in with the existing area and key areas will be highlighted where evaluation and refinement should be focused. The initial locations are the routes are intended to support additional analysis based on the constraints that have been discussed and reviewed to date. There will be future topics of discussion that will come up in subsequent phases of the study including land use in and around the concept roadways, actual dimensions of the lanes and shoulders, intersection design (stop-control, signalization, roundabout, jughandle), environmental resources, property acquisition, or potential Otter Creek crossings. The purpose of this meeting is to obtain committee feedback and reach a consensus. The committee can provide additional feedback and comments to the study team through January 31, 2024.

Blue Route

Steve reviewed the Blue Route, the westernmost new roadway concept. At the southern end, the Blue Route connects with Route 22A approximately a mile south of the Vergennes-Panton municipal boundary. The Blue Route would create several notable intersections including at

Panton Road, Macdonough Drive, Botsford Road/Comfort Hill, and the new crossing of the Otter Creek. The route would be approximately 2.5 miles long connecting back to Route 22A north of the Vergennes Police Department and near the Vermont Discount Store. Multiple locations along this route would require cut or fill to maintain appropriate grades. The most substantial earth movement for this route would be at the proposed crossing of Otter Creek. This route would traverse three municipalities including Vergennes (north of Otter Creek) with a small segment in Ferrisburgh and Panton south of Otter Creek.

Steve reviewed several visualizations along the Blue Route which can be found on slides 21-24. Steve noted that the green areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require fill and the brown areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require cut. Steve indicated that the bridge structure over the Otter Creek would require a 50-foot clearance to allow passage of the largest watercraft known to traverse the Otter Creek waterway.

Discussion

Steve opened the meeting up to discussion amongst the members of the committee, hearing none, he presented the next concept.

Blue and Pink Route

Steve provided context to how and where the Blue and Pink Routes overlap. North of Otter Creek, the Blue and Pink Routes follow the same alignment, however, just north of the Otter Creek crossings the routes diverge. The southern connection of the Blue Route is to the south in Panton while the Pink Route is to the north staying entirely within Vergennes.

Discussion

Steve opened the meeting up to discussion amongst the members of the committee, hearing none, he presented the next concept.

Pink Route

Steve reviewed the Pink Route. At the southern end, the Pink Route connects with Route 22A approximately a tenth of a mile north of the Vergennes-Panton municipal boundary and approximately three-quarters of a mile south of the intersection of Route 22A at Panton Road. The northern section of the Pink Route follows the same path as the Blue Route connecting back to Route 22A north of the Vergennes Police Department and near the Vermont Discount Store. The southern section of the Pink Route would stay entirely within the Vergennes city limits shifting the crossing at Otter Creek and Panton Road to the east of the Blue Route crossings. Multiple locations along this route would require cut or fill to maintain appropriate grades. The most substantial earth movement for this route would be at the proposed crossing of Otter Creek. The route would be approximately 2.5 miles long, approximately a half mile shorter than the Blue Route, connecting back to Route 22A.

Steve reviewed several visualizations along the Pink Route which can be found on slides 28-31. Steve noted that the green areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require fill and the brown areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require cut. Steve indicated that the bridge structure over the Otter Creek would require a 50-foot clearance to allow passage of the largest watercraft known to traverse the Otter Creek waterway. The bridge structure required for the Pink Route would be substantially longer than that required for the Blue Route due to the alignment.

Discussion

Clark Hinsdale, Town of Ferrisburgh, asked for additional information on the two bridges in terms of potential cost and benefits or issues. Clark stated the longer bridge has more potential for hiking and wildlife connectivity underneath due to the larger span, but he assumed it would cost a lot more. Clark asked if issues associated with the two bridge locations could be compared and contrasted.

Steve responded that the study team has not looked at the costs of these structures formally. Stephen agreed that the longer spanned bridge would be more costly than the shorter one. Stephen explained the primary difference between the bridges would be the need for pier or pier locations for the shorter span versus the longer span. In addition, the bridges would be designed in order to meet Coast Guard regulations including required horizontal clearance to maintain throughput for watercraft. Stephen did not think there would be a massive difference between the two bridges in terms of potential for recreation. The important thing to note is how the bridges fit into the existing environment which is what the visuals are trying to convey from both the ground level perspective (from the water) and how the bridges traverse through the existing environment. Stephen directed members of the committee to look at the visualizations as they provide a clear picture of how these bridges fit into the existing environment.

Clark Hinsdale stated that the greater amount of cut and fill would affect the usability of the adjoining land and the potential for access to those lands. Clark stated that as a result the Pink Route appears more challenging, but he would go back and look more closely at the visualizations. He supposed if the route was intended to be limited access that would be okay. He indicated that in terms of travel time for the public using this there is virtually no difference in the time you would spend traversing the Blue and Pink Routes so it is more of a question of experience and opportunity along them.

Steve explained that while the Pink Route is slightly shorter, drivers will remain on Route 22A slightly longer, thus given the lengths of the routes in question there is not a substantial difference. The travel time would be similar. Stephen explained that what we are looking at are the types of ancillary uses that can be on these routes including features like the bridges.

Katharine Otto, VTrans, includes that it might be worth mentioning both routes despite diverging have notable environmental issues and impacts including existing wildlife and archeological impacts. The Pink Route would also be located close to the existing Otter Creek mobile home park. While distinctly different, each has challenges. Katharine stated there is no route where you can easily make it work to avoid all notable challenges.

Ken Robie, D&K, noted that the cost of each route will be looked into and estimates for each of these alternatives will be included as part of the next step of the study process, the evaluation phase. The factor of cost is not something that will be ignored through this process.

Brent Rakowski, ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee, stated that in terms of evaluating the alternatives it would be helpful to know the number of properties impacted by each. Brent stated that ultimately in the right of way process property acquisition will be a challenge if one route requires 50 properties to be impacted versus 3. Brent indicated it would be helpful for the committee to understand these impacts to inform their decision during future evaluation.

Orange Route

Steve reviewed the Orange Route. The Orange Route is located entirely within Vergennes and is the only new route that does not require a new crossing of Otter Creek. This is a slightly revised route that reflects a shift in grade based on input received by the study team and the Technical Committee to reduce potential property impacts and acquisitions along this potential route. This is a good segway from Brent's comment about the need to understand where those property or right of way acquisitions may be. The fact that we have been able to revise this concept to reduce those impacts is illustrative of the ability of some of these concepts to support changes and alterations while understanding that any of routes or modifications we might make do have tradeoffs. At the southern end, the Orange Route connects with Route 22A at the intersection with Macdonough Drive about 500 feet northeast of Otter Creek. The route generally follows Macdonough Drive through to Comfort Hill where it goes north before connecting back to Route 22A in the same location as the Blue and Pink Routes just north of the Vergennes Police Department and near the Vermont Discount Store. This route would necessitate substantial fill to support the raising of Macdonough Drive to maintain an acceptable grade and the outcome of that fill would be the need to dead-end Battery Hill at Macdonough Drive. The total length of this route is approximately a mile.

Steve reviewed several visualizations along the Orange Route which can be found on slides 34-35. Steve noted that the green areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require fill and the brown areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require cut. Steve highlighted the substantial fill that would be required at the Macdonough Drive and Route 22A and Macdonough Drive and Comfort Hill intersections.

Discussion

Representative Matthew Birong asked if the study team could speak to the dead-ending of Battery Hill in more detail. Matthew stated he was more focused on this impact than last round and wanted to know where the existing road would be terminated.

Steve pulled up slide 34 which provided the best perspective of the dead-ending of Battery Hill. Stephen explained that Battery Hill would effectively be terminated above Macdonough Drive and the length of Battery Hill would be maintained as much as was feasible given the different in grade between the two roadways. Stephen indicated that the exact location of where Battery Hill would be terminated is a detail that would be determined during preliminary/final design.

Green Route

Steve reviewed the Green Route, the easternmost new roadway concept. At the southern end, the Green Route connects with Route 22A approximately a mile south of the Vergennes-Panton municipal boundary. The Green Route would create several new intersections including at Hopkins Road, Maple Street, Green Street, and Church Street, and the new crossing of the Otter Creek. The route would be approximately 2.3 miles long connecting back to Route 7 at the existing intersection with New Haven Road in Waltham. Multiple locations along this route would require cut or fill to maintain appropriate grades. The most substantial difference between this proposed crossing of Otter Creek and the others is this location would require less clearance given the expected types of watercraft traversing the waterway at this location. Thus, the earthwork associated with this structure is less substantial than the Blue and Pink Routes. This route primarily traverses Panton and Waltham with the exception of a small segment located in

the southeastern corner of Vergennes.

Steve reviewed several visualizations along the Green Route which can be found on slides 38-40. Steve noted that the green areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require fill and the brown areas shown in the visualizations denote areas that would require cut. Steve highlighted the substantial fill that would be required at several of the new intersections.

Discussion

Steve opened the meeting up to discussion amongst the members of the committee, hearing none, he presented the next concept.

Purple Route

Steve reviewed the Purple Route, the only concept that does not involve the construction of a new roadway, but instead widens or improves existing roadways focusing on Routes 22A, 17, and 7. This concept would shift northbound truck traffic currently using Route 22A onto Route 17 to Route 7 where they would continue their trip north. Southbound truck traffic would remain on Route 22A. We know there are several challenges with shifting several hundred trucks onto Route 17 that is not optimal due to existing horizontal and vertical curves. Route 17 would require some construction or reconstruction to meet the same design criteria we are using for the new roadway concepts. The study team has identified the current substandard horizontal or vertical curve locations and have adjusted this concept accordingly. The overall length of this route is approximately 20 miles and traverses numerous municipalities including Addison, Panton, and Vergennes along Route 22A, Addison, Weybridge, Waltham, and New Haven along Route 17, and New Haven, Waltham, and Ferrisburgh along Route 7. Focusing on Route 17 there are several key intersections we highlighted to be reviewed and considered including Mountain Road/Middle Road, Quaker Village Road/Hallock Road, Field Days Road, and Green Street.

Steve reviewed several visualizations along the Purple Route which can be found on slides 43-40. Steve showed a graphical representation of cut and fill locations along Route 17.

Discussion

Brent Rakowski, ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee, stated that the graphics indicated 5 substandard curves were identified along Route 17 and several sections where identified where the existing grade exceeds 8%. Brent asked how long of an area of an area along Route 17 have grades in excess of 8%. Brent also asked, in regards to reducing grades to 5%, how does that relate to other options you have presented such as the section of Route 22A coming up to Macdonough Drive at the light in the Orange Route. Brent indicated that section of Route 22A is definitely steeper than 5% and stated he was trying to get a point of comparison for how many areas have a more than 5% grade in the other routes presented.

Steve responded that that information is summarized in the Technical Memorandum and the study team could follow up with a formal number. Stephen indicated that the intent of the summary graphic on slide 43 was to show the numerous locations along Route 17 would require those cuts and fills to maintain the appropriate grade proposed in the current design standards. Stephen explained that Route 17 would require earth movement consistently through its length along the Purple Route.

Stephanie added that over 3 miles of Route 17 would require what is considered reconstruction and just over 4 miles would require less extensive work such as widening, roadside grading, and

width adjustments.

Adam Lougee, ACPRC and committee chair, stated it was his understanding that the cut and fill on Route 17 was so extensive because the study team wanted to compare apples to apples as far as metrics along Route 17 and the new roadway concepts. Adam asked if that was correct.

Steve indicated that was correct. Stephen stated that the new roadways would be held to a particular design standard so the goal was to treat the Purple Route to the same design standards governing the design on a new roadway.

Katharine Otto, VTrans, asked to go back to the second part of Brent’s question regarding the existing grades on Route 17 compared to the existing grades along the section of Route 22A approaching the Orange Route.

Brent Rakowski indicated that while technically the section of Route 22A coming up to the proposed Orange Route is technically not part of the proposed route itself, however, going through Vergennes on Route 22A as a whole, from point A to point B, on that existing alignment has those same challenges as described on Route 17 even though technically the Orange Route is not constructing a new alignment there.

Steve responded that the study team would have to provide feedback on this separately after consulting with the engineering team unless Ken Robie has a sense of how that section of Route 22A could be treated.

Ken Robie stated that what Brent said was correct, the section of Route 22A is approximately 10-11% in grade from the bridge up and the steepness increases from the proposed intersection with the Orange Route to into the Village. Ken indicated that for comparison the grade on the existing section of Route 22A is at least two times the design grade that would be used in these concepts. Ken stated that the section of Route 22A, Brent was describing, is not part of the route itself so there were no plans to make any grade corrections to that section. Ken explained that it would not be feasible to correct the grade there because it would require the elimination of everything on either side of the roadway.

Brent Rakowski stated that it is not obvious when considering the Orange Route that the steep grade in that section would remain and that trucks would have to overcome that steep grade to access the Orange Route. Brent encouraged the study team to advise folks about this because it could be a factor in how they evaluate that concept.

Ken Robie responded that Brent made a great point and indicated that the grades in this location are something that would be evaluated more closely in the next phase. Ken stated that it has been noted that that intersection would be very difficult.

Steve thanked the committee for their comments and questions and reminded the committee that they could provide feedback through January 31, 2024.

Consensus Point

Stephanie stated that the committee can provide any additional changes that they would like to see to the proposed conceptual designs. Stephanie summarized some of the changes captured through this meeting including the desire to see: the potential costs and environmental impacts, comparisons of the routes, the property impacts and acquisitions associated with each route, additional detail regarding the dead-ending of Battery Hill, and the further evaluation of the existing section of Route 22A going into town from the south. Cost and environmental impacts

are something that will be evaluated further during Task 6. Each of the current routes will have property impacts, but these will be reviewed further during the evaluation stage. Stephanie opened up the meeting to additional comment and discussion on any of the routes. Stephanie reminded the committee that the study team is looking for consensus on the recommendation today that was brought forward by the Technical Committee at the meeting in December and we are looking for a recommendation from the Policy Committee on whether to move the conceptual designs to further evaluation. Stephanie reminded the committee that the conceptual designs will be evaluated further including many of the items that were discussed throughout this meeting.

Discussion

Adam Lougee, ACRPC and committee chair, provided an example of a change the committee could make as one the Technical Committee made which was to change the design speed and grade along the Orange Route.

Stephanie expanded upon the change the Technical Committee made on the Orange Route. The Orange Route was originally designed following the Vermont State Standards with a design speed of 45 mph, not to be confused with the operating speed which is typically 10 mph lower. Based on the discussions with the Technical Committee, they were not comfortable with the design speed being that high and stated that the roadway wouldn't be operating at a speed of that magnitude especially in the southern portion near downtown. The southern portion of the Orange Route was revised with a lower design speed of 35 mph and the grades were adjusted accordingly.

Renny Perry, Vergennes Partnership, stated it seemed that the Orange Route was the least practical of the routes presented. Renny indicated that the route was very disruptive, tearing neighborhoods apart, and bringing truck traffic almost into downtown. Renny stated that while he didn't have any points to make from an engineering standard other than from looking at the visualizations and where the route traverse, he still felt the route was impractical. Renny indicated that he understands that it eliminates a bridge, making it less costly, but the amount of fill required, the impact to those neighborhoods, and how disruptive it would be to boating and access to Otter Creek, a major part of the economy, he still felt the route was impractical and couldn't be seriously considered.

Adam Lougee thanked Renny for the comment and stated his comment was noted. Adam explained that the purpose of this meeting is for the committee to look at the conceptual designs and make technical corrections to move them forward, not to necessarily outright reject them. Adam explained the committee would have the ability to eliminate routes later in the study after the further evaluation has been completed. Adam reminded the committee that their charge today was to move the conceptual designs forward in a way the committee is comfortable with knowing that the concepts may have limitations. Adam continued that they are moving the routes forward for further evaluation and they would have the ability to reduce the number of options that would go further into NEPA, but reminded the committee that they are not quite there yet.

Renny Perry stated he was not expecting the Orange Route to be eliminated, but he wanted to make a point of the practicality of that route in comparison to the others.

Adam Lougee thanked Renny and asked assuming the Orange Route is moving forward, are there specific things you would like done differently to that route or are there different

visualizations you would like to see.

Renny Perry stated he did not think anything could be done to the Orange Route to make it better than what has been presented to date. Renny explained that the existing grades are what they are and to straighten out the roads to meet standards, to deal with the steep hill above the bridge, and to deal with the failing bridge, just is impractical. Renny stated he could not think of any way it could be improved to make it practical.

Clark Hinsdale, Town of Ferrisburgh, stated that Renny's points are well taken. Clark indicated that he sees the Orange Route as being an overlay of a typical modern transportation facility on top of a historic community. Clark stated the visual, the noise, and the changes to the grade will be detrimental to the historic character of Vergennes. Clark stated he would like to see more information on the opportunities associated with making a more user-friendly bridge in the existing bridge location. Clark explained his understanding is that the bridge is deteriorating and is on a list of bridge to be replaced in the future. Clark asked if there were options to enhance the function of the bridge that could in turn offset some of the negative aspects of continuing to come right through town.

Katharine Otto, VTrans, responded that the bridge is owned by the City but has been allocated funds through the State's Town Highway Bridge Program. Katharine indicated she did not know the timeline for the construction of the bridge as the project is in the design level at the scoping phase. Katharine indicated that the bridge would be constructed far ahead of any alternative being constructed as a result of this study. Katharine stated that coordination between the two projects? to ensure neither is making conditions worse for the other and hopefully to improve conditions will be conducted. Katharine stated that coordination is key.

Clark Hinsdale stated that the thing that worries him is that Vergennes and Ferrisburgh share the unique issue that the bridge cuts those two communities in half. Clark provided an example of how direct access to emergency services could be impacted if the bridge is temporarily out of service, as the Fire Department resides on one side of the bridge and the Rescue Department resides on the other. Clark stated that is just one example of the need to maintain access to protect the citizens. Clark appreciated that the project would be coordinated. Clark stated that he was sorry to see condominiums being constructed so close to the right of way eliminating any future options to widen the bridge or install a temporary one. Clark reiterated that he feels an improved bridge would be a benefit that an Orange Route could offer that would be a net gain for the City, as Renny stated there are certainly a lot of disruptive aspects identified. The Orange Route doesn't do anything to move people more quickly from West Ferrisburgh to the rest of Ferrisburgh. Clark explained that it takes his Selectboard and Planning Commission members over a half an hour to get to Town Hall because their only route is to travel through Vergennes. Clark stated that some of the other western alternatives provide the added benefit of connecting the two halves of Ferrisburgh making town services and schools more accessible. Clark stated driving through Vergennes and using the old bridge doesn't help anyone. Clark indicated that he could see people who don't like the bypass being happy because it doesn't go through their town and thinking Vergennes can handle all the pain. Clark stated that he believes this study whether it is improving Route 17 or making a connection west will create opportunities. Clark stated that the Orange Route is just an awkward solution and essentially just building a second Main Street with no businesses through difficult terrain. Clark stated that having a second bridge over Otter Creek in this part of the state is a benefit to all the communities for access and safety as there will

be a lot of problems should that bridge in Vergennes ever go out.

Adam Louge thanked Clark for his comments and asked that for the purpose of today's meeting, based on the conceptual designs, your point about coordination with the existing bridge project and how it could enhance the Orange Route is the one most on point with today's discussion. Adam asked if Clark agreed with that. Clark indicated that he agreed.

Katharine Otto stated that Jesse Devlin, VTrans and voting member of the committee, and Joel Perrigo, VTrans and a non-voting member of the committee, were unable to join today, but were able to review the conceptual designs and indicated they looked good from their perspectives.

Adam Lougee asked Katharine to remind the committee of Jesse and Joel's roles at VTrans.

Katharine Otto stated that Jesse is the head of Highway Safety and Design who oversees paving, roadway design, bridges, and all other major construction-type things and Joel is the head of the Municipal Assistance Section and works with the municipalities on things like grants which plays into one of the major questions we hear in the study of would the maintenance and construction of these routes be financed by the State or the towns.

Mike Audy, Town of New Haven, stated that it would be beneficial to see visualizations of the Route 17 and Route 7 intersection. Mike indicated that the intersection is fairly busy with the railroad crossing, feed mill, swamp lands, and a car dealership. Mike stated there is going to have to be a lot of work there to make that intersection viable and a conceptual visualization would help people take that into account.

Ken Robie, D&K, responded there is a two-dimensional view of that intersection as a proposed intersection change with that much additional traffic it would likely have to be a signalized intersection and that would have to consider the railroad crossing. Ken stated there are a suite of options to consider for this intersection should that alternative be carried through the evaluation phase, but the difficulties there are understood.

Adam Lougee asked if he was right in his understanding that intersection design will be investigated during the evaluation phase.

Ken Robie responded that traffic analysis is part of the evaluation and the study team will review intersection operations with the additional traffic going to Route 7 and 17.

Renny Perry stated that all of the conceptual designs showed signalized intersections. Renny indicated that there are a number of different types of intersection designs and asked if it was worth seeing different designs that might be more conducive to moving truck traffic from Route 22A onto the new route other than a traditional intersection. Renny asked if there were other intersection types such as roundabouts or other designs that might work better for moving truck traffic. Renny stated that was a big question in his mind and asked if that was something that could be provided to the committee.

Steve stated that the purpose of the current visualizations were to show a concept of a potential intersection treatment at those locations. Stephen explained that when the study moves into traffic analysis that will help determine the footprint of a potential treatment whether that be a signal, stop-control, a roundabout, or a jughandle. Stephen continued that the intersection treatment will be born out of the traffic analysis. Stephen stated the other things Renny mentioned about ways to move trucks like wayfinding or other design elements to encourage trucks onto the new route or passenger vehicles to remain on Route 22A those are also elements

that will be born from future evaluation and study. Stephen stated that this time we are really focusing on whether these concepts really fit within the existing environment.

Adam Lougee asked if there were any other comments or if the committee was ready to move forward the conceptual designs as they were presented today.

Renny Perry, Vergennes Partnership, stated there isn't really much choice at this juncture we are in right now. Renny explained that is all we really can do because we need more information to do anything else.

Adam stated that he does not disagree with Renny, there is a very limited choice today. Adam explained that in the future we will ask the Policy Committee to make much more significant decisions, but that for today, the committee is being asked to move forward the conceptual designs perhaps with some changes like the ones the Technical Committee made to the Orange Route, but he hasn't heard any of those. Adam stated that he has heard a lot of great suggestions for things to be evaluated during the PEL study.

Representative Matthew Birong echoed Renny's concerns primarily over the Orange Route and stated for the record that he also has a great deal of trepidation over the Green Route, but he realizes the scope of work we are being asked to do today is not that.

Katharine Otto asked Matthew if that the end of this meeting if there was time if he could delve further into his concerns with the Green Route as the Green Route was not discussed much today and his concerns could be beneficial to the evaluation.

Representative Birong stated he would love nothing more.

Consensus Point

Adam Lougee asked if Policy Committee was ready for a motion. Brent Rakowski, the representative from the Transportation Advisory Committee with the ACRPC, motioned for "the vote to move for the Policy Committee to move forward with the alternatives as presented today for further investigation and review." The motion was seconded by Mike Audy, the municipal appointee from the Town of New Haven. Adam Lougee asked Delia Makhetha, WSP, to poll the committee members:

- Brent Rakowski, (ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee), ACRPC - yes
- Clark Hinsdale (Town of Ferrisburgh), Municipal Appointee - yes
- Diane Lanpher (State Representative from Vergennes), Legislature - yes
- Dickie Austin (City of Vergennes), Municipal Appointee - yes
- Ron Redmond (City of Vergennes), Municipal Appointee - yes
- Katharine Otto (VTrans), VTrans - yes
- Mary Rudd (Town of Panton), Municipal Appointee - yes
- Matt Birong (State Representative from Vergennes), Legislature - yes
- Mike Audy (Town of New Haven), Municipal Appointee - yes
- Renny Perry (Vergennes Partnership), Business – yes
- Adam Lougee (ACRPC), ACRPC – yes

Of the eighteen voting Policy Committee members, eleven were present to vote. Eleven responded "yes," zero responded "no." A consensus was reached. The Policy Committee recommends that the conceptual designs presented in the Conceptual Design Technical

Memorandum and today's presentation should be moved forward for additional evaluation and refinement. The motion passed at 2:19 pm.

Public Engagement

Stephanie Camay and Jim Gish, the study's community liaison with VHB, provided an overview of public engagement efforts to date starting in the spring of 2023, presentation slides 46-55. Stephanie provided highlights from the public feedback survey that was launched over the summer and into the fall. Stephanie thanked the Policy Committee for helping to spread the survey to study stakeholders. The survey received a great response with over 900 respondents representing all the municipalities impacts by these transportation solutions. To reach all these communities, we took a multipronged approach including sending over 5,000 direct mailers to residents, businesses, and PO boxes, attendance at local community events, email blasts to our stakeholder list, social media posts through VTrans accounts, and outreach through municipalities through their ListServes, Front Porch Forum accounts, and websites. The full report is published on the website which includes an executive summary with the main highlights. All input received through the survey are also available in the appendix.

Jim Gish shared his perspective as he has a unique one coming in this past spring as a community liaison and as a resident of Addison County who is familiar with the area, but doesn't have skin in the game on this particular project as a Middlebury resident. Jim Gish started off by providing the qualitative side of things to shed some light on the hours that have been exhausted getting into the field and these communities. Activities included lots of stakeholder meetings – typically one on one and occasionally small group meetings, many strategy meetings with the team – his role is to go into the field collect input from the public and feed that back to the team to develop a strategy moving forward, highly attended public workshops and completed surveys, and lots of miles traveled in his vehicle throughout Addison county to meet with folks.

Jim Gish shared a list of the stakeholders he met with in 2023, ranging from municipalities and leadership to private property owners. Jim Gish stated there are still a number of people he would like to meet with and asked the Policy Committee members to consider whether he should be meeting with anyone else not listed. Jim Gish urged the Policy Committee to let him know if there were community members or business owners that are coming to them with concerns that should be shared with the study team so he can meet with them.

Jim Gish shared key accomplishments of the study as a whole including extensive field work, a significant increase in awareness this past year due to the survey and route maps, increased stakeholder meetings, and coverage in the Addison Independent. Over the past year there has been a shift from anxiety over potential property impacts to real engagement with the process - two major examples of this include the Church Street neighborhood and Bailey Farm vineyard. People are deeply invested in the PEL study outcome across the seven communities.

Jim Gish shared some key questions that he is hearing in the field. There is still concern of the impact a truck route would have on Vergennes businesses. Many folks feel the improvement to quality of life and to safety of having an alternative truck route would benefit the downtown businesses, but it is fair to say that there is a divided opinion on whether it would in fact harm downtown businesses. This is something that Jim wants to explore further in the upcoming months. There is also a lack of understanding of the PEL study's final recommendation. Questions include who makes the final decision, how many routes will be on the table at the end

of the study, how and when it will be constructed, and what happens next. This study is a front end to NEPA and potentially to design and construction and we need to do a good job of informing the community on what is going to happen next, how and why. Common feedback we heard during community meetings and field days was that traveling anywhere on Route 22A is a challenge, in particular from Addison Four Corners north. Is there a way to improve road safety along Route 22A from Addison Four Corners north and east to Route 7 in this study or future studies? We talk about consensus a lot and Jim has met with all the selectboard chairs and many planning chairs and the more he meets with people the more he realized that consensus was an elusive concept. He has frequently heard this is a Vergennes problem, let them solve it. This is part of understanding where people are coming from with the hope of moving them to common ground. He has heard that the PEL study has pitted communities against each other, but given the broad concern with roadway safety along Routes 22A and 17 how can we promote a shared approach to the shared problem and what are the tangible benefits of working together as communities. While each community is bound to defend its best interest and perspective, can we find common ground to find consensus of what is best for northern Addison county. Coming back to the Policy Committee, how can they work to facilitate these collaborative conversations?

Jim Gish reviewed his engagement priorities for 2024 which could align with the Policy Committee's priorities as well. Jim Gish is going to meet one-on-one with each Policy Committee member to discuss their concerns, questions, and recommendations for 2024 focusing on how we can get consensus. Jim Gish is looking to quantify support for or opposition to a truck route amongst Vergennes area business owners potentially through a survey including businesses, cultural centers, civic organizations, etc. Jim Gish will continue to meet with impacted property owners and concerned citizens and engage and encourage municipal leaders to collaborate in the PEL study.

Next Steps

Stephanie Camay provided the next steps, presentation slides 56-59. From the technical side, she thanked committee members for attending the land use workshops which wrapped up in January. The team is currently reviewing and compiling all the information from those workshops and will be preparing land use scenarios for each of the proposed routes. The routes will be further evaluated and there will be additional public engagement efforts during the evaluation task. Once the evaluation is complete the study team will draft the implementation plan.

Stephanie reviewed the expectations of the Policy Committee over the next year which include meeting with Jim Gish to get a sense of what they are hearing from stakeholders, talking to each other to understand each other's concerns and needs, reviewing and providing consensus on the transportation and land use scenarios and the route evaluations. We understand it might be hard to get to consensus, but we hope we can get to a place where it may not be everyone's preferred option, but rather an option everyone can live with.

Additional Discussions

Representative Matthew Birong elaborated on his concerns regarding the Green Route stating that his concerns stem from a compilation of his personal feedback and concerns he has heard from the community. Matthew stated that if we are looking at the potential for ancillary benefits,

such as developing housing, the Green Route is a less attractive route. Matthew explained the route has significant impact on wildlife, fragmenting existing habitat, impacting lower water tables and marsh lands. Matthew continued with the concerns regarding impacts to the Christian school, the neighboring community, and adjacent properties. Matthew stated the route would bifurcate the church and school itself. In addition, Matthew stated the Green Route and even the Purple Route stretches out the problem and he has always been a fan of looking at more compact solutions to this problem. Matthew also stated he shares Renny's and Clark's concerns with the Orange Route.

Clark Hinsdale, Town of Ferrisburgh, stated the big issues that haven't been discussed yet include limited access roadways, land use impacts and regulatory restrictions along the routes. Clark stated he was very interested in hearing more about Jim's current and future discussion with businesses owners especially regarding the western routes. Clark stated that there is a split view from Vergennes business community about whether a bypass would hurt or help businesses. Clark explained that he knew this is for a later discussion, but to Renny's point about the intersections, if you are coming north on Route 22A would the main road direct you to bypass around Vergennes, if you are not paying attention would travelers accidentally end up in Ferrisburgh. Clark stated the concept around how these designs will encourage or discourage certain vehicles from going one way or another is a really big deal and a very important part of the process. Clark indicated that he doesn't know the answers to those questions, but he wants to make sure what is done here is a net positive to northern Addison County opposed to an awkward, limited solution to the core problem. Clark stated the range of choices provided have that potential and are exciting. Clark stated that he was glad to hear Jim Gish encourage the committee members to meet outside of these meetings. Clark stated he was anxious to continue the dialogue with these communities about where we go from here.

Brent Rakowski, ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee, pointed out for the study team's awareness that there have been conversations regarding the development of the parcel located north of the police station which would develop the location the Blue, Pink, and Orange Routes connect to Route 22A. Brent stated a considerable housing development is being considered at that parcel and thought it might preclude the construction of those routes. Brent asked that this potential future development be considered.

Adam Lougee, ACRPC and committee chair, asked Jim Gish if that is one of the landowners he was considering speaking with.

Jim Gish replied they were and stated that he continues to follow the conservation closely. Jim indicated that there did not appear to be any movement since an article in the Addison Independent, but he would keep a close eye on it. Brent Rakowski replied he would keep Jim in mind as the situation develops.

Renny Perry, Vergennes Partnership, stated that while he knew this what not the time and place for these discussions, obtaining more detail about how these intersections will work and how truck traffic can be affirmatively moved away from using Main Street is important. Renny explained that he has worked with businesses for many years and has been part of this conversation for a long time and in the beginning there were no businesses that supported a bypass and now we have businesses at least considering the idea. Renny continued that the big question that remains for the businesses is the true impact a bypass will have on the traffic they want to remain on Main Street. Renny stated that businesses want to know how you direct trucks

off Main Street while maintaining other vehicles on Main Street. Renny stated that businesses need to see examples of where this has been done before and how successful it has been. Renny indicated that answers to these questions could turn some businesses from opposing those concepts to supporting them. Renny stated he understands that there can be no guarantees, but some insight based on existing locations is important to move forward as soon as possible. Renny recognized that Jim Gish is really helping with this and that is likely the types of questions he is encountering. Renny stated he understood it was too early in the process for this type of discussion, but he needed to get it off his mind.

Adam Lougee stated that what Renny said goes to what the evaluation of each route will be going forward and that Renny is helping to progress us to the next stage of the study.

Katharine Otto, VTrans, stated that the study team has heard strong advocacy for the routes that stakeholders do not like. Katharine asked the committee if any one feels that these is a route that could be ideal if certain tweaks were made to it. Katharine stated that study team is struggling to advance the concepts because we are only hearing comments stating “not that route” or “not in my backyard.” The study team is trying to find a happy medium where the most people could live with a concept with a few tweaks. Katharine asked if anyone had any concepts that they feel would work for the most people with these adjustments and what might those adjustments be. Katharine stated that the committee does not need to provide an answer today, but encouraged them to think on it and let the study team know. Katharine reminded the committee that we need to get to a point where we are okay with this and steer away from just we don’t want this.

Representative Mathew Birong stated that without any specific suggestion, based on the feedback he has been hearing and from being part of this conversation for several years, he felt the best path forward is a blend or hybrid of the Blue and Pink Routes somehow. Matthew indicated that he would need to more time to give any real level of detail as there are justifiable concerns with either route including the vineyard’s concerns with the Blue Route and concerns with bridge height and noise. Matthew stated that the study is at the difficult part where we are trying to balance the weight of infrastructure, safety, and responsible growth and development benefits with minimizing the impacts to property owners and quality of life. Matthew continued that he has already spoken his piece on the Orange and Green Routes and explained the Purple Route is just pushing the problem away from the core of where the problem is. Matthew stated that as the study starts to develop these routes in a more finite way, he is picturing a hybrid of the Blue and Pink Routes.

Clark Hinsdale stated that he feels the western routes offer the most potential to create something that benefits all of northern Addison county. Clark stated that he was apprehensive about allowing commercial development along any of the western routes because businesses building brand new infrastructure on a new road would be at an advantage to businesses downtown working with the constraints of the historic buildings and neighborhood patterns. Clark encouraged Jim Gish to keep conversations with the businesses going and stated that Renny’s points were right on point. Clark stated that his gut is telling him that the western routes would need to be limited access with the potential to provide a park or other recreational facility. Clark stated that the route needs to keep traffic moving. Clark indicated that he is really sensitive to Pantón’s concerns, but with a long enough roll out to allow land use regulations and conservation easements to be put in place, a western route could be scenic and recreational with

the nice byproduct of getting trucks around Vergennes quickly. Clark stated that he is optimistic that there is a solution here that will create opportunity for the community and he looks forward to continue to work with smart people to move forward in that direction.

Mary Rudd, Town of Panton, stated that she hears what Clark was saying about understanding Panton's concerns, but she didn't feel it was true. Mary explained that the embankments needed to construct the Blue and Pink Routes is going to split neighborhoods and change wildlife patterns just like the other routes where embankments are required. Mary indicated she did not see how a high-speed limited access road is compatible with recreation stating that she would not want to walk next to a super highway with trucks traveling 60 mph plus. Mary Rudd stated the Pink Route is the better of those routes because it contains it more and reiterated that the Blue Route requires such significant elevation change that it would not be a good option for Panton.

Adam Lougee stated that the study team would take all of the comments provided and explore ways to improve each route to make the most people happy and really work with the design team to make the best decisions possible given the options available. Adam explained the committee will be asked to determine what goes forward. Adam indicated that there was a good bit of work for the study team to do here and all the thoughts and comments provided are appreciated.

Katharine Otto thanked the committee for the comments provided thus far and stated the study is headed in the right direction.

Stephanie thanked the committee and reminded them if they had any additional comments to email the study team. Stephanie explained that the committee had until January 31 to provide additional design changes for incorporation.

Renny Perry motioned for the meeting to be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Clark Hinsdale. The meeting was officially adjourned at 3:00 p.m. by Adam Lougee, the Chair of the Policy Committee.