

# Engaging the Public

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OUTREACH GUIDELINES FOR PROJECTS, PLANS, AND OTHER  
AGENCY ACTIVITIES

VTrans Public Involvement Guide  
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## **Public Involvement Guide Development**

The development of this guide was directed by a working group of VTrans staff with the vision of improving the effectiveness of VTrans' public involvement efforts. Many others, both within and outside the Agency, were interviewed and consulted.

The guide was initially drafted through research conducted and prepared for VTrans by Cambridge Systematics, Inc, with Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. The initial draft was further developed by VTrans Public Outreach staff, in close consultation with internal staff members in Planning, Structures, and other divisions, bureaus, or sections.

### **Project Management Team**

Jennifer Fitch, Former Project Manager, Structures

Erik Filkorn, Public Outreach Manager

Scott Bascom, Former Planning Coordinator

Jacqueline LeBlanc, Marketing and Outreach Coordinator

### **Internal Working Group**

Michele Boomhower, Policy, Planning and Intermodal Development

Kevin Marshia, Chief Engineer

Kevin Viani, Highway Division

Ken Robie, Project Development Bureau

Josh Schultz, Transportation Systems Management and Operations

Michael Charter, Department of Motor Vehicles

Shauna Clifford, Operations, District 7

Tricia Scribner, Contract Administration

Shawn Nailor, Information Technology

Amy Bell, Planning

Lori Valburn, Civil Rights

Susan Hackney, Civil Rights

Ellen Sauer, Construction

Kyle Obenauer, Environmental

Sue Scribner, Municipal Assistance Bureau

Mike Hedges, Asset Management and Performance Bureau

Bonnie Waninger, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission

Tina Lee, Federal Highway Administration

Chris Jolly, Federal Highway Administration

# PREFACE

“Public involvement” refers to two-way communication and problem solving with the goal of achieving decisions that are better for all parties. It can also be referred to as public outreach, stakeholder engagement, public participation, public input, or any combination of these terms.

Public involvement helps us to better serve our customers - it helps keep people safe, improves our project delivery, and gives people a voice in decisions affecting their communities, among many other benefits. It is also required by state and federal regulations. Effective public involvement is based on early, continuous, and meaningful engagement with stakeholders and clear messages.

This guide was prepared to enhance public involvement, encourage active participation, and lead to improved transportation decision making. Virtually every activity the Agency undertakes impacts a wide range of stakeholders – people, agencies, or groups having an interest or a “stake” in the project or activity. This could include other departments within VTrans, the traveling public, emergency responders, truck and bus companies, businesses, other agencies, and many other groups of people. It is especially important to include our most vulnerable populations that have traditionally been underserved, such as low income or minority populations. Different stakeholder groups can have unique, and sometimes conflicting, needs and desires related to Vermont’s transportation infrastructure.

VTrans recognizes that the people of Vermont, regardless of their race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability, should have a voice in the projects and policies that the Agency promotes. Because Agency decisions must recognize policy and funding priorities (e.g., mobility, safety and cost), involvement should also help the public understand the Agency’s decision-making process. At the same time, VTrans remains open to the possibility that the public may suggest new ideas that should be explored.



# VTRANS' PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PRINCIPLES

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VTrans commits to the following principles and actions in all public involvement activities:

## 1. Promote Respect

- All citizens and the views they promote are respected by VTrans.

## 2. Provide Opportunities for Participation

- Participation will be open, meaningful, and organized to allow people to participate comfortably. Needs for accessibility, scheduling, location, information material formats, and language will be addressed.
- Meetings will be structured to allow informed, constructive exchanges.
- The direction and effectiveness of the public participation effort will be continually reviewed to ensure active public participation.
- Increase consultants and project steering committees' knowledge and understanding about diverse populations and the importance of inclusion and representation.
- Appoint members of underrepresented communities to project committees when possible.

## 3. Be Responsive to Participants

- VTrans meetings and events will facilitate discussion that corresponds to participants' level of interest and available time.
- VTrans will fully consider the results of all public participation activities during decision-making and will document public comments.

## 4. Offer Substantive Work

- Public processes will provide purposeful participation, allowing useful feedback and guidance. Effective public participation is a two-way street—public input must come from informed opinions and ideas.
- A clearly defined purpose and set of objectives are needed for initiating a public dialogue on plans, programs, and projects.
- Participants will be encouraged to reconcile many competing interests, issues, and needs.

## 5. Provide a Predictable Planning Process

- The planning process will be understandable and known well in advance, to make the process coherent and comprehensible.

## 6. Outreach & Communication

- Effective outreach strategies must be tailored to fit the identified audience and the issue at hand. Notification procedures must effectively target the identified audience.
- Use simple, non-technical language during outreach so that the public can easily understand.
- Engage people in conversations in their native language and use translation services when needed.
- Outreach and education will be continuous and repetitive to increase public knowledge and participation.
- Efforts to reach new constituencies will include outreach to people with disabilities, low-income, elders, youth, student, underrepresented, refugee, and accessibility issue communities. These efforts must be tailored to ensure meaningful participation.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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This Public Involvement Guide is intended to provide an overview of the rationale for outreach, how to properly prepare for outreach, and tools for engaging stakeholders. Public involvement is built into the regulations and requirements that the Agency must follow on virtually every project. Beyond our legal requirements, the practices recommended are guidance rather than policy, as every project can have unique circumstances that affect the level of outreach that should be conducted to properly engage our customers.

The primary audience for this Guide is all agency staff engaged in implementing projects and programs, including: Project Managers, Resident Engineers, Regional Construction Engineers, planning staff, maintenance district personnel, and others involved in the delivery of transportation projects. The tools described can be used by anyone to support effective outreach.

The Guide includes five main sections:

## Quick Guide: Outreach by Project Phase

- 1.1 – Planning
- 1.2 – Project Definition
- 1.3 – Preliminary and Final Design
- 1.4 – Construction
- 1.5 – Maintenance and Operations
- 1.6 – Communication Tools Summary

## Why Does Outreach Matter?

- 2.1 – Benefits of Public Involvement
- 2.2 – Legal Requirements

## Preparing for Outreach

- 3.1 – Understand the Context
- 3.2 – Develop a Stakeholder List
- 3.3 – Public Outreach Goals
- 3.4 – Develop a Public Involvement Plan

## Engaging the Public

- 4.1 – Public Meetings
- 4.2 – Working with the Media
- 4.3 – Digital and Print Tools

## Tools and Resources

- Appendices

## ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disability Act
EJ	Environmental Justice
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FRA	Federal Rail Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PIO	Project Information Officer
PIP	Public Involvement Plan
RPC	Regional Planning Commission
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Plan
TMC	Traffic Management Center
TPI	Transportation Planning Initiative
TSMO	Transportation System Management and Operations

Note: New England Compass refers to the system formerly known as NH-ME-VT 511.



# 1. QUICK GUIDE: OUTREACH BY PROJECT PHASE

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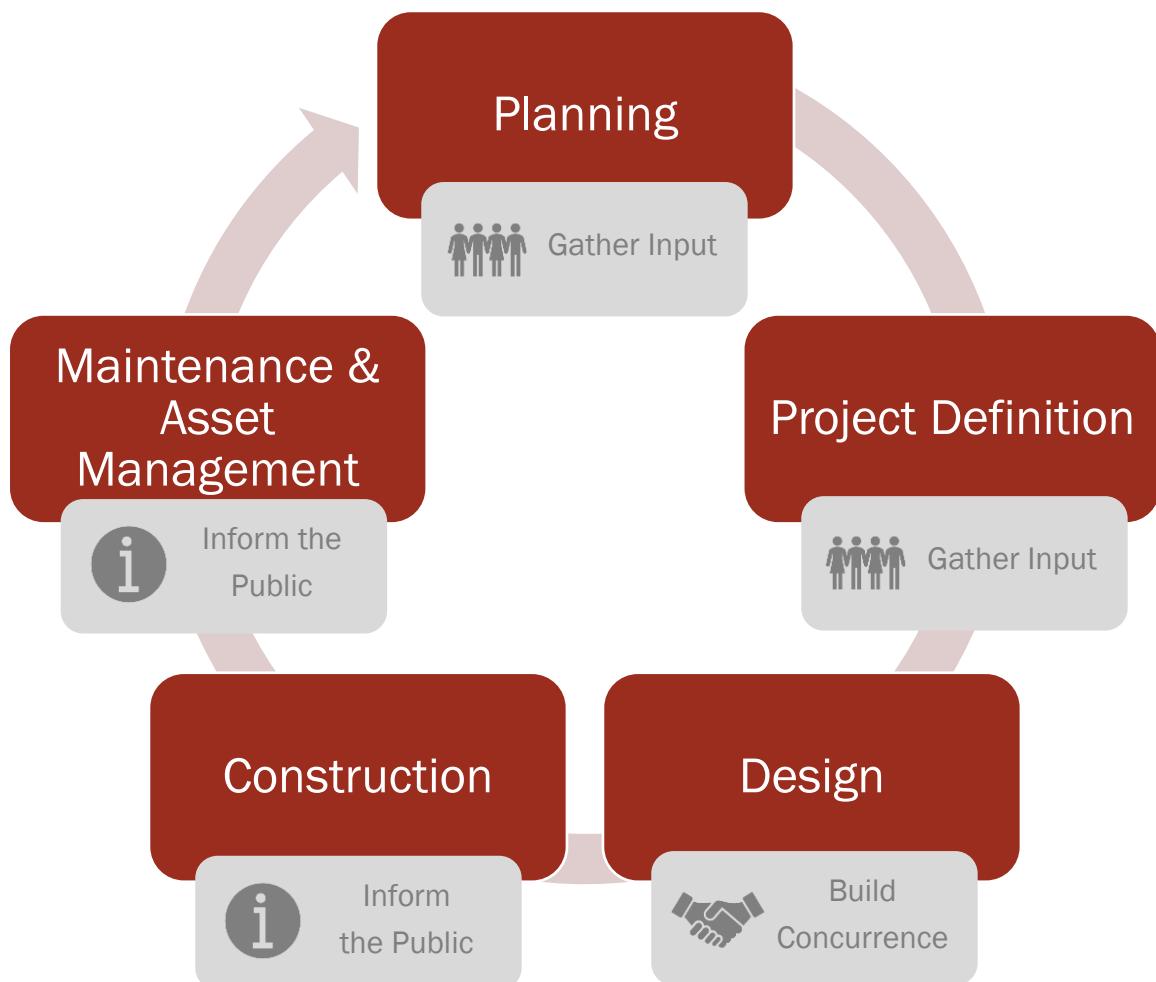
## Outreach by Project Phase

Early and continuous public engagement is necessary from the earliest stages of a project (before the project is even defined) through the planning, design, construction or implementation, and later when maintenance or management of the asset is required. Celebrating project successes and milestones at all phases can help build public support and sustain interest in long term projects.

The summaries for each “phase” are merely a starting point, meant to help give a quick starting point of outreach methods to consider. Different types of projects may require different types of outreach. The concepts described in these summaries are elaborated on throughout the guide.

For projects that will have a major impact on a community or are controversial, consider working with VTrans Public Outreach section to hire a Project Information Officer (PIO) to assist with informing stakeholders about the project and responding to questions.

*Figure 1. General phases of VTrans project delivery and typical public outreach goals.*



## 1.1 PLANNING

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The goal of outreach for many planning projects is to gather input to inform the development of projects, policies, and planning initiatives. VTTrans works collaboratively with the Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) as part of the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) to solicit local input, identify and prioritize regional transportation needs, develop transportation plans, and facilitate the flow of information to the public.

The planning process is a key part of ensuring that civil rights, environmental justice, and other federal and state public involvement obligations are met, and that potential community concerns and obstacles are understood. It is especially important in the planning phase to include a process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services. [Appendix C Equity Impact Worksheet and Maps](#) can help guide efforts to effectively engage these underrepresented populations.

Some planning efforts have specific outreach requirements, such as the State Transportation Improvement Program and the development of modal plans, described below.

### STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN (STIP) & STATE LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is a staged, multi-year, statewide, intermodal program of transportation projects, funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that incorporates projects in the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). Projects listed in the STIP are consistent with the State Long Range Transportation Plan, which is produced by the Vermont Agency of Transportation as part of a planning process with public engagement. The STIP and Long Range Transportation Plan have specific regulations per 23 CFR 450.210, and other Federal Rulemaking, and Guidance and Circulars requiring a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points, and requires a specific process for including nonmetropolitan local officials. These documented policies can be found in full in [Appendix L](#) and [Appendix M](#). The communication methods and tools described in these policies are further expanded upon in this guide.

### OUTREACH FOR MODAL PLANS, PLANNING STUDIES, AND CORRIDOR PLANS

Outreach needs for planning studies and plans are highly variable. The exploratory nature of planning work can be less tangible than specific construction projects, making it more difficult to conduct outreach in some cases. It is important to review legal requirements early on – consult with the legal section or Civil Rights for more information. For questions about outreach best practices beyond legal requirements, consult with outreach staff.

Public involvement in the planning phase can sometimes be qualitative in nature and usually includes multiple community meetings throughout the planning phase, and can also include surveys, focus groups, or other methods to gather information. Many studies and plans involve an internal working group and external working group, which is often referred to as an Advisory Committee or a Stakeholder Group. Refer to [Appendix H](#) for more information on these methods.



## 1.2 PROJECT DEFINITION

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The project definition phase is described in detail in the [VTrans Project Definition Process Guidebook for Highway Division Projects](#), which includes best practices for outreach.

During this phase, the goal of outreach is to gather input from the public on the purpose and need of the project and different project alternatives, such as the project's configuration and alignment. Collaboration is key in getting to a preferred alternative that can be advanced into design. Listen to what elements or conditions are important to the public. If these considerations can be accommodated and still meet the project's purpose and need, this will go far toward creating a more implementable project. While it is unlikely everyone will agree on all elements of project's design, it is critical that the public has ample opportunity to weigh in, and that they understand the selection criteria and legal requirements used to make the final determination.

The Project Manager, and Project Information Officer, if applicable, should consider the following outreach elements during this phase, and extending into project development and resource identification:

- Engage Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and municipal staff to help develop a stakeholder list and brainstorm effective involvement strategies.
- Once the project is funded, it is best practice to review project history, existing project correspondence, and send out the Local and Regional Concerns Questionnaire. A Local Concerns Meeting may be required for some projects.
- Review legal requirements for public involvement ([section 2.2](#), pg. 16). Consult with the legal section or Civil Rights for more information.
- Ensure that VTrans staff in Maintenance Districts, Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO), Construction, Planning, Public Outreach, Civil Rights, Environmental Section and other sections as necessary are looped into the project as it progresses. Other sections may have public outreach components that can be done alongside your efforts, such as Section 106 requirements through the Environmental Section.
- Review project information in VPINS and VTransparency and ensure the fact sheet is correct. Project fact sheets are generated directly from VPINS so if your data is not current, the fact sheet will be wrong.
- Consider creating a public SharePoint site to easily share project presentations and other project materials with stakeholders before and after meetings. Structures and Highway Safety Design have created sites that are good [examples](#).
- If a 502 hearing or a minor alteration is required, it is a best practice to conduct the hearing early in the process. Consult with the Right of Way section for more information.
- Track comments and responses in each phase of project development to document how public ideas have been included and addressed. This ensures that important public feedback and information obtained during the scoping process finds its way into the design process.



## 1.3 PRELIMINARY AND FINAL DESIGN

During this phase, the goal of outreach is to build concurrence. Building on the relationships and trust developed in the earlier phases is of utmost importance because it is during this phase that a project becomes more than just lines on a map. Project managers need to think beyond the immediate property impacts by also evaluating cumulative impacts to neighboring properties that will be in a changed landscape. Direct contact with affected neighborhoods and properties should be maintained.

When planning outreach activities for short term road closures, consider the size and complexity of the project, length of the detour and closure period, location of the project, and traffic impacts such as signal timing, intersections, high crash locations, and additional traffic on the detour route. In addition to standard practices of developing a listserv, updating a project factsheet, and weekly project updates, a pre-closure public meeting is required for state and interstate projects. It is important to address comments and questions from the public - about the project

**Ensure that the community understands the details of the project early in your process to avoid last minute requests and changes. Make sure the community is seeing the same picture that you are seeing.**

The Project Manager should consider the following outreach elements during the design phase:

- Send a copy of the plans following preliminary and final design for review and comment by town officials and other project stakeholders. SharePoint is a good tool for sharing documents, such as this [example](#).
- Include visualizations whenever possible to help the public understand the design.
- Review project information in VPINS and VTransparency and ensure the fact sheet is correct and updated with any new relevant design graphics. Project fact sheets are generated directly from VPINS so if your data is not current, the fact sheet will be wrong.



This visualization of a bridge design in Newfane helped the public understand how visibility limitations impacted the design options.

## 1.4 CONSTRUCTION

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During the project construction phase outreach goals shift to informing the public. At this phase, a new stakeholder becomes more important – the traveling public. The traveling public consists of people or groups that were not necessarily involved with the project in the planning or design of the project, however the construction will now affect them through direct and/or indirect disruption to the transportation network.

There are many ways that the Resident Engineer and Project Manager can work together, with a Project Information Officer (PIO), if applicable, to ensure that outreach efforts go smoothly:

- The Resident Engineer completes the Emergency Contact sheet and sends to the Transportation Management Center (TMC) through [AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov](mailto:AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov).
- The Project Manager should review project information in VPINS.
- The Resident Engineer or PIO should review project information in New England Compass daily. Promptly notify the TMC through [AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov](mailto:AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov) of any significant changes to the traffic control plan.
- Both the Project Manager and Resident Engineer should review the project on VTransparency and ensure the fact sheet is correct. Project fact sheets are generated directly from VPINS so if your data is not current, the fact sheet will be wrong.
- Ensure that VTrans staff in Maintenance Districts, TSMO, Construction, Planning, Public Outreach, Civil Rights, Environmental Section and other sections as necessary are looped into the project as it progresses.
- The Resident Engineer or PIO should alert the RPC, municipal staff, and other stakeholders, including Emergency Medical Services, Vermont State Police, truck and bus companies, local businesses and schools. This is a good time to revisit the Local Concerns Questionnaire. If there is a PIO working on the project, they should send out email updates to the stakeholder listserv as needed. Messages should be developed with the Resident Engineer.
- The Resident Engineer should include the project in VTrans On The Road weekly construction updates by sending a summary of impacts to the Public Outreach Coordinator. Consider a Public Service Announcement during drive-time radio programs.
- Some projects may benefit from working with TSMO to develop a variable message sign strategy.
- For high impact or high interest (big, innovative, etc.) projects, the Project Manager or Resident Engineer should consider working with public outreach staff on an announcement on social media, a press release, or for special circumstances, an interview with the media.
- In accordance with Act 153, VTrans is required to hold one public pre-closure meeting for state and interstate projects. This meeting may be held during design or construction prior to the closure. Pre-closure coordination meetings should include the Project Manager, Resident Engineer, Contractor, other VTrans stakeholders as necessary, municipal officials, emergency services, and PIO (VTrans District staff and RPCs can also be invited).
- Once the project is complete, a customer satisfaction survey should be distributed through the VTrans survey monkey account, managed by public outreach staff.



## 1.5 MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

VTrans personnel responsible for keeping roads and bridges in a state of good repair are on the front lines with the public every day. Planned maintenance activities, no matter how minor, may generate disruption or concern. Proactive public outreach can make a big difference in the ongoing relationship between VTrans and its customers. It is always better to over-communicate a potential mobility disruption.

To keep the lines of communication open, district personnel should:

- Contact local municipal officials and the Regional Planning Commission about upcoming maintenance activities that may cause travel disruption (delays and road closings) with sufficient time to notify the public and revise project plans to accommodate community concerns.
- Make sure road closures and major disruptions are communicated to TSMO for vetting and entry into New England Compass.
- Alert Public Outreach Staff in case additional outreach is warranted.
- Consider the timing of the closure and avoid major holidays and commuting times when possible.
- Coordinate with General Maintenance Managers to send daily work updates for use in On The Road and for general coordination with other projects.



The public generally responds better to travel disruptions when they have been given notice.

## 1.6 COMMUNICATION TOOLS SUMMARY

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The following two tables can be used as a general tool for matching project impacts to the public to possible outreach methods to consider and a summary of the outreach methods.

*Table 1. Communication Recommendations based on Impact to Public*

Communication Strategies	Traffic Impact Severity + Capacity Loss		
	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
	<input type="checkbox"/> Project duration: a few hours to one week <input type="checkbox"/> No project controversy <input type="checkbox"/> Commute/school not affected <input type="checkbox"/> Low traffic volume <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal delay and/or detour, if any	<input type="checkbox"/> Project duration: one week to several months <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate project controversy <input type="checkbox"/> Commute/school moderately affected <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate traffic volume <input type="checkbox"/> Some delay and/or detour	<input type="checkbox"/> Project duration: several weeks to several months <input type="checkbox"/> Commute/school affected <input type="checkbox"/> Controversial project <input type="checkbox"/> High traffic volume <input type="checkbox"/> Long delay and/or detour
New England Compass	✓	✓	✓
Work Zone Signage	✓	✓	✓
TSMO	✓	✓	✓
Message Boards	✓	✓	✓
VTransparency	✓	✓	✓
Front Porch Forum		✓	✓
On The Road		✓	✓
Social Media		✓	✓
Fact Sheet/Website		✓	✓
Public Meeting		✓	✓
Public SharePoint Site		✓	✓
Engage a PIO		✓	✓
Customer Survey			✓
Website			✓
Press Release			✓
Radio Announcement			✓

*For emergency situations, follow Incident Command System protocol*

Table 2. Summary of Communication Tools

Type	Contact	Definition/Notes
Consider for all projects	New England Compass	AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov Send project information sheet & updates (i.e. rolling roadblocks, detours). Alerts post to New England Compass, Twitter, Facebook, and Waze.
	Work Zone Signage	Resident Engineer / District / Contractor Standard work zone signage, which could include message boards or static advanced notice.
	TSMO	Traffic Operations Engineer All closures and significant lane restrictions should be reviewed by TSMO.
	Message Boards	AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov Send the situation, location, and draft message. Boards are 8 characters per 3 lines.
	VTransparency	Responsibility of Project Manager VPINS data populates VTransparency. Review for other projects in the area for timing.
Consider for medium to high impact projects	Listserv	Responsibility of Project Manager/PIO Municipally maintained email list used to notify project stakeholders of project updates.
	Front Porch Forum	Outreach Coordinator Statewide neighborhood specific listserv, used to announce meetings or for traffic impact alerts. (2-4 day lead time needed)
	On The Road	Outreach Coordinator Weekly radio/newspaper report during construction season. Includes construction updates and maintenance activities. (Due Thursday AM)
	Social Media	Marketing & Outreach Coordinator Used to advertise public meetings, to post project status updates, to post videos or photos, or for live video.
	Fact Sheet/Website	Public Outreach Manager/PIO All VPINS projects have an automated project fact sheet that also serves as a basic project website.
	Public Meeting	Responsibility of the Project Manager/PIO Check legal obligations. Coordinated with RPCs. Click-voting devices have been effective.
	Public SharePoint Site	IT Systems Developer Used to share project information with stakeholders. Structures and Highway Safety Design have produced sites that are excellent examples.
	Engage a PIO	Public Outreach Manager Can be brought on as needed at any project stage.
	Customer Survey	Responsibility of the Project Manager/PIO Sent to stakeholders after meeting, project completion, or other milestone.
	Custom Website	Public Outreach Manager For large projects requiring additional information beyond the project fact sheet.
	Press Release	Public Outreach Manager Generally, for large projects or initiated by PIO.
	Radio Announcement	Outreach Coordinator Can be used for emergencies or additional information beyond On The Road, including Public Service Announcements.



# 2. WHY DOES OUTREACH MATTER?

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## 2.1 BENEFITS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

*“Listen to understand, not to respond.” – Kevin Marshia, VTrans Chief Engineer*

“Public involvement” refers to two-way communication and problem solving with the goal of achieving decisions that are better for all parties. It can also be referred to as public outreach, stakeholder engagement, public participation, or any combination of these terms. “The public” refers to a very broad range of people and organizations who have a stake in the project (whether they know about the project yet or not), making them project stakeholders.

Public involvement is a two-way conversation. With the right tools, effective public outreach can help garner public support for the project and can expedite project delivery and lower costs, alleviating costly delays, frustration, and other unforeseen problems. Public involvement is an integral part of ensuring that VTrans is engaging our customers, including our most vulnerable populations, in transportation decisions.

Successful public outreach requires an understanding of the different needs and expectations of the public, which may include competing priorities. All stakeholder concerns need to be considered and responded to appropriately. Appropriate response will differ between projects, but at a minimum, it is our responsibility to answer questions from the public, whether they be through phone, email, social media, or in person.

Engaging the public can help build credibility and confidence in VTrans, minimizing time-consuming responses to questions, criticism and complaints. Most importantly, public access to information can help keep our roads safe.

### THE PUBLIC = OUR CUSTOMERS

Quality customer service is a VTrans goal. Most VTrans staff have interactions with the public while performing their jobs, requiring open and respectful interactions. This may include:

- ✓ Coordinating with municipal officials and Regional Planning Commissions
- ✓ Responding to inquiries
- ✓ Conducting presentations
- ✓ Advertising/publicizing availability of projects and grants
- ✓ Attending public meetings, advisory council meetings, and other regional meetings
- ✓ Meeting with advocacy and special interest groups
- ✓ Communicating about construction impact
- ✓ Working on job sites in communities
- ✓ Completing planned or unplanned maintenance



## Public Involvement and Transportation

Transportation planning and project delivery have changed dramatically over the years, requiring a level of transparency and public involvement that creates a more comprehensive and context-sensitive decision-making process. VTrans recognizes that public involvement is key to reaching actionable project outcomes, strengthening our relationship with our customers, and keeping people safe. Not only is it the right thing to do, engaging the public is fundamental to the State and Federal regulations that the Agency must follow on virtually every project.

**Public involvement is not something that is done “alongside” the technical work of planning and engineering.**

**It is integral to project success and should be interwoven throughout.**

## VTrans' Commitment to Public Involvement

**Community members have a right to participate in decisions affecting their community.** Community members care about what happens on the roads where they live and work. Changes in the roadway can have real or perceived impacts to quality of life, safety, or the character of a community. Expectations surrounding transportation can vary from community to community and from person to person. Minority and/or low-income population groups, communities, or neighborhoods should not be unduly burdened with project impacts. It may be necessary to use alternative methods of outreach because of cultural differences, economic or physical hardship, or limited English proficiency.

**Transportation projects should fit the community.** People are increasingly aware of how natural and cultural features define their community. VTrans is committed to providing transportation solutions that fit within the context of the community and its values. Additionally, public involvement conserves scarce resources in the long run by avoiding costly backtracking to address issues that were missed.

**Community partnerships can lead to better projects.** Involving the community can lead to better projects and is a first step in deciphering local context, issues, and needs. Community leaders, business owners, Regional Planning Commissions, and others in the community can help deliver project information, gather feedback, and identify additional stakeholders to bring into the process. Working with “ambassadors” reinforces collaboration and trust in the Agency and its processes. Trust will be earned by being respectful, knowledgeable, considerate, and transparent. If you are consistent in this approach, the public will usually respond in kind.

**It is the responsibility of VTrans and its employees to ensure that people know about our projects.** The more people know about managing transportation infrastructure and changing road conditions, the better prepared they will be to navigate safely through (or avoid altogether) work zones or detours, and the better understanding they will have for potential delays.



## 2.2 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

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Public involvement is built into the regulations and requirements that the Agency must follow on virtually every project. The primary laws and regulations that govern public involvement in Vermont are identified in the following Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. [Appendix E](#) provides links to additional information. If you have any questions or confusion about these requirements, consult VTrans legal staff, Civil Rights, the Environmental Section, or other sections as required for clarification.

Legally mandated requirements, such as public hearings, may not be sufficient to satisfy the project's outreach needs and additional outreach may be needed.

### 2.2.1 FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Early and continuous coordination with stakeholders is an integral part of ensuring that potential concerns are addressed to the maximum extent possible and that laws and regulations are complied with. Consistency in following laws and regulations is important to ensure a fair and equitable process that identifies, mitigates and addresses issues early on so projects, plans, or initiatives can be advanced expeditiously.

#### Civil Rights and Environmental Justice

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Environmental Justice (EJ) are two of the most important legal concepts to consider in planning, project delivery, and other relevant agency activities.

**Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**, bars all discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional. As amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, states that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, or disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Title VI bars intentional discrimination (i.e., disparate treatment) as well as unintentional (disparate-impact) discrimination stemming from neutral policy or practice that has the effect of a disparate impact on protected groups based on race, color, or national origin. [VTrans Title VI Nondiscrimination Statement](#)

**Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 on Environmental Justice** provides that "each Federal agency shall make achieving Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high or adverse human health and environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations ...".

Guidance from the Federal Highway Administration states that although the nondiscrimination principles of E.O. 12898 and the Title VI statute intersect, they are two separate mandates and each has unique requirements. For example, the term "minority," which is a protected category under EJ, overlaps with "race, color, and national origin (including individuals with limited English proficiency)," which the Title VI statute protects. However, EJ principles also apply to low-income populations, which are not covered under the Title VI statute.



In addition, while EJ aims to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations, Title VI prohibits all types of discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, or disability in programs receiving Federal assistance. Further, in certain circumstances, private parties may initiate lawsuits under Title VI. A private party may not initiate a lawsuit under E.O. 12898, although, where an agency opts to examine EJ as part of its National Environmental Policy Act analysis, courts may review the EJ analysis under the Administrative Procedure Act.

Title VI should be considered throughout the planning, project development, and environmental review process. As with all project development issues, early identification of Title VI concerns increases the likelihood of successful resolution. All VTrans staff should be proactive in identifying and addressing possible Title VI issues, and VTrans Civil Rights specialists should be actively engaged to provide input on areas of potential concern.

## Accessibility

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended in 2008, requires that meetings and hearings be held in ADA-compliant buildings. Reasonable accommodations such as qualified readers or interpreters, provision of or modifications to audiovisual aids or documents, or other visual, hearing, or mobility assistance must be made as necessary to assist those with disabilities to participate in meetings, planning, and programming activities. Keep ADA requirements in mind when planning meetings and development project visualizations and consult the Civil Rights section for clarification as needed. See page 34 for ADA language concerning meetings.

## Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

In the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Congress established a comprehensive program to preserve the historical and cultural foundations of the nation. Section 106 requires consideration of historic preservation for all federally funded projects, which VTrans' Environmental Section reviews. Section 106 review ensures that preservation values are factored into agency planning and decisions. It is best to involve the Environmental Section early on so that any required public involvement can be folded into other outreach activities. Refer to [Appendix B](#) for more information on the Section 106 process.



Plans to widen the Route 2 truss bridge in Richmond were closely coordinated with Vermont's State Historic Preservation Office as part of the Section 106 process.

Table 3. Summary of Federal Laws and Regulations

Title 23 U.S.C.- Highways	Federal transportation authorizing legislation sets the overall framework for transportation planning. Public involvement remains a hallmark of the transportation planning process. Code § 128 requires certification by the Secretary of public hearings in convenient and accessible locations for any State transportation department which submits plans for a Federal-aid highway project involving the by passing of or, going through any city, town, or village.
Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): 23 CFR 450, 210 (a)(b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes requirements for statewide and metropolitan transportation planning, requiring agencies to establish early and continuous public involvement opportunities.</li> <li>• Requires states to develop and use a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points in development of the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) and Long Range Plan, Freight Plan, and other Modal plans, and in consultation with non-metropolitan officials.</li> <li>• Requires that agencies use visuals to describe proposed long-range statewide transportation plans and supporting studies in an accessible and electronic format.</li> </ul>
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964	Bars intentional or unintentional discrimination. Ensures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, or disability be excluded from participation in federally funded projects. Subsequent federal legislation led to further protections based on age, gender, and mental or physical disability.
Environmental Justice, Presidential Executive Order 12898	Reinforces the nondiscrimination requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 such that no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from projects. Environmental Justice populations must be given opportunities to participate in project development.
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 & as amended (2008)	Requires that meetings and hearings be held in ADA-compliant buildings. Reasonable accommodations such as qualified readers or interpreters, provision of or modifications to audiovisual aids or documents, or other visual, hearing, or mobility assistance must be made as necessary to assist those with disabilities to participate in meetings, planning, and programming activities.
Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508	Requires Federal electronic and information technology to be accessible to people with disabilities.
Executive Order 13166 on Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	Established to improve access to Federally assisted programs and activities for persons who, as a result of national origin, have limited English proficiency.
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires reasonable public notice of NEPA-related hearings, public meetings, and the availability of environmental documents for review by those who may be interested or affected.</li> <li>• Requires coordination of public involvement activities and public hearings through the entire NEPA process.</li> <li>• Requires early and continuing opportunities during project development for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts, as well as impacts associated with relocation of individuals, groups, or institutions.</li> </ul>
Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act	Requires Federal agencies to consider the effects of projects they carry out, approve, or fund on historic properties in coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer. This may also result in public consultation with certain organizations and individuals as part of the review. For more information, see <a href="#">Appendix B</a> .



## 2.2.2 STATE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Timing, accessibility, and inclusion is key when complying with laws and regulations. Strict attention needs to be paid to public comment periods, notification requirements, accessibility to information and meeting locations, and inclusion of low income and minority populations.

Failure to follow the “letter of the law” could subject your project to costly delays and possible litigation. Take the time to familiarize yourself with these requirements, and consult with the legal section or Right of Way for more information.

Additional information on planning statutes and rules can be found through the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#).

### VT Open Meeting Law

Per [Title 1 V.S.A. Chapter 5, Sections 310-314](#), all public meetings of any government entities in Vermont must meet the minimum notice, public access and reporting requirements of the Open Meeting Law.

### Vermont Statute Section 502

[19 VSA § 502](#) requires a public notification and hearing prior to initiating proceedings to condemn property for state highway projects. For projects with minor impacts a “Minor Alteration” process may be sufficient. Consult the Right of Way section for more information.

### Act 200 and Land Use Planning Statutes

[VSA Title 24 Chapter 117](#) defines how local, regional and state land use planning will occur in Vermont and establishes a framework for regulatory and non-regulatory implementation. [Title 24 VSA Chapter 117, Section 4302](#) articulates the goals governing land use planning and regulation in Vermont. Substantive goals (addressing development patterns, transportation, economic development, etc.) as well as process goals encouraging broad participation and coordination are provided.

### Vermont’s Land Use and Development Act 250

The Land Use and Development Act 250 ([10 V.S.A. Ch. 151](#)) is Vermont’s development control law, established in 1970. The law provides a public, quasi-judicial process for reviewing and managing the environmental, social, and fiscal consequences of major subdivisions and development in Vermont through the issuance of land use permits. Hearings and public notifications may be required based on the size of the project. Consult the Right of Way section for more information.



## Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI)

Per [VSA Title 19 Chapter 1, Section 101](#), VTrans created the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) program as a way to organize a transportation planning process in which local municipalities, citizens and stakeholders could participate directly. The fundamental principle is to ensure all areas of Vermont to have access to the planning process and the development of transportation policy and projects. Local plans must be compatible with regional plans. Thus, through the TPI process, statewide transportation priorities and projects are meant to reflect local, regional and statewide goals and interests.

## State Highway Closures Act 153

Per [19 V.S.A. § 43](#), VTrans is required to hold one public pre-closure meeting for state and interstate projects. This meeting may be held during design or construction prior to the closure.



The potential impact of projects on the function and values of wetlands, such as this Rutland area wetland, will be documented with public input as part of the NEPA process.

# 3. PREPARING FOR OUTREACH

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## 3.1 UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Taking the time to understand the history of the project area and possible public concerns with the project will help you understand the context of the project within the community and aid in the development of successful outreach strategies. VTrans staff, Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), local communities, Federal authorities, special interest groups and political leaders can all help provide context and should be involved in the project early on.

### 3.1.1 RESEARCH PROJECT HISTORY

#### Consult with RPC and VTrans' Planning Coordinator

Before embarking on any project or planning process, VTrans staff should check in with the affected RPC and the VTrans Planning Coordinator. RPC staff members know the lay of the land – people, geography, and issues. They can help in contacting key people to quickly get the word out on projects and outreach activities. They may also identify key local “hot button” issues so that Agency representatives can be prepared to address them.

Eleven RPCs have been established within the State to serve all communities. The RPCs are responsible for collaborating with VTrans in developing plans necessary for federal and state funding, and help to set priorities for Transportation Improvement Plans (TIP) and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). They assist towns with transportation plans and addressing transportation issues.

Sometimes RPCs help define a project, conduct feasibility studies, and identify a preferred alternative and conceptual design. In other words, VTrans may get a project with much of the groundwork already completed, enabling the public process to go forward more quickly. VTrans provides funding to RPCs to assist with public outreach within their regions through the Agency's Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI).



Regional Planning Commission and VTrans staff collaborate at a public meeting.

## Involve affected municipalities early

Many municipal administrators/managers have managed their jurisdiction affairs for decades and have had much experience with the Agency. People in leadership positions in their municipality will be asked questions, field complaints, and hear ideas on how a project can be improved. Exchanging information on a regular basis will not only provide local officials with what they need to know to effectively communicate with their constituents, but frequent dialogue may also provide VTrans with useful information to shape plans and projects. When working with a municipality, identify the right contacts (i.e., elected and appointed leaders and/or staff) and the protocols they prefer. Should information be sent to the Town Clerk? Town Manager? Selectboard Chair? Is the project in an incorporated village within a town? The organization of local government varies widely so it is best to get it right early on. Think beyond the immediate project area and consider all types of local and regional mobility impacts. Projects with short term closures and regional detour routes may affect more than one town and Regional Planning Commission.

## Send Local Concerns Questionnaire and/or Hold Local Concerns Meeting

The Local and Regional Concerns Questionnaire was developed by VTrans' planning staff with RPCs to learn about key factors that may affect a project. This allows the affected municipalities and RPCs a chance to weigh in on important considerations, such as annual events, school routes, emergency services or other things to consider in project development. For some projects, there may be a recently completed Questionnaire from the region to consult, and a Local Concerns Meeting might also be necessary. View the Local and Regional Concerns Questionnaire in [Appendix D](#).

### TIPS FOR WORKING WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS

- ✓ If project design or project definition changes, let local officials know immediately. Surprises are never good. The municipality needs to know before a change is implemented so it can weigh in before it is too late, especially if a change conflicts with what was decided when the project was planned with the municipality.
- ✓ Listen to what local officials say and let them know that they have been heard. There may not always be agreement on project outcome, but it is important that issues are fully discussed and that the rationale for the decision is understood by key stakeholders such as town officials.
- ✓ Work to iron out differences. VTrans' and the municipality's views on a project may differ. Work to find middle ground or to better explain the Agency's recommendations.
- ✓ Give officials plenty of time to respond. Many Selectboards (and RPC regional Transportation Advisory Committees) meet only once a month. It is best to learn meeting schedules at the beginning of a project.
- ✓ Don't assume a letter or an email is enough. If an individual or town has been unresponsive, follow-up by telephone or asking others for assistance in making contact.
- ✓ When requesting comments, provide a reasonable deadline. This will encourage a timely response, communicate your urgency, and help prevent the request from getting buried under other tasks and deadlines.



## Review previous VTrans projects

Review previous VTrans projects in the area and contact the project manager or other VTrans staff involved. Read project reports, including records of public and local officials' meetings. If there was a previous advisory committee or stakeholder list, contact these people early on in project development.

## Send Maintenance and Operations Questionnaire

VTrans' Structures section developed a questionnaire, modeled after the Local and Regional Concerns Questionnaire, to make sure that district staff have a chance to weigh in on project development. District staff have a working knowledge of the area and can identify community leaders and issues, infrastructure and maintenance needs, potential conflicting projects, seasonal activities, travel patterns, and detour routes. View the Maintenance and Operations Questionnaire in [Appendix E](#).

## Check for concurrent projects

Identify other projects that are planned in the same area or at the same time as your project using VTransparency. District Transportation Administrators and Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) are good resources to consult. This is especially important if your project needs to detour traffic through an area where there will be delays caused by other projects. TSMO staff may have information on other projects or events affecting the traveling public and must review any planned road closures and traffic control plans. The public will expect you to be informed about all related ongoing projects and specific maintenance issues.



### 3.1.2 IDENTIFY HOT BUTTON ISSUES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Once you have familiarized yourself with the history of the project area, it is important to be aware of the types of project impacts that will may raise public concerns.

Typical impacts that generate concerns:

- Safety concerns.
- Permanent and temporary property takings – private and municipal.
- Impacts to utilities.
- Effects on protected resources such as an historic bridge or a wetland.
- Impacts to local businesses, including agricultural operations.
- Mobility impacts, especially if a long detour or closure is needed.
- Transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- Increased congestion, noise levels or other quality of life impacts.
- Visual impacts.
- Project timing that conflicts with local events or tourism.
- Multiple projects in one year or recurring mobility impacts over multiple years.



Many towns, such as Middlebury, pictured left, have major routes converging in their town centers. Transportation projects should consider many needs, including safety, mobility, commerce, and aesthetics.

## 3.2 DEVELOP A STAKEHOLDER LIST

Stakeholders include: local, regional, state, and federal officials; special interest or advocacy groups; civic organizations; economic development groups; businesses; project abutters; emergency service providers; state representatives; and the general public. Some are easy to identify, others more difficult. Engaging a broad range of stakeholders will ensure that all viewpoints are better understood.

At project initiation, begin development of a contact list of those who may be interested and/or affected by the project. Have others who are knowledgeable about the area or project review the stakeholder list. The figure below illustrates the range of types of stakeholders that may be involved in any project. A more detailed list of types of stakeholders can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Figure 2. Sample of Stakeholders



## The Public

It is our responsibility to engage our customers in decisions about transportation projects and keep them informed of travel disruptions. Cast a wide net when developing a stakeholder list and consider how information is shared in the community you are working in. Some ways to reach the public include distributing project fact sheets in a community's corner store, posting to Front Porch Forum or social media, or using message boards. Specific methods will vary based on the project and the community.

### During project planning.

When the Agency informs the public about the need for a project, listens and responds to what people say about it, and considers the public's wishes and concerns in the final design, VTrans is more likely to receive support to move a project forward because the public feels it has played a role in shaping it. While it is incumbent on the Agency to make information available to the public, it is particularly important to engage those who will be directly or indirectly affected by the project and to engage disadvantaged populations. Specific outreach techniques may be needed to reach out to people who have limited English proficiency, live in low-income or minority neighborhoods, or are members of a protected group based on race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Specific outreach techniques can be found in [Section 1.6](#) and [Section 4](#).

### During construction.

The public is less likely to be upset about travel delays or other disruptions if they have advance notice. Notice can be given through broad distribution of project fact sheets, New England Compass, Front Porch Forum, message boards, social media, project update listservs, or a press release, if the project warrants. The more the public knows in advance, the less calls and emails from upset customers for everyone, and most importantly, improved safety for workers and the travelling public.

## Businesses

Businesses can be your greatest allies and your most potent adversaries. They are vulnerable to mobility disruptions, capable of sharing information with large constituencies and able to organize into groups that can help bring the community along or create major obstacles.

It is important to engage them early on, in person when possible, to assess their issues and seek their support. While we cannot invest highway dollars in direct aid to businesses, we can adopt a supportive posture, assist in connecting them with other resources and use our communications resources to help maintain an "open for business" environment during our work. Chambers of Commerce, business associations and the Agency of Commerce can be valuable partners.



## Special Interest Groups

Most special interest groups the Agency will encounter are comprised of citizens with a passion for serving a public need or particular population, such as bicyclists, environmentalists, rail advocates, or transit users. Engaging with advocates for a special cause will improve VTrans' understanding of needs and, in ideal circumstances, will provide the support needed to move a project forward.

**Consider who may benefit.** When approaching a project or study, consider who may benefit. There are natural alliances that should be explored.

**Seek out opposing views.** Project opponents need to be heard and understood. While it may be uncomfortable, it is critically important to seek out those with opposing views or those who may be negatively impacted. It can be difficult to build partnerships with groups that oppose a project, but taking the initiative can help build common understanding, which in turn can help prevent groups from derailing a project completely. Having proactive dialogue may create opportunities to discuss differences and perhaps identify ways to modify or reshape plans that are more acceptable to the group, still acceptable to the Agency, and possibly a win-win on all fronts. Direct discussions with opposition groups that occur outside a public meeting context are typically more productive and less confrontational.

Outreach to project opponents is best done by discussing the project one-on-one with the project opponent(s) prior to any public meetings or at any time throughout the life of the project.



Bicyclists can be very vocal advocates for on-the-ground conditions for cyclists.

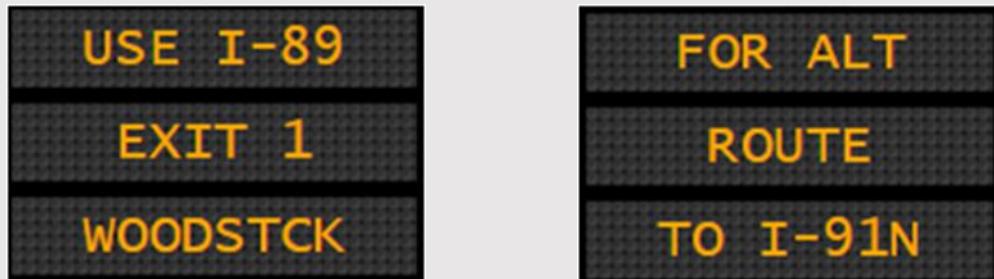
## 3.3 DEVELOP PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT GOALS

Different public involvement goals can require different outreach tools. Below are some typical public involvement goals and a sampling of tools that can support them. Oftentimes, a PIO will be engaged to help, but VTrans Public Outreach staff can also assist.

### Goal: Inform the Public

Informing the public can be one-way information; however, always include contact information where people may direct questions or concerns. Tools to consider include:

- Project update emails or phone calls to affected stakeholders, i.e. RPC, towns, schools, local sheriff, truck and bus companies, emergency services, property abutters, and other interested parties.
- Variable message signs
- Postings on New England Compass and VTransparency
- Front Porch Forum
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Media releases
- Fact sheet/website
- Posting on community bulletin boards



The content of Variable Message Signs that alerts travelers can change to respond to existing conditions. Messages can accommodate eight characters per line, with three lines and two phases.

## Goal: Gather Input

There are instances where a municipality or community can make some of its own decisions about project elements. This is especially true for Town Highway projects. Elements to consider gathering input on include certain design features (e.g., sidewalks, amenities, form liners), the best time of year for a closure, or the number of acceptable closure days. Planning and modal projects also may require significant input from the public.

These two-way communication tools can be effective in helping to gather input:

- Municipal meetings
- Visualization (maps, 3-D renderings, traffic modeling)
- Voting clickers
- Public Advisory Committees (for more sustained interaction)
- Public meetings
- Interviews
- Survey/Questionnaires
- Focus groups

## Goal: Build Concurrence

Concurrence does not mean full agreement – sometimes it is necessary to identify a path forward that people are willing to go along with, even if it is not their first choice. Ensure that the community understands the details of the project early in your process to avoid last minute requests and changes. Make sure the community is seeing the same picture that you are seeing. To reach common ground when opinions are not agreed upon, consider the following tools:

- Facilitated workshops or charrettes
- Informal neighborhood meetings
- Local officials' briefings



VTrans staff and a Project Information Officer present to the Duxbury community using voting clickers to help determine the optimal closure period and timeframe.

## 3.4 DEVELOP A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

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Once you have completed basic research on legal requirements, project history, and key stakeholders, developing a basic Public Involvement Plan (PIP) can help you ensure that all legal requirements are followed and key stakeholders that have the potential to stop a project are involved from the beginning. A PIP is a guidance document to identify ways to conduct public outreach for a specific project. Each plan should reflect the needs of the specific project, and all plans should be designed to allow the public meaningful and timely input.

A PIP does not need to be a lengthy document. Identify areas that need improvement throughout the public participation process and revise your plan accordingly. The real key to successful public involvement is to be nimble, adjusting outreach methods to meet the needs of the community. These needs can change multiple times over the course of a project and the PIP should reflect that. Appendix A includes a template to use in developing your PIP.

### Key Elements of a Public Involvement Plan

#### **1. Project Purpose, Need and Goals**

The project purpose and need statement and project goals need to be documented in the public involvement plan to avoid any misunderstanding about project purpose. Key project milestones are often opportune times to update the public or hold a meeting. Refer to the [Project Definition Process Guidebook](#) for more information on involving stakeholders during the project definition phase.

#### **2. Project Background**

This section should summarize the findings from initial research on issues and stakeholders, including the Local and Regional Concerns Questionnaire, discussed in [Section 3.1.1](#) and found in [Appendix D](#). A review of project history will provide insight on how much public engagement has previously occurred. The PIP should provide adequate opportunity for the public to learn how previous public input informed the Agency's decision and what, if any, modifications were made.

#### **3. Key Stakeholders and Concerns**

Identifying who the key stakeholders are in the project area and identifying concerns early on will build the foundation for selecting the most appropriate outreach techniques. For example, if disruption to business during construction is a concern, then the PIP should detail how businesses will be engaged in discussions of how to best schedule work activities to minimize impacts.

#### **4. Legal Requirements**

The legal and regulatory requirements that govern public involvement for the project need to be articulated. See [Section 2.2](#) and [Appendix F](#).



## 5. Outreach Tools

The outreach tools proposed in a PIP should be appropriate for the project's level of impact, and may be different based on the project's phase (e.g. planning, design, construction, maintenance). Use a variety of tools, including a mixture of traditional (e.g., public meetings) and innovative (e.g., voting clickers, text or online surveys) methods.

See [Section 1.6](#) and [Section 4](#).

## 6. Implementation Schedule

Legally required comment periods and notification timeframes must be considered when developing a project schedule. The schedule should clarify project milestones where public input may help shape project development. As a project progresses, adjustments to project milestones and decision-making points may be needed. If this occurs, let stakeholders know about the changes.

When building a schedule, set public meetings at times and dates most optimal for large levels of participation. Sometimes timing cannot be perfect, but when possible, avoid summer vacation months, holidays (including religious observances), popular hunting seasons, or school breaks. For smaller projects, get on the agenda for an existing Selectboard meeting or another planned event.

## 7. Documenting Input

Public comments are gathered through a variety of means, including mail, email, survey results, comment cards, formal oral or written testimony, verbal comments at meetings, virtual on-line meetings, votes, focus groups, and other ways. Provide a variety of ways for people to provide input.

All comments need to be read or listened to and responded to as legally required. If a comment contains a question, a misstatement of fact, or is from a particular stakeholder such as an elected official, it may require more than a standard response. It is important to consider and evaluate what you are hearing and stay open to the possibility that there may be good ways to improve the project or mitigate impacts that have not previously been considered.

## 8. Measuring Outreach Success

Build evaluation into the public involvement process from the beginning and develop methods for measuring success. Goals and objectives can be used as a starting point to define criteria for measuring success. Over the course of a project these goals and criteria may change. Identify how evaluation will take place.

**Possibilities for outreach evaluation include:**

- Number of participants at meetings
- Number of comments received
- Number of visits to a web site
- Diversity of opinions and interests represented
- Public meeting evaluation forms
- Opinion surveys and questionnaires
- Interactive polling during public meetings
- Website and social media metrics



# 4. ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

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## 4.1 PUBLIC MEETINGS & HEARINGS

While emails, social media, and online surveys are increasingly used as project communication and feedback tools, public meetings are still among the most frequently used and critical pieces of most outreach efforts. Some projects require specific meetings to meet legal obligations. Some processes require actual *hearings*, which are different from *meetings*.

Public hearings are more formal than meetings and are generally held prior to a decision point for comments from all interested parties to be collected for public record and input into decisions. Public meetings are typically more informal and can be used to share information and obtain informal feedback at any time in a project's development. Make sure you are clear about the legal requirements for your project.

### 4.1.1 MEETING BEST PRACTICES

#### Scheduling

Determine the best time and day of the week. This can vary based on the community, so check with local stakeholders. Public meetings are typically held Monday through Thursday, and usually in the afternoon and/or early evening. Avoid religious holidays, local events, and popular hunting seasons when possible.

#### Location & Accessibility

Meetings should be held at locations convenient to the group targeted for involvement. If possible, visit the meeting room in advance. A checklist on what to look for in a meeting room is found in [Appendix K](#). Meetings and hearings must be held in ADA-compliant buildings and reasonable accommodations must be made to ensure equal access for people with disabilities to participate in meetings:

- Where possible, meetings should be held in places that are convenient to other transportation modes besides the private automobile.
- Qualified readers or interpreters are available if requested at least three business days prior to the event.
- Identify alternative meeting sites, such as churches, schools, and senior centers to reach traditionally underserved populations.
- When possible, work with local public access television to broadcast meetings. A listing of providers can be found through [Vermont Access Network](#).

#### ADA LANGUAGE FOR MEETINGS

All public meeting notices should state the following:

"In accordance with provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended, VTrans will ensure public meeting sites are accessible to all people. Requests for free interpretive or translation services, assistive devices, or other requested reasonable accommodations, should be made to Sue Hackney, VTrans Title VI Coordinator, at 802-828-5858 or [susan.hackney@vermont.gov](mailto:susan.hackney@vermont.gov) at least three business days prior to the meeting for which services are requested."



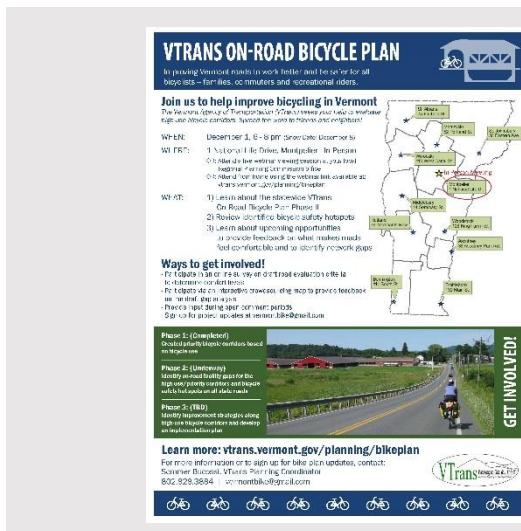
# Meeting Announcement

The announcement should include the date, time, location, purpose, and contact information, at a minimum. Provide adequate notification for the meeting, which can vary based on legal requirements, but should provide at least two weeks' notice as general guidance. In addition to an email to stakeholders, this could include paid newspaper advertisements, flyer distribution, social media posts, a radio announcement, a meeting announcement to press, and other methods. Consult with outreach staff for more information.

## Preparation

Before holding a public meeting, have a plan. Know what message you want to convey, who the public should contact about the project, and how the Agency plans to communicate with the public.

- Plan an agenda that supports the purpose of the meeting.
  - Anticipate concerns and understand how the project may or may not address or exacerbate them.
  - Learn how to pronounce the names of towns, streets, and abutting landowners. Refer to roads as the locals do.
  - Meet with seriously affected people in a small group or one-on-one prior to a meeting, rather than having them learn about the project in a large, public setting.
  - Review the project fact sheet and print copies to hand out. Translate into other languages if needed.
  - Determine mechanisms for gathering feedback and responding to it.
  - Rehearse the presentation - it will help clarify and hone the message.
  - Set up the meeting area to suit your purpose and arrange for light refreshments if you can.
  - Ensure that special efforts are made and documented relative to the involvement of minority and low-income communities and that appropriate Title VI language is used in all letters and public notices. Consult with Civil Rights staff for more information.



In addition to sending an announcement to your stakeholder list and local media, libraries, convenience stores, town halls, and coffee shops are great places to have flyers advertising a public meeting.

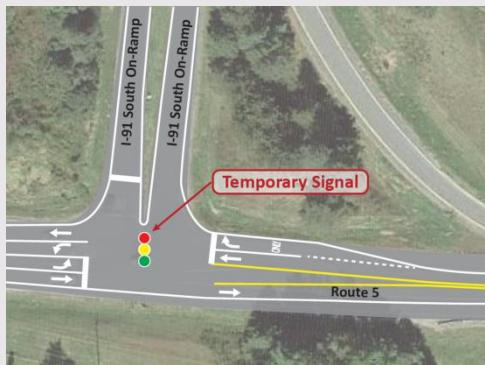
## Facilitation

A facilitator plays an important role in focusing discussion, keeping a meeting on track, affirming participants, listening, and restating discussion points so that resolution and concurrence are reached.

- ✓ Establish ground rules about how public discussion at the meeting will be managed.
- ✓ Ask questions to make sure you understand.
- ✓ Do not interject comments, your own opinion, or argue.
- ✓ Thank the speaker and repeat the main points.
- ✓ Ensure everyone has the chance to speak and that one or two people do not dominate conversation.

### Phrases to guide discussion

To answer a question you are unsure about	"I'll find out the answer and get back to you."
To get opinions	"How do you feel about...?" "What do you think about...?"
To summarize what's been said	"What I am hearing is .... Did I get that right?" "Let me see if I understand your comment. Are you saying that...?"
To encourage participation when one person is dominating discussion	"We have not heard from others yet, let's see if someone else wants to add something...?" If no one immediately volunteers, pick someone from the crowd, "How about the gentleman in the plaid shirt, would you like to tell us ...?"
To clarify a comment	"I'm not sure I'm clear about what you mean, are you thinking (saying)..."
To explore an idea in more detail	"Does anyone want to add to what we have just heard?" "Are there other ideas on how to approach this problem?"
To gauge if other people in the group share a viewpoint	"Could we see by a show of hands how many others agree with this?" "How many are not sure."



Visualization techniques should be used in public presentations to help the public understand traffic changes that would be put in place during construction, such as this diagram showing a temporary signal at U.S. 5 and I-91.

## Dealing with Hostility

Dealing with upset people sometimes cannot be avoided, despite your best efforts at planning ahead, reaching out to local officials and affected people, and using excellent communication skills.

If you find yourself in front of an angry speaker or group, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Be respectful. Do not engage in an argument, behave defensively, or raise your voice. No matter what others do, keep your cool. You will get the sympathy and the respect of many in the audience if you remain consistently civil.
- Using a calm voice, ask people to speak one at a time. Having people shouting out or interrupting may lead to a breakdown of civility.
- Acknowledge people's feelings. Dismissing them, even with gestures or attitude, may make things worse.
- Keep your answers brief. This will be easy if in advance of the meeting you have prepared answers for the kinds of questions you expect. Remember the public is more likely to have a greater urge to speak to you than to listen (especially if they have already heard a formal presentation).
- Respond honestly to the questions that are asked. Don't try to skirt difficult issues.
- If you do not know the answer, say so. Tell the person you will get back to them later (be sure to get contact information after the meeting so you can keep your word).
- Speak in non-technical language when possible, so that people can more readily understand you. If you need to use a technical term, ask if people know what you mean.
- Involve people in constructive participation. For example, if someone suggests that you do not know how local drivers behave, you might suggest that the community organize a field trip for you so they can show you the problem first hand.

## Public Meeting Formats

Public meetings can be “open house” format, “presentation” format, or a combination of both. The purpose is to gather information, but not verbatim, as with a public hearing.

### Open house format

An open house format is intended to exchange information in a relatively informal setting, giving the public a chance to carefully examine maps and exhibits up close and to speak with project staff one-on-one, rather than in front of a large group. The project team may also convey concepts and obtain feedback from meeting attendees.

This format is ideal for creating dialogue and an atmosphere that welcomes stakeholders to participate in the project process. In general, it depicts projects managers as collaborative and open to community concerns. Drawbacks can be a lack of depth of information or context that can sometimes more easily be conveyed in a presentation.



## Presentation format

A formal presentation followed by a period where the public can ask questions or make comments allows everyone to hear the same information. A presentation also provides a forum for key stakeholders, such as elected officials, to address attendees. Voting clickers could be incorporated into a presentation to allow attendees to have a voice.

This format is ideal for conveying complex information to a large group. Drawbacks of this less collaborative style can be stakeholders who don't feel included, are shy about speaking up in a group, or who feel that the Agency is not open to alternative ideas.

## Blended format

Combining an open house and presentation format is ideal for many projects. The public can speak informally and individually with project staff and closely examine exhibits, followed by a formal presentation to all attendees. For longer meetings, the presentation can be delivered multiple times.

This type of meeting works especially well for large, complex projects, with numerous alternatives. A blended meeting can also be useful on controversial projects where VTrans wants to more fully understand issues and personally connect with stakeholders. One drawback is that information shared during the informal session will not be included in the meeting transcript.

### Tips for a successful blended format meeting:

- Greet people as they enter the room and direct them to move through the tables or stations to avoid congestion and ensure that they get the full picture.
- Use a large writing pad, post-its, or other means to record comments.
- Provide chairs along the outskirts of the meeting room to allow people to rest.
- Be sure that Agency staff (and consultants) are proactively interacting with the public, not talking amongst themselves.
- Keep presentations concise, interesting, informative, clear, and include visualization.
- Provide adequate background and context so that stakeholders can orient themselves to the project.

## Participating in Meetings Sponsored by Other Organizations

Agency staff may be invited to speak at meetings hosted by other organizations. If you are invited to address a meeting that is not a VTrans-sponsored event (such as a Chamber of Commerce or RPC meeting), ask about the audience, the topic intended for you to address, the meeting format, and the time allotted for you to speak.

You may need to do some research to determine if there are any issues of concern that participants may raise during the meeting. If you have any concern about the invitation, you do not need to commit on-the-spot to the engagement but do commit to getting back to them promptly.



## 4.1.2 LOCAL CONCERN MEETINGS

The focus of a Local Concerns Meeting is to hear concerns of municipal leaders, Regional Planning Commissions, federal, state, and local agencies, interest groups, and abutting property owners. The Agency listens to concerns and ideas raised by meeting participants and makes every attempt to help define the project and incorporate feedback into the analysis of possible alternative solutions, if they are technically sound and cost-effective. The challenge is to balance these concerns and determine what can be incorporated into the project design, consistent with purpose and need. For some projects, the Local and Regional Concerns Questionnaire may be used instead of a meeting.

**Meeting notification:** Invitations should be sent out approximately four weeks before the meeting and should include background information on the project and a map of the project location.

**Comments:** Comments can be made at the meeting or within two weeks after the public meeting.

**Meeting summary:** The meeting summary and all comments become part of the public record. After the meeting, the project manager will evaluate all the comments received and ensure that comments are integrated into the appropriate project documents, such as the Project Definition Report.

**Additional meetings:** Following a Local Concerns Meeting, the project may warrant additional public information meetings, depending on project size, complexity or potential impacts. For large projects that include a long planning period, it is recommended to have an additional meeting a few weeks before construction begins to re-brief stakeholders on the project.



A public meeting to discuss the future of the landmark Lake Champlain Bridge attracted hundreds to a local school in Addison.

### 4.1.3 PUBLIC HEARINGS

Public hearings are held in response to regulatory requirements and have specific timetables for publicizing meetings, as well as prescribed comment periods for receiving written comments. It is critical to check legal requirements and follow them as specified. Consult VTrans legal staff if you are unsure if a public hearing is required or not.

#### Projects that require a public hearing

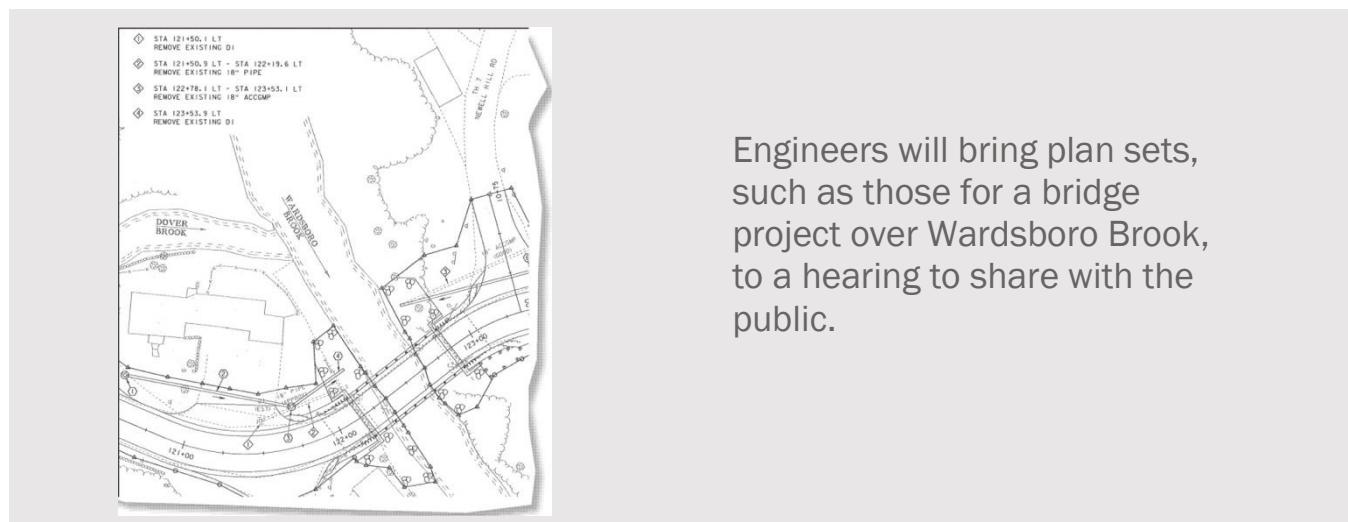
Regulations stipulate that one or more public hearings, or the opportunity for public hearings, must be provided if a project meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Requires acquisition or use of non-State owned property (State regulation)
- Substantially changes the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved (State regulation)
- Has a substantial adverse impact on abutting property (State regulation)
- Has a significant social, economic, environmental or other effect (NEPA Federal regulation)
- FHWA, FTA, or FRA determines that a public hearing is in the public interest (Federal regulation)

See section 2.2 and Appendix F for more specifics about which statutes require hearings.

#### Minimum State Hearing Requirements

- An announcement of a hearing must be published in a local newspaper of general circulation in the municipalities affected. Public outreach staff can help identify which newspapers are necessary.
- The [Vermont Department of Libraries](#) must be notified of any public hearing that is scheduled.
- Pertinent project information must be made available for the public to view at Agency headquarters.
- Public testimony must be recorded and transcribed by a hired transcriptionist.
- The hearing notice period may differ depending on the type of hearing. Consult with Legal staff.



## Hearing Format

Typically, the hearing is run by a moderator or meeting facilitator who will make introductions, explain the format of the meeting, and oversee the gathering of public comments. The moderator will also formally begin and end the hearing, as well as cite the appropriate governing regulations under which the hearing is being held and the specifics of the comment period. The project manager or consultant will typically be expected to make a presentation about the project at the beginning of their hearing.

## Presentation

The presentation can vary in length, but ideally is no longer than 20 minutes. The presentation should contain clear language and easy to interpret graphics. Depending on the size of the project or level of controversy, you may wish to have multiple hearings in different locations along a corridor. The time of the presentation should be clearly indicated in the hearing notifications.

*The presentation should include the following elements:*

- ✓ Introduction and hearing purpose
- ✓ Citation of laws and/or regulations governing the hearing
- ✓ Project purpose, need, goals and objectives
- ✓ Project location and definition
- ✓ History of the project
- ✓ Description of alternatives, including the no-build alternative
- ✓ Visual representations of the alternatives
- ✓ Criteria by which the alternatives were screened
- ✓ Pros and cons of the alternatives relative to the selection criteria
- ✓ Discussion of impacts from proposed alternatives
- ✓ The Right-of-Way acquisition process and why the property is necessary
- ✓ Instructions for providing oral and/or written comments at the hearing
- ✓ Comment period closing dates and methods to submit comments after the hearing

## Receiving Public Testimony

After the presentation, the moderator will begin taking comments from the public. The hearing can be combined with an open house with display materials and staff on hand to answer questions in a separate area. This adds a conversational element to the hearing. It is important to stress that comments made in an open house portion of the meeting will not become part of the public record.

People who want to speak at the public hearing are generally asked to put their names on a speaker's list and they will be called upon in order by the moderator. Elected officials are often given the courtesy of speaking first, prior to the public. Each speaker may be given a time limit, generally three minutes, but may be allowed to speak a second time after everyone else has been given an opportunity. People may bring written testimony and have it included in the public record. Attendees can also fill in comment sheets to complete at the hearing, or send in during the public comment period. All inputs have the same weight.



A public hearing typically does not end until all members of the public who wish to comment have had the chance, whether they signed up initially to speak and whether they have spoken before. The length of the public comment period requirements varies, so make sure to check with VTrans legal staff.

## Hearing Documentation

Public hearing proceedings, including the presentation and comments received, are recorded and transcribed for the official record. A transcription service must be hired to record the hearing and produce a written transcript. The names and addresses of people who speak are also noted in the transcript. Usually the meeting transcript should be ready for review within two weeks after the hearing.

These transcripts along with any additional written submissions made either at the hearing or during the comment period are then archived. These comments are then forwarded to project staff to prepare the appropriate responses, depending on the legal requirements. For example, NEPA requires each individual comment to be responded to as part of the legal record. All comments and responses should also be made publicly available, rather than responses made on an individual basis.

## 4.1.4 SECTION 502 HEARING

A Section 502 Hearing is a specific type of hearing. Before VTrans proceeds with property condemnation to lay out, relocate, alter, construct, reconstruct, maintain, repair, widen, grade, or improve any state highway, including affected portions of town highways, a public hearing must be held to receive suggestions and recommendations from the public. This is required by 19 VSA 502.

**Notification:** The Agency is required by Vermont State Statute to prepare an official notice stating the purpose for which the property is desired and generally describing the highway project at least 30 days prior to the hearing. Notice includes:

- 1) Printing an advertisement in a newspaper with general circulation in the area affected.
- 2) Mailing a copy of the notice to the legislative bodies of the municipalities affected.
- 3) Mailing a copy of the notice to all known property owners whose property may be taken as a result of the proposed improvement.

**Hearing:** At the hearing, VTrans will explain the reasons for the selection of the proposed project or preferred alternative and hear and consider all objections, suggestions for changes, and recommendations made by the public. Each parcel to be “taken” must be presented. At the close of the comment period and after due consideration of input received, the Agency may proceed with the project.

Questions about Section 502 requirements should be referred to the VTrans Right-of-Way section. The Project Delivery Bureau also assists in scheduling, correspondence templates, hiring transcription services, and other Section 502 Hearing planning.



## 4.2 WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

VTrans program managers or their designee will likely need to deal with the media during the development of a project, and it is generally better to reach out to the media before they contact you. People are interested in government initiatives and transportation projects which affect their mobility and the welfare of their communities. Interacting with the media can be anxiety-provoking for some, but does not have to be stressful.

Never lose sight of the fact that the job of the media is to keep an eye on us to make sure that we are acting in the public interest. If you understand how the media works and why, you can partner with them in a positive way to inform our customers about the work we do on their behalf.

### 4.2.1 DEVELOPING A MEDIA STRATEGY

Thinking about how and when you want your project to appear in the media is an integral part of presenting your project to our customers and ensuring a healthy partnership. To effectively manage media relations, the project manager should identify what kind of media coverage is desired and should have information readily available on project definition, purpose, schedule, impact, cost, etc., for use by the media in simple language that is consumable to a wide range of stakeholders. Depending on the scale of the project, this can be as simple as getting project details to the Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) to be added to New England Compass (which generates a tweet and Facebook post), or could require hiring a Project Information Officer (PIO). Think this through early in the process and you won't find yourself playing catch up when the cameras are rolling.

Questions to consider:

- Is this a high-profile, high impact, or controversial project? Consider the project, neighbor/business impacts and traffic impacts as distinct elements.
- What are the core messages the Agency wants to convey to the community or to a wider audience? Innovative design? Difficult circumstances? Upgrade for community?
- How do people get their news in the project area? Small weekly or monthly newspaper? Front Porch Forum? Listserv? What are the local TV and radio news outlets? Bulletin board at the bakery?
- What are the key project milestones?
- When is publicity needed? Meetings? Closures?
- Is this project relevant beyond the specific project area? Will disruption be felt more in another town?
- Who will be the media spokesperson, if needed?
- Are you going to need help with media or social media? Do you need to hire a PIO to assist you? Have you consulted the public outreach team?



## 4.2.2 DEALING WITH MEDIA INQUIRIES

The Agency's general practice is that the subject matter expert is the person who talks with the press. The subject matter expert will vary based on the context of the call, where the project is in terms of design and construction, who is responsible for project outreach, and even who is available to promptly answer questions. For most queries – “When is the meeting?” “How much is this going to cost?”, etc. – it is best if the Project Manager takes the call and then lets the Agency's Public Outreach Manager know via email who called and what was discussed. The Public Outreach team will then inform the Secretary of Transportation's office and the Governor's office as appropriate.

There are situations with high-profile or complicated projects where it may be appropriate to move the reporter up the chain of command to address larger policy issues or to a more specific information resource like environmental or archaeology. Don't be afraid to press pause while you move the reporter to the best resource, just be sure to keep public outreach in the loop and don't leave the press hanging too long.

### Strategies for talking with the media:

- Return phone calls promptly. Avoidance is not a good strategy.
- Be honest.
- Do not say anything you would not want to read in print. Assume that anything you say is on the record unless there is an agreement that specific remarks are “off the record.” And even then, don't expect the reporter to get that right.
- Answer the questions you are asked. You do not have to volunteer information unless you wish to provide more clarification.
- Seek opportunities to reiterate your project's core messages.
- If you do not fully understand the question, ask for clarification. It is okay to say you cannot comment.
- Do not be drawn into commenting on hypothetical or poorly constructed questions.
- You do not have to fill silences in the conversation. Wait for the next question.
- It is okay to refer them to someone else within the Agency with more expertise or seniority or to let them know you will get back to them with the name of someone else to contact (or have that person call the reporter).
- If you do not know the answer to a question, it is always best to say so. But tell the reporter you will find out and get back to them when you do.
- Be accessible. Ask about their deadline for story completion and help them make that deadline.
- Compliment a story well done. It is also okay to call attention to incorrect facts, if you do so tactfully.
- Treat legitimate bloggers in a similar way as traditional media reporters.

If you are unsure of the legitimacy of an outlet, check with outreach staff before commenting.



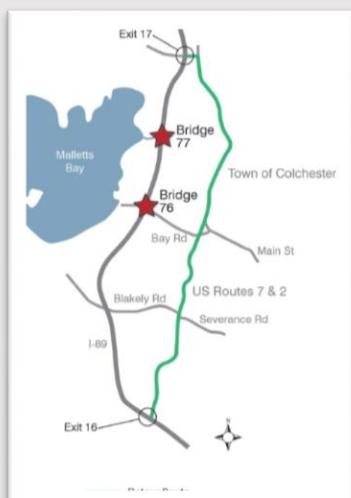
### 4.2.3 PREPARING A PRESS RELEASE

All media releases other than basic factual project updates or meeting announcements need to be reviewed by the Agency's public outreach staff. Any policy-related information or releases that include quotes must be reviewed by the Public Outreach Manager and when necessary, cleared with the Secretary's office. When in doubt, always run it by outreach staff.

While the public outreach office will help with edits and distribution of the release, it is always better if the project manager provides the following information in the draft:

- The five W's –
  - What is the project?
  - Where is the project? Are there local names for the affected area?
  - Who will be affected?
  - Why are we doing this project?
  - When will the project take place and how long will people be affected?
- The date the information should be published (be sure to give outreach staff sufficient lead time to process)
- Name and contact information for the press to contact with questions –usually the subject matter expert.

Press releases should be brief and to the point. If your project is complex, then consider accompanying the press release with a fact sheet or graphic with more detailed information.



To inform the public about a detour, include a map that can be easily printed and distributed by the media.

## 4.2.4 TELEVISION AND RADIO

Local cable access and radio stations are often eager to run stories and cover project events related to public infrastructure projects. Consider asking local cable access to tape a public meeting for viewing by those who are unable to attend.

### VTrans On The Road

Radio drive time shows are a great way to reach an audience of drivers and other users of the roadway network. *VTrans On The Road* is heard on radio stations throughout the state during construction season and is also shared in newspapers and on social media. Check with the show's VTrans host, the Outreach Coordinator, to get news about your project on local radio stations.



Notify the Public Outreach Manager of any communication with a reporter.



On the Road airs every Monday during construction season on radio stations throughout Vermont.

## 4.3 DIGITAL AND PRINT TOOLS

### 4.3.1 FACT SHEET/WEBSITE

Project fact sheets can be developed in advance of reaching out to project stakeholders. A project fact sheet that is made available on the VTrans website, VTransparency, and printed for public meetings can help explain the project and identify who the public should contact for further information or to voice concerns. Specific outreach techniques may be needed to reach out to people who have limited English proficiency or live in low-income or minority neighborhoods.

The VPins system can now generate a basic fact sheet that can function as a project web page automatically if the Project Manager has current information in the system. Like VTransparency, the data in the fact sheet will be updated every night and, provided the Project Manager is keeping up their data, the fact sheet will be current. VPins also provides the opportunity to add content to the fact sheet—visuals, detour maps, etc. through the regular VPins interface. The easiest way to see a final fact sheet is by accessing the project through VTransparency. The links can also be added to pages on the website as needed.

Creating a dedicated project website outside of the vtrans.vermont.gov Content Management System (CMS) is now discouraged. Our CMS has a branded VTrans look that helps visitors identify that they are on a state government website. Our IT staff have the resources to create just about anything needed to share project information on the web in a lower cost and more secure environment. If you feel your project needs its own website, please contact outreach staff.

A project fact sheet that is made available on the VTrans website, VTransparency, and printed for public meetings can help explain the project and identify who the public should contact for further information or to voice concerns.



### 4.3.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a way to rapidly share project information while allowing the public to weigh in on key decisions or ask questions. Although some projects use social media only as a tool to share information and meeting notifications, the most effective social media campaigns create a two-way conversation between the public and the project team. The “reach” or the number of impressions social media posts and campaigns create can be easily tracked.

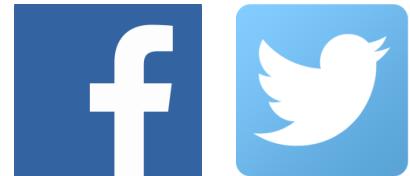
Because social media is as much about listening as it is about talking, even monitoring the social feeds of stakeholders can help gain perspective on community sentiment toward our work. Check the feeds of local businesses, municipal government, etc. to see what the important topics in the area are. This is the modern equivalent of hanging out at the diner to hear the latest gossip.

Public Outreach and Traffic Management Center (within TSMO) staff maintain social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube and there is currently a regional Facebook page for projects in the Southwest Construction Region. Project managers interested in actively using social media should consult with VTrans Public Outreach staff. Some projects may require their own dedicated feed or staffing of that feed by a PIO. In other cases, you can send info to outreach staff to disseminate.

Meetings, detours, disruptions, project milestones, work zone safety, or just a cool photo of work in progress are all good candidates for social media. And don’t forget to document any celebration or other good news event associated with your project.

#### A few key things to remember:

- Follow stakeholders, and other agencies that may update their pages with pertinent information about your project.
- Check feeds related to your project often. Outreach staff monitor main VTrans feeds, but there may be channels specific to your project where important information is hidden.
- Respond to questions and comments generated through social media in a timely manner as you would any other public query.
- Document important feedback received through social media.
- Wait to respond to angry messages. If in doubt, ask public outreach staff for help developing the best approach, and remember to thank the user for his/her input.



See [Appendix I](#) for social media policies.

### 4.3.3 FRONT PORCH FORUM AND COMMUNITY LISTSERVS

Community forums, such as Front Porch Forum (FPF), and listservs are some of the most effective ways to reach people who will be affected by a specific project.

**Front Porch Forum (FPF)** is a free service that helps neighbors connect and share information relevant to their specific community or neighborhood. As a hyper-local medium, postings to the forum should be specific to the municipality or the neighborhood of that forum. Closing a bridge in Norwich? FPF postings in Hartford, White River, Fairlee, etc. in addition to Norwich might make sense. Holding a statewide meeting about a plan in six towns on different dates? Not right for the forum. Lead times vary for each FPF and could be as long as a week. Postings should be channeled through the town clerk or a similar local official when possible, but can be posted through outreach staff when a local stakeholder is not available. See [Appendix J](#) for more information.

**Listservs** allow individuals to send an email to a list of people. They are a low-effort, no-cost way to effectively communicate. Listservs are managed by municipal staff or civic volunteers. Passing along information, meeting notifications, ideas, or questions to a stakeholder listserv can boost participation on a project. In some cases, a discussion can follow that may provide noteworthy feedback on a project. When you start work in a community, ask if there is a local listserv and who manages it.

## Using Community Calendars

Community calendars are a good, and usually free, outlet for publicizing public meetings and other project-related events. On-line community calendars are maintained by government entities, interest groups, local cable access TV stations, civic associations, etc. Printed community calendars often appear in local papers. Similar to the media contact list, it is helpful to build a list of these calendars early on in a project with contact information and deadlines for submitting information.



# CONCLUSION

The public is the reason we do what we do. It takes patience and focus to facilitate their participation, but they are our customers and if we involve them in our process, they will have a better sense of ownership in the final product and we often wind up with better projects.

Each constituency needs different things and being conscious of those differences at the beginning of a project will help you and the rest of the agency avoid additional work along the way.

There is always help available. This guide is meant to support your good work, but the outreach team remains committed to helping you do the best work you can.



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## APPENDIX A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

Project Name and Number:		Project Manager:	
Purpose and Need Statement:			
Project Location:		Project Budget:	
Target Advertising Date:		Target Construction Date:	
Traffic Control Method (cross-over, alternating one-way, closure, etc.):		Traffic Control Date and Duration:	
Detour Route:			
Legal Requirements:	<input type="checkbox"/> 502 Hearing, Minor Alterations (Confirm with Right of Way) <input type="checkbox"/> Act 250 (Confirm with Right of Way) <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Impacts, NEPA (Confirm with Environmental Section) <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Justice, Title VI, ADA (Confirm with Civil Rights) <input type="checkbox"/> Other:		
Project Information Officer	Yes, who: No – confirm with VTrans Public Outreach Manager		
Public Involvement Goal:	<input type="checkbox"/> Inform the public – Who will be affected, when, and in what ways?  <input type="checkbox"/> Gather Input – What decision will be influenced by public input?  <input type="checkbox"/> Build Concurrence – What are the different opinions?		
Outreach Evaluation Method (# of participants or comments, evaluation forms, surveys, etc.)			
Events for unique or special projects:	<input type="checkbox"/> Ground breaking <input type="checkbox"/> Project milestones event		<input type="checkbox"/> On-site tour <input type="checkbox"/> Ribbon cutting, dedication, opening celebration, etc.



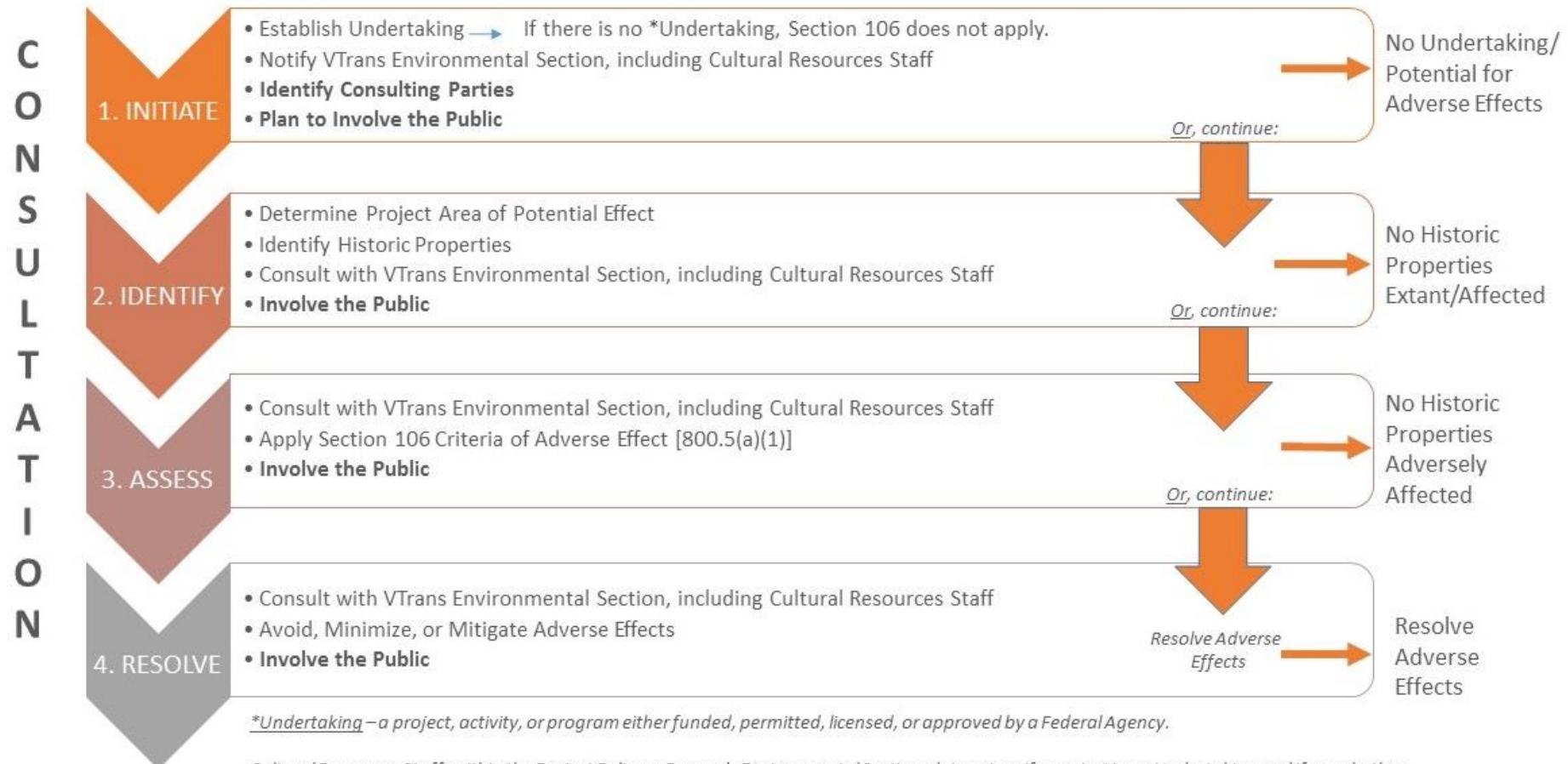
	POSSIBLE STAKEHOLDER	CONSIDERATIONS MAY INCLUDE:	NEEDED FOR PROJECT?
VTRANS	Policy and Planning	Project benefits and costs, stakeholders	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Rail, Public Transit, Aviation	Consistency with statewide plans (policy, modal) and existing infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Public Outreach	Outreach methods and use of a PIO	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Asset Management, Performance, Project Delivery	Consistency with asset management plans, other Agency projects planned in the area	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Construction and Materials	Compliance with design standards	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Maintenance and Operations	Maintenance requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Municipal Assistance	Complete streets review, Context sensitive review	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Environmental Section	Environmental, historical, cultural impacts	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Civil Rights	Legal requirements related to workforce, Environmental Justice	<input type="checkbox"/>
FEDERAL	Federal Highway Administration	Compliance with Federal planning, design, and environmental regulations	<input type="checkbox"/>
	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service	Environmental impacts and permitting	<input type="checkbox"/>
	FRA, FTA, FAA	Impact on other modes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Federal Agencies, e.g., Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Army Corps of Engineers	Compliance with regulations	<input type="checkbox"/>
STATE, REGIONAL, MUNICIPAL	Agency of Natural Resources, Agency of Agriculture	Compliance with State regulations and existing permit conditions, i.e. stormwater	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Department of Housing and Community Development	Support of other State initiatives/programs (housing, economic development, safety, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Department of Economic Development	Effect on downtown businesses tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Public Safety, EMS	Safety considerations	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Regional Planning Commissions	Regional costs/benefits/impacts, consistency with regional plans, stakeholders	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Rail and Transit Operators	Consistency/coordination with regional plans, services and facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>
	State & Regional elected officials	Impacts on constituents	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Municipal planners, engineers, public works	Benefits and impacts and local context	<input type="checkbox"/>
BUSINESSES, OTHER	Municipal elected and appointed officials	Consistency with local plans & zoning	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Businesses and institutions in project vicinity, Chambers of Commerce, business organizations	Benefits and impacts, construction disruption, access to businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Freight shippers	Business access, effect on delivery services (i.e. fuel, milk, shipping)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tourism	Effect on visitors to the state	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Private transit service providers	Disruption of service	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ped/bike groups, Community groups, Transit Riders, Environmental groups	Special interests (e.g., bicycle or pedestrian features, environmental impact, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Emergency service providers	Access to hospitals, detours	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Travelers using roadway	Travel time, delays	<input type="checkbox"/>

			Recommended Strategies Based on Traffic Impact Severity + Capacity Loss		
			LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Who's Responsible?  Project Manager - PM Resident Engineer - RE Project Information Officer - PIO Other:	When	Communication Strategies	Project duration: a few hours to one week No project controversy Commute/school not affected Low traffic volume Minimal delay and/or detour, if any	Project duration: one week to several months Moderate project controversy Commute/school moderately affected Moderate traffic volume Some delay and/or detour	Project duration: several weeks to several months Commute/school affected Controversial project High traffic volume Long delay and/or detour
		New England Compass	✓	✓	✓
		Work Zone Signage	✓	✓	✓
		TSMO	✓	✓	✓
		Message Boards	✓	✓	✓
		VTransparency		✓	✓
		Front Porch Forum		✓	✓
		On The Road		✓	✓
		Social Media		✓	✓
		Fact Sheet/Website		✓	✓
		Public Meeting		✓	✓
		Public SharePoint Site		✓	✓
		Engage a PIO		✓	✓
		Customer Survey			✓
		Custom Website			✓
		Press Release			✓
		Radio Announcement			✓



Communication Tools	Contact	Definition/Notes	General Timeframe (may change based on project)			
			Project Definition	Design	Construction	Project Completion
New England Compass	AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov	Send project information sheet & updates (i.e. rolling roadblocks, detours). Alerts post to New England Compass, Twitter, Facebook, and Waze.			✓	✓
Work Zone Signage	Resident Engineer / District / Contractor	Standard work zone signage, which could include message boards or static advanced notice.			✓	
TSMO	Traffic Operations Engineer	All closures should be reviewed by Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO).		✓	✓	✓
Message Boards	AOT.HWYMOBTMC@vermont.gov	Send the situation, location, and draft message. Boards are 8 characters per 3 lines.			✓	
VTransparency	Responsibility of project manager	VPINS/MATS data populates VTransparency. Review for other projects in the area for timing.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Front Porch Forum	Outreach Coordinator	Statewide neighborhood specific listserv, used to announce meetings or for traffic impact alerts. (2-4 day lead time needed)	✓	✓	✓	✓
On The Road	Outreach Coordinator	Weekly radio/newspaper report during construction season. Includes construction updates and maintenance activities. (Due Thursday AM)			✓	✓
Social Media	Marketing & Outreach Coordinator	Used to advertise public meetings, to post project status updates, to post videos or photos, or for live video.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fact Sheet/Website	Public Outreach Manager	All VPINS projects have an automated project fact sheet that also serves as a basic project website	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public Meeting	Responsibility of the Project Manager/PIO	Check legal obligations. Coordinated with RPCs. Click-voting devices have been effective.	✓	✓	✓	
Public SharePoint Site	Systems Developer	Structures and HSD can be used as a model.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engage a PIO	Public Outreach Manager	Can be brought on as needed at any project stage.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Customer Survey	Responsibility of the Project Manager/PIO	Sent to stakeholders after project completion.				✓
Custom Website	Public Outreach Manager	For large projects requiring additional information beyond the project fact sheet.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Press Release	Public Outreach Manager	Generally, for large projects or initiated by PIO.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Radio Announcement	, Outreach Coordinator	Can be used for emergencies or additional information beyond On The Road, including Public Service Announcements.	✓		✓	✓

## APPENDIX B THE SECTION 106 PROCESS



## APPENDIX C EQUITY IMPACT WORKSHEET & MAPS

To effectively engage underrepresented populations (i.e. low-income, disabled, senior, minority, new American) additional research may be needed to understand the specific outreach methods that will be necessary to reach these populations.

Use the maps on the following pages to identify potential low income, minority, and limited English proficiency populations that might be affected by the project. Gather adequate background information about the affected populations you intend to reach (i.e., language spoken, customs, historical or geographic data, relevant data reports). Consult with Civil Rights for additional resources to better know and understand your audiences.

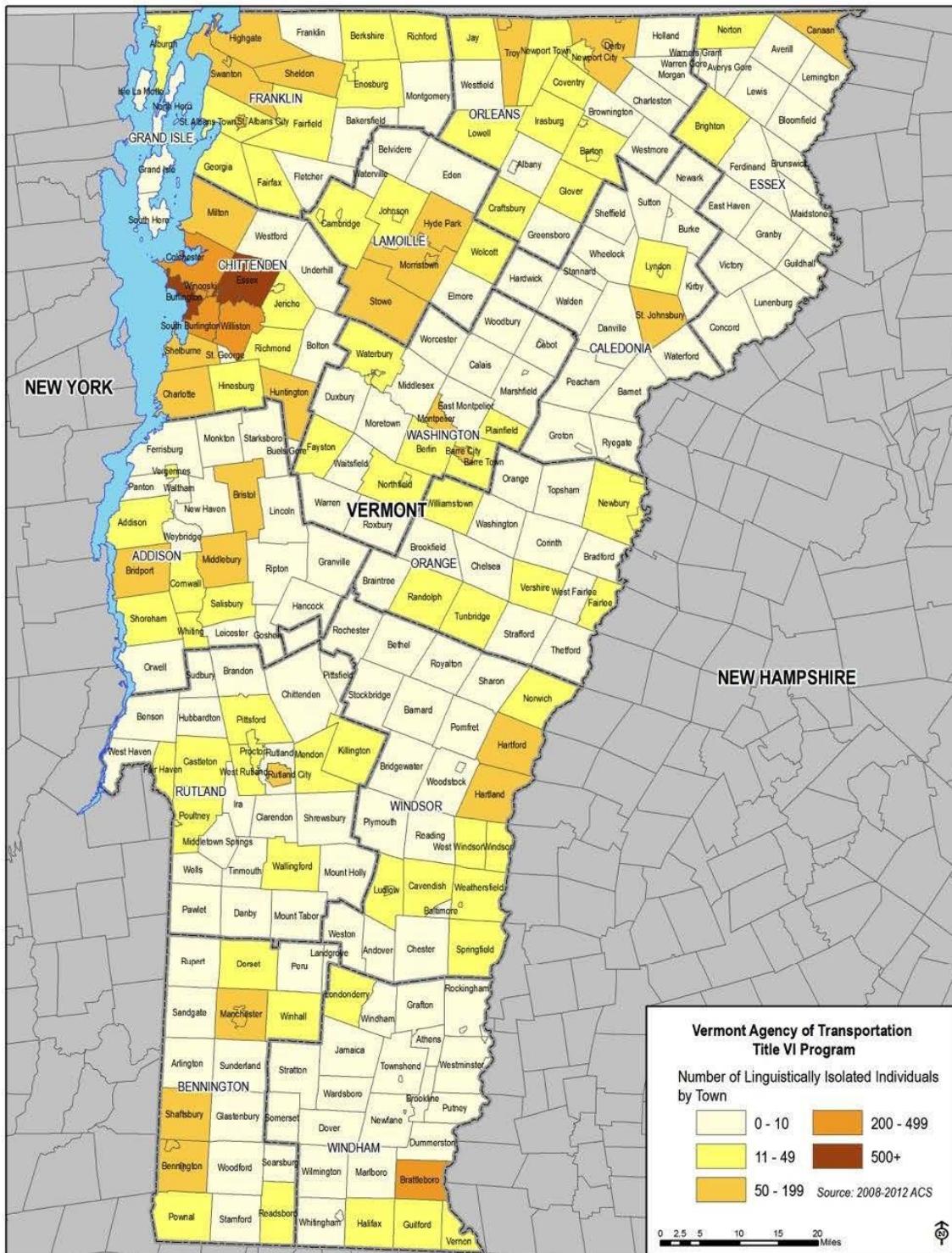
The following additional resources can help you determine who may be impacted:

- American Community Survey: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>
- Community Commons: <http://www.communitycommons.org/maps-data/>
- Community Action Agencies:  
<http://humanservices.vermont.gov/community-partners/cp-community-action>
- ECOS Map Viewer: <http://map.ccrpcvt.org/ChittendenCountyVT/>
- Regional, municipal, or department specific data
- Data on clients or consumers of services
- Data on community partners or contractors who provide services (they may also be a source of data)

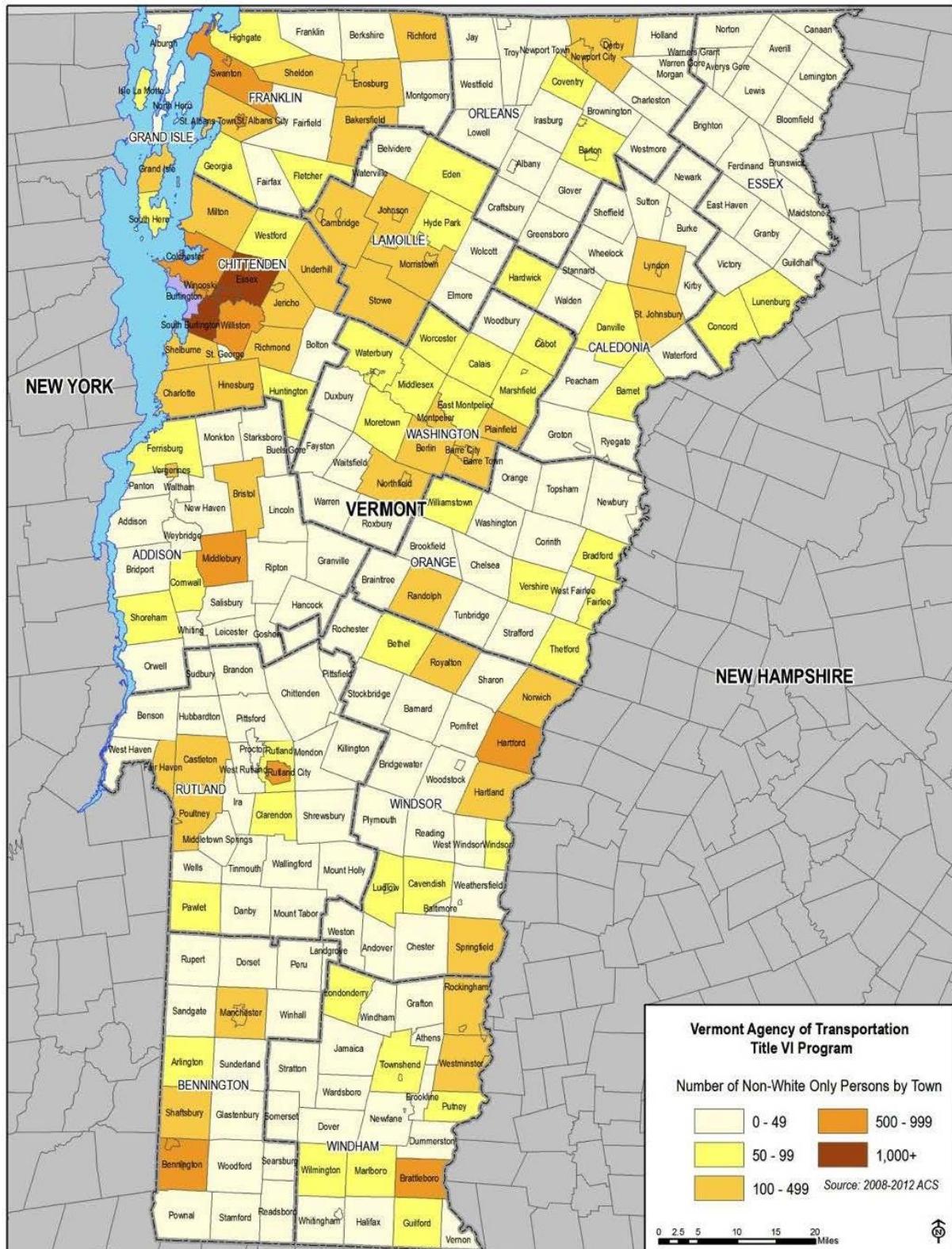
Population(s) affected disproportionately	Describe potential positive impact	Describe potential negative impact	Actions to mitigate negative impacts	Special outreach considerations (language, accessibility, literacy, cultural expectations)



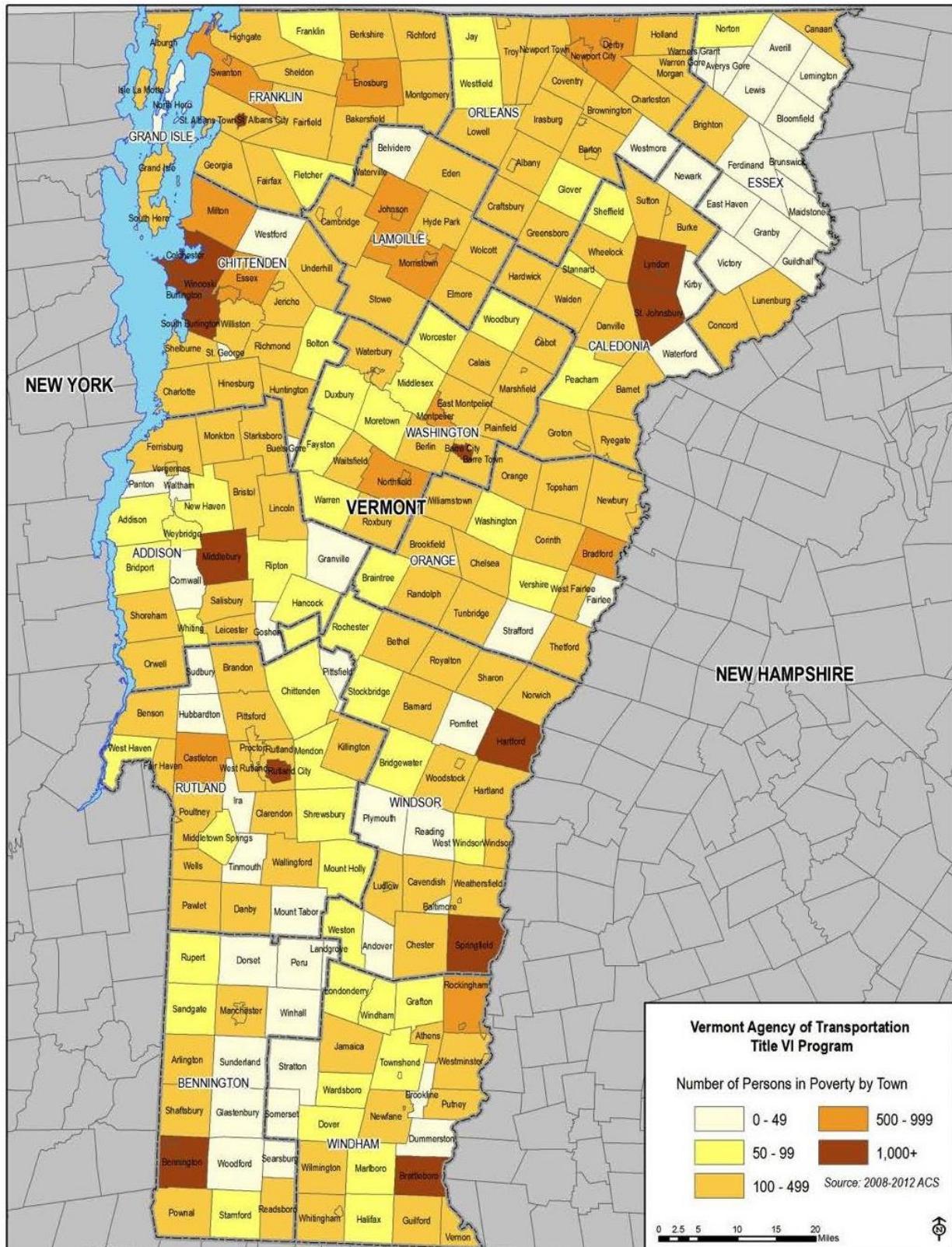
## Number of Linguistically Isolated Individuals by Town



## Number of Non-White Only Persons by Town



## Number of Persons in Poverty by Town



## APPENDIX D LOCAL & REGIONAL CONCERNS QUESTIONNAIRE

### Project Summary – **Modify for each project**

This project, BF 032-6(13), focuses on a culvert on VT Route 9 in Mendon, Vermont. The culvert is deteriorating and is in need of either a major maintenance action or replacement. Potential options being considered for this project include a new liner applied to the interior of the existing culvert pipe, removal of the existing pipe and replacement with a new culvert placed in the same location, or removal of the existing pipe and replacement in a new location. It is possible that VTrans will recommend a road closure and detour traffic away from the project site for the duration of the work. Efforts will be made to limit the detour to State roads.

### Community Considerations

1. Are there regularly scheduled public events in the community that will generate increased traffic (e.g. vehicular, bicycles and/or pedestrians), or may be difficult to stage if the bridge is closed during construction? Examples include annual bike races, festivals, parades, cultural events, weekly farmers market, concerts, etc. that could be impacted? If yes, please provide approximate date, location and event organizers' contact info.
2. Is there a “slow season” or period of time from May through October where traffic is less or no events are scheduled?
3. Please describe the location of the Town garage, emergency responders (fire, police, ambulance) and emergency response routes that might be affected by the closure of the bridge, one-way traffic, or lane closures and provide contact information (names, address, email addresses, and phone numbers).
4. Are there businesses (including agricultural operations and industrial parks) or delivery services (fuel or goods) that would be adversely impacted either by a detour or due to work zone proximity?
5. Are there important public buildings (town hall, community center, senior center, library) or community facilities (recreational fields, town green, etc.) close to the project?
6. What other municipal operations could be adversely affected by a road/bridge closure or detour?
7. Are there any town highways that might be adversely impacted by traffic bypassing the construction on other local roads? Please indicate which roads may be affected and their condition (paved/unpaved, narrow, weight-limited bridges, etc.), including those that may be or go into other municipalities.
8. Is there a local business association, chamber of commerce, regional development corporation, or other downtown group that we should be working with? If known, please provide name, organization, email, and phone number.
9. Are there any public transit services or stops that use the bridge or transit routes in the vicinity that may be affected if they become the detour route?



### Schools

10. Where are the schools in your community and what are their schedules?
11. Is this project on specific routes that school buses or students use to walk to and from school?
12. Are there recreational facilities associated with the schools nearby (other than at the school)?

### Pedestrians and Bicyclists

13. What is the current level of bicycle and pedestrian use on the bridge?
14. Are the current lane and shoulder widths adequate for pedestrian and bicycle use?
15. Does the community feel there is a need for a sidewalk or bike lane on the bridge?
16. Is pedestrian and bicycle traffic heavy enough that it should be accommodated during construction?
17. Does the Town have plans to construct either pedestrian or bicycle facilities leading up to the bridge? Please provide any planning documents demonstrating this (project definition, master plan, corridor study, town or regional plan).
18. In the vicinity of the bridge, is there a land use pattern, existing generators of pedestrian and/or bicycle traffic, or zoning that will support development that is likely to lead to significant levels of walking and bicycling?

### Communications

19. Please identify any local communication channels that are available for us to use in communicating with the local population. Include weekly or daily newspapers, blogs, radio, public access TV, Front Porch Forum, etc. Also include any unconventional means such as local low-power FM.

### Design Considerations

20. Are there any concerns with the alignment of the existing bridge? For example, if the bridge is located on a curve, has this created any problems that we should be aware of?
21. Are there any concerns with the width of the existing bridge?
22. Are there any special aesthetic considerations we should be aware of?
23. Does the location have a history of flooding? If yes, please explain.



24. Are there any known Hazardous Material Sites near the project site?
25. Are there any known historic, archeological and/or other environmental resource issues near the project site?
26. Are there any utilities (water, sewer, communications, power) attached to the existing bridge? Please provide any available documentation.
27. Are there any existing, pending, or planned municipal utility projects (communications, lighting, drainage, water, wastewater, etc. near the project that should be considered?
28. Are there any other issues that are important for us to understand and consider?

#### **Land Use & Zoning**

29. Please provide a copy of your existing and future land use map or zoning map, if applicable.
30. Are there any existing, pending or planned development proposal that would impact future transportation patterns near the bridge? If so, please explain.
31. Is there any planned expansion of public transit or intercity transit service in the project area? Please provide the name and contact information for the relevant public transit provider.

#### **Communications**

32. Please identify any local communication outlets that are available for us to use in communicating with the local population. Include weekly or daily newspapers, blogs, radio, public access TV, Facebook, Front Page Forum, etc. Also include any unconventional means such as local low-power FM.
33. Other than people/organizations already referenced in this questionnaire, are there any others who should be kept in the loop as the project moves forward?



## APPENDIX E MAINTENANCE INPUT QUESTIONNAIRE

Project **xxx**

The Project Delivery Bureau has begun the Project Definition process for **(Project Name/Number)**. This project **(Brief Project Description)**. **(If there is a Structure Inspection, Inventory, and Appraisal Sheet available, please attach it and provide a one-sentence summary here)**. We are interested in hearing your thoughts regarding the items listed below as applicable.

What are your thoughts on the general condition of the infrastructure within the area of this project?

What are your thoughts on the general maintenance effort required to keep this area operational?

Is the current project area width adequate for winter maintenance including snow plowing?

What are your comments on the current geometry and alignment within the project area (curve, sag, banking, sight distance)?

Do you feel that the posted speed limit is appropriate?

Are you familiar with traffic volumes in the area of this project?

Do you think a closure with an off-site detour in conjunction with accelerated construction would be appropriate? Do you have any opinion about a possible detour route, assuming that we use State route for State projects and other routes for Municipal projects? Are there locations on a potential detour that are already congested that we should consider avoiding?

Please describe any other projects that you have completed in the area that may not be reflected otherwise (I.e. on the Appraisal sheet if included).



If there is any municipally owned infrastructure (sidewalks, shared use paths, etc.) within the project area, how effective are the Municipalities efforts in keeping it free of snow, ice, or debris, in your opinion?

Are there any drainage issues that we should address on this project?

Are you aware of any complaints that the public has about issues that we can address on this project?

Is there anything else we should be aware of?

If this is a bridge project, please also respond to the following:

Are the joints salvageable or would you recommend replacement?

Are the railings constantly in need of repair or replacement? What type of railing works best for your district? (We are recommending more and more box beam guardrail on our bridges because of crash-worthiness and compatibility with accelerated projects).

Do you find that extra effort is required to keep the slopes and riverbanks around the bridge in a stable condition?  
Is there frequent flood damage that requires repair?

Does this bridge seem to catch an unusual amount of debris from the waterway?



## APPENDIX F LAWS AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

[www.dol.gov/dol/topic/disability/ada.htm](http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/disability/ada.htm)

Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898

[www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental\\_justice/overview/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/overview/)

Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency Executive Order 13166.

[www.lep.gov/13166/eo13166.html](http://www.lep.gov/13166/eo13166.html)

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (As Amended).

[ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/nepa/nepaeqia.htm](http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/nepa/nepaeqia.htm)

Public Hearings for Federal Aid Highway Projects

[www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/orders/#a9](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/orders/#a9)

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508

[www.section508.gov/section508-laws](http://www.section508.gov/section508-laws)

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

[www.achp.gov/106summary.html](http://www.achp.gov/106summary.html)

State Highway Closures Act 153

[legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2012/Docs/ACTS/ACT153/ACT153%20As%20Enacted.pdf](http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2012/Docs/ACTS/ACT153/ACT153%20As%20Enacted.pdf)

Title 23 U.S.C.- Highways

[www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/cfr23toc.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/cfr23toc.htm)

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

[www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php)

Vermont's Land Use and Development Act 250

[www.nrb.state.vt.us/](http://www.nrb.state.vt.us/)

Vermont Open Meeting Law

[legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/01/005/00312](http://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/01/005/00312)

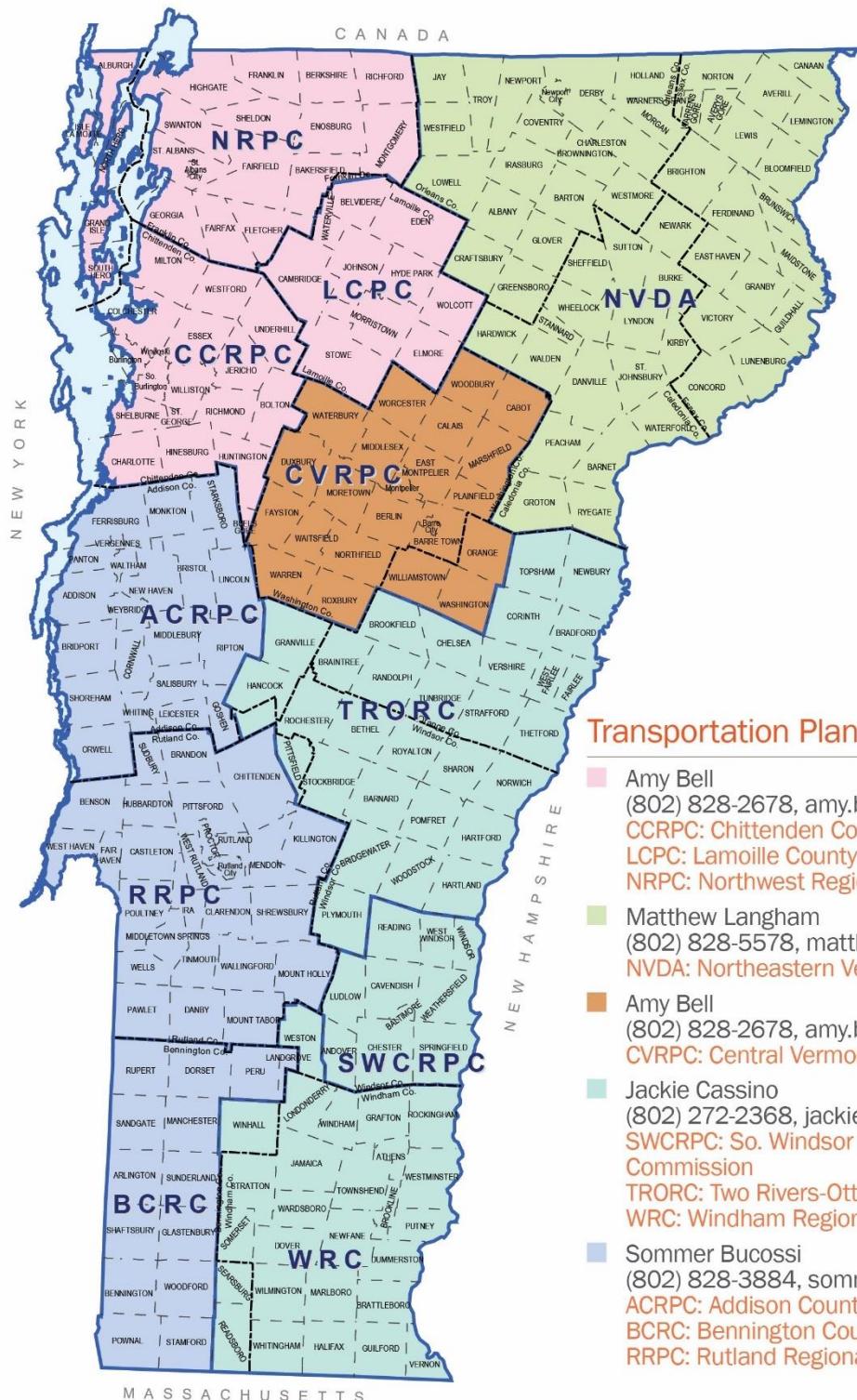
Vermont Statute Section 502

[legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/fullchapter/19/005](http://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/fullchapter/19/005)

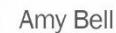


## APPENDIX G REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS

View online at [vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/policy-planning/regional](http://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/policy-planning/regional)



### Transportation Planning Coordinators



Amy Bell  
(802) 828-2678, amy.bell@vermont.gov

**CCRPC: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission**

**LCPC: Lamoille County Planning Commission**

**NRPC: Northwest Regional Planning Commission**



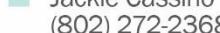
Matthew Langham  
(802) 828-5578, matthew.langham@vermont.gov

**NVDA: Northeastern Vermont Development Association**



Amy Bell  
(802) 828-2678, amy.bell@vermont.gov

**CVRPC: Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission**



Jackie Cassino  
(802) 272-2368, jackie.cassino@vermont.gov

**SWCRPC: So. Windsor County Regional Planning Commission**

**TRORC: Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission**

**WRC: Windham Regional Commission**



Sommer Bucossi  
(802) 828-3884, sommer.bucossi@vermont.gov

**ACRPC: Addison County Regional Planning Commission**

**BCRC: Bennington County Regional Commission**

**RRPC: Rutland Regional Planning Commission**

## APPENDIX H GROUP PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLS SUMMARY

GROUP TECHNIQUE	WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT DOES	WHEN IT IS USED
<b>Ad Hoc Committee/Collaborative Task Force</b>	A group that works on a specific task with a deadline to complete its assignment	Brings together key stakeholders to resolve a problem or issue	Most effective when the group is dealing with an issue that can be resolved through dialogue and cooperative effort
<b>Advisory Committee</b>	A group of stakeholders that meets regularly to provide information and guidance, and discuss issues of concern	Provides forum for an exchange of ideas and feedback on project development	Most effective in large or controversial projects. Provides project manager with local knowledge opportunities for collaboration and public outreach support
<b>Blended Public Meeting</b>	Public meeting with both informal, open house session as well as a structured formal session with presentation and Q & A	Allows opportunity for public and staff to converse informally (one-on-one) as well as communicate to a group	Useful when seeking feedback on alternatives and when there are exhibits/displays for the public to look at and to provide feedback
<b>Brainstorming</b>	A meeting with free-flowing discussions to generate ideas	Creates open atmosphere where a range of ideas can be discussed without prejudice	Useful at the beginning of projects to develop new ideas and get concurrence on priorities
<b>Briefing</b>	A meeting with a limited agenda aimed at giving information	Provides focused communication on a topic	A good forum to transmit technical data and comprehensive data while avoiding getting sidetracked on other topics
<b>Charrette/Design Workshop</b>	An interactive workshop focused on creating design concepts or problem solving	Engages stakeholders in identifying their <i>vision</i> and <i>values</i> and gives an opportunity to voice ideas or solutions	An effective tool when trying to understand community vision and build concurrence
<b>Conference or Issue Forum</b>	A program, usually with keynote speakers, organized to educate and to seek input from the public on a specific topic	Provides widespread publicity for and public input on an issue or project	Most useful when seeking to draw public attention to a project or issue with a large public impact

GROUP TECHNIQUE	WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT DOES	WHEN IT IS USED
<b>Focus Group/Facilitated Discussion</b>	A small group meeting facilitated to gauge opinions from a representative sample of constituents	Creates atmosphere where people are more likely to participate in discussion, ask questions. Allows in-depth discussion and exploration of views on issues	Helpful tool when seeking feedback on people's perceptions of problems and alternatives especially when holding a public meeting is impractical or intent is to understand opinions of a targeted group
<b>Key Person Interview</b>	Conversation with an individual who usually is vested in a project	Allows dialogue and information exchange in an informal setting	An effective means to get background information on a project and understand community values and sentiments. Also, can build trust in a controversial project process
<b>Mediation</b>	A method of resolving disputes using a person trained in helping settle disagreements	Enables people or agencies to work together to solve problems and end disagreements	Most effective when parties with differences want to end a dispute to save time and money or to move a project forward
<b>Polling</b>	Interactive opinion polling of meeting attendees	Attendees provide responses to questions using a handheld device and responses are displayed in real time in a PowerPoint at the meeting	At public meetings to gauge the views of the audience about a proposed plan, design features and alternatives.
<b>Site Visits</b>	Visit by officials and community members to a project area	Familiarizes officials with local perceptions, concerns, physical and social elements of project area	A good way to build relationships with the community by meeting on their turf and trying to understand their concerns in context of place
<b>Visioning/Roundtable Discussions</b>	A structured exercise that engages people in thinking about what they want their community to be	Clarifies what a community values and what it wants for the future	Best used early in the project development phase when the project and goals are being defined
<b>Walking Audit</b>	A written assessment or description of a site or corridor area	Describes or rates an area using specific criteria and observations	Helps people become more aware of their surroundings and provides measured qualitative feedback about a place

## APPENDIX I SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES AND PRACTICES

### Guidelines for posting on VTrans Facebook Page

1. Facebook is its own medium and duplicating a post from Twitter unless it relates to a road closure or other emergency is discouraged.
2. Link to content posted on the VTrans website whenever possible.
3. When posting images or video content, be sure they portray VTrans positively and don't show any potential safety issues—nice looking job site, but where is the silt fence? Are the people in the shot wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)? And always be certain that the people in the shot do not object to being on Facebook.
4. Speak English. Be friendly, but professional. Do not resort to text-like expressions like "U-R". But do adopt a conversational tone. Whenever possible, use the royal "we". "We will check-in to that." "We are building a roundabout." Use caps and exclamation points sparingly. We are calm, cool and in control.
5. Spelling counts. Check your post before sending. If unsure, paste into a word doc to spell check.
6. When posting news clips, always attempt to do it as a "share" from the Facebook page of the outlet you are referencing. This creates a traffic link between us and potentially grows our audience.
7. Engage carefully. If a member of the public posts something unfriendly or provocative, take a deep breath and a walk around the office before responding. Consider not responding. "What idiot thought it would be a good idea to pave this stretch of road?" is not a statement that deserves a response.
8. NEVER delete a post by a member of the public unless it contains profanity, hate speech or inaccurate information that could create a hazard for the travelling public or our employees. If you find it necessary to delete a post that you deem offensive, take a screen shot of it first and send the image to erik.filkorn@vermont.gov
9. Don't guess. If you don't know the answer, say that you will check into it and follow through.
10. Report what you learn on Facebook. A, reasonable question on our page deserves the same response as a call to the Secretary's office. A report of a road condition from a member of the public may be valuable information for operations.
11. Resist the temptation to "like" things unless it is a post from a partner agency directly related to the event you're working on (VEM announces GMP has restored to power to xx)
12. "Share" our page with your friends.



## APPENDIX J FRONT PORCH FORUM

### Background

Front Porch Forum (FPF) is a community bulletin board/news service with 185 outlets in Vermont. Most towns have their own, dedicated forum. Larger metropolitan areas like Burlington are divided by neighborhood, and some of the more sparsely populated areas are grouped by county. The content is provided by the subscribers and can range from posts about lost pets and bikes for sale, to heated debates about a new traffic light. Many of our Project Information Officers (PIO) and Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) use it to communicate about upcoming public information meetings or road closures.

### Listening

We can monitor all 185 forums and to set up search terms for alerts. When people talk about VTrans, we will be able to hear them. We have set up a basic alert with terms like “AOT”, “VTrans”, “Bridge Construction” and “Rumble Stripes” and will pass on any information that may be helpful. Or if you have a named project that you would like to track (e.g., “Villas Bridge” or “Bennington Bypass”), please contact Erik Filkorn or Brent Curtis and we can help you develop a search term.

### Talking

Project Managers, Resident Engineers, district personnel or anyone else with a public meeting, a road closure, or any other event or activity that affects a town are encouraged to use this service. The FPF is a narrowcast medium. This is not for statewide messaging on rumble stripes, seat belts, etc. Posted information should have unique and direct impact or interest to the towns/communities being targeted.

If it's a corridor project, select the towns/municipalities along the corridor. If it's a detour, select all municipalities along the detour route including the origin and destination. If you are unsure what towns/municipalities should be included, please contact Erik Filkorn and/or the affected RPC. This is an opportunity to carefully target communities that are affected by our work and to solicit opinions on our plans.

Often, the municipality will take the lead in posting information and that's fine—in fact it can be better in some cases. We must be careful not to overwhelm the public with too much information. Please choose your opportunities carefully—an upcoming meeting, a road closure, something that is really pressing within that community.

### Privacy

While there is nothing confidential about what is said on any Front Porch Forum, it is a local conversation and as The State, we need to be careful about how we enter conversations. Think of it more as if you are stopping into the local hardware store and talking to people rather than “we are big government and we are here to tell you what's what.”



## How to Post

We only have one account, so all requests for FPF posting should go to [Brent.Curtis@vermont.gov](mailto:Brent.Curtis@vermont.gov) and he will make the entries. Generally, entries should be brief, but sometimes entire press releases may get posted.

### Sample posting:

*1 Day Closure of VT 14*

*Vermont Agency of Transportation*

*Posted to: Williamstown Bethel Sharon Tunbridge Chelsea Royalton*

*VTrans District 4 is planning a 1 day closure of VT 14 for a culvert replacement project.*

*The project will consist of closing VT 14 to completely remove an old culvert and replace with a new culvert.*

*The date for this closure is October 14, 2017. The road will be closed at 7:30am to all traffic and reopened at 6pm. This site will have one lane traffic a few days before and after the closure for prep work and finishing touches.*

*The project site will be on Route 14 mile marker 1.2 in Royalton. This will be 500ft just south of Dairy Hill Road. There will not be a signed detour since this project is closed less than 48 hours.*

*Any questions or concerns please contact Chad Poston or Chris Bump at 802-295-8888.*

Because all postings will appear as coming generically from Vermont Agency of Transportation, each posting must include a contact name and email or phone number at the bottom.

All replies through the forum will come to the email box [AOT.Publicoutreach@vermont.gov](mailto:AOT.Publicoutreach@vermont.gov) and Brent will check that box daily and forward messages as necessary.

To see which towns are covered and how many subscribers are in each town, we have posted documents on the SharePoint site.

Finally, when you are conducting public meetings or communicating with town officials, be sure to tell people if you will be using the FPF. Even in recently added towns where coverage is not that strong, we can help build the audience by telling the public that we will be there.

If you need more information or would like a tour of the forums and their capabilities, we're happy to come to a staff meeting or you can just stop by our desks on the 5th floor.



## APPENDIX K MEETING PLANNING CHECKLIST

PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Availability: \_\_\_\_\_

Capacity/Seating: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance Certificate:   Yes   No

Parking: \_\_\_\_\_

Handicapped Accessible:   Yes   No

Fees: \_\_\_\_\_

Food Permitted:   Yes   No

Wall – Tackable:   Yes   No

Contact name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

### WHAT TO BRING / WHAT'S IN THE ROOM:

Projector  Tables

Screen  PA System

Extension Cords  White Board

Easels

### MEETING NOTIFICATION METHODS:

Email to stakeholder list  Flyer posted on community bulletin boards

Post to [Vermont State Libraries](#)  Press release

Newspaper ad  Front Porch Forum

Calendar post in community papers  Social media



## APPENDIX L PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PER 23 CFR 450.210(F)

The Vermont Agency of Transportation will solicit formal public comment in transportation planning and programming in three ways.

1. The Transportation Planning Initiative. In this ongoing program, Vermont's 12 Regional Planning Commissions are soliciting local community input on all transportation related matters. Each regional commission has a transportation advisory committee, or the equivalent, with representation from member municipalities. This committee interacts on a regular basis with staff members of the commission, who in turn provide input to the Agency of Transportation. From time to time the regional commissions also conduct public meetings in their respective regions to gather direct public input on transportation issues and processes. Regional transportation plans have been prepared or updated in each region, reflecting the public input in a substantive way. The regional transportation plans will describe the long-term transportation goals of each region. Upon completion of Draft regional transportation plans, public input will be solicited before adoption of final plans. Each plan will be updated at intervals of no more than five years and will document process similar to the above. The final regional transportation plans will be furnished to the Agency of Transportation, and will be used as one of the bases for development of the State's Long Range Transportation Plan.
2. The Long Range Transportation Plan. In accordance with the requirements of 23 CFR 450.214, the Agency of Transportation has prepared a Long Range Transportation Plan. The statewide long range transportation plan will be updated at intervals of no more than five years and will document responsiveness to the public involvement requirements of relevant portions of 23 CFR 450.212 via use of a process similar to the one outlined below.

Public involvement efforts related to this will include: questionnaires regarding transportation issues, distributed to a statistically valid sample of Vermont residents, randomly distributed to assure both demographic and geographic coverage; a number of regional meetings to be held in cooperation with the ongoing regional transportation planning effort. In accordance with the requirements of 23 CFR 450.212, input will be sought from affected public agencies, private transportation providers, and public transportation providers. Upon completion of a Draft long range plan, public input will be solicited before adoption of a final plan. The draft plan will be printed and a public notice about its availability will be issued statewide. The notice will provide information on how copies of the plan may be obtained and it will solicit comments on the draft plan. Written comments on the draft plan will be accepted for three weeks from the date the notice is published. Comments will be carefully considered in the development of the final plan. After publication of the final plan, documentation of how the comments on the draft plan were explicitly addressed will be available to the public, upon request. The final plan will be published and a statewide notice will be issued advising of its availability. Minor changes to the plan may be made by the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Two weeks prior to making any such minor changes, a statewide notice will be issued outlining the proposed minor changes. The Agency of Transportation will consider the comments received prior to finalizing the minor changes.

3. The State Transportation Improvement Program. Each year, the Agency of Transportation adopts a State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP is a three-year, financially constrained schedule for obligation of Federal transportation funds. It is closely linked to, and must be consistent with, a five-year capital budget for expenditures, forwarded by the Agency of Transportation to the Vermont legislature annually. Public involvement in the development of the STIP will be achieved in a number of ways.
  - a) Once each year during June and July, or as soon as possible thereafter following adjournment of the legislature, the Agency of Transportation, in cooperation with the regional planning commissions, will hold a



public meeting to solicit public comment on the STIP. The Vermont Interactive Television Network may be used to provide simultaneous dispersed geographic access for public input. The public meetings will discuss 1) needed amendments to the current year's STIP, arising either from legislative action or from other causes; 2) input and comment on the coming year's STIP. In addition to soliciting comment from the general public, notice for this meeting will also solicit comment from affected public agencies, affected public jurisdiction, employee representatives of transportation and other affected agencies, private transportation providers, and public transportation providers. Two weeks prior to the meeting, the draft STIP will be printed and a public notice about its availability will be issued statewide. The notice will provide information on how copies of the draft STIP may be obtained, will solicit comments on the draft STIP, and will provide a schedule for the public meetings. Written comments on the draft STIP will be accepted for two weeks following the public meeting. All comments will be carefully considered in the development of the final STIP. After publication of the final STIP, documentation on how comments were explicitly addressed will be available to the public upon request.

- b) If necessary, each year during November or December, or otherwise as necessary, any major changes to the STIP will be made using a public involvement process similar to that found in part 3(a), above. Major changes shall consist of the addition of new large projects (over \$2,000,000) to the STIP, or cumulative changes which would drop a large project out of the STIP. The process shall be the same as found above, excepting that one meeting will be held in a suitable central location and comments will be accepted for three (3) days after the meeting. Affected regional planning commissions will be notified directly in writing of proposed major STIP changes one week prior to the meeting.
- c) The Agency of Transportation may make minor changes to the STIP. Minor changes may include but are not limited to moving a project from year one to year two or three of the STIP, or vice versa, \$2,000,000 or larger changes to a project already in the STIP; the addition or deletion of projects of \$2,000,000 or less. One week prior to making such minor changes, a statewide notice outlining the proposed changes will be issued. Affected regional planning commissions will receive this notice directly. The notice will provide information on how comments can be made about the proposed minor changes. Public comment will be accepted up to the effective date of the change as stated in the statewide notice, but shall not be less than seven days from the appearance of the public notice.
- d) No public involvement will be pursued for cost changes to a project in the STIP of less than \$2,000,000, for adding a phase of work for less than \$2,000,000 for a project already on the STIP, or changes to the description of a project already on the STIP.
- e) In the geographic area of the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), a Transportation Improvement Program will be developed which will be an integral part of the STIP. Public involvement within the MPO area will be accomplished in accordance with specific procedures developed by the MPO. Changes to the TIP must be consistent with changes to the STIP, and vice versa. Minor changes to the TIP, and to the STIP within the MPO geographical area, will be made in accordance with procedures to be developed and carried out by the MPO.

All public meetings held as part of this public involvement process will be properly noticed in accordance with the requirements of the Vermont public meeting law (Vermont Title 1, section 310 et. Seq., as annotated), including public announcement of all meetings at least 24 hours before the meeting.



## APPENDIX M PROCESS FOR NON-METROPOLITAN LOCAL OFFICIAL PARTICIPATION IN THE STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

### I. Definitions:<sup>1</sup>

“Consultation means that one party confers with another identified party in accordance with an established process and, prior to taking action(s), considers that party’s views and periodically informs that party about actions(s) taken.”

“Non-metropolitan areas mean the geographic areas outside designated metropolitan planning areas, as designated under 23 U.S.C. 134 and 49 U.S.C. 5303.” “Non-metropolitan local official means the elected and appointed officials of general purpose local government, in non-metropolitan areas, with jurisdiction/responsibility for transportation.”

**II. Consultation Process:** In carrying out the statewide transportation planning process prescribed in 23 CFR Part 450, Subpart B, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) will elicit and consider the concerns of non-metropolitan local officials in three ways.

**A. The Transportation Planning Initiative:** This consultative planning process is based on enacted state and federal legislation. The 1988 amendments to the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act, Title 24 Chapter 117 VSA (frequently referred to as “Act 200”), encourages community and citizen participation in the planning process. The amendments specify that regional planning efforts be in consultation with their member municipalities and that state plans be compatible with regional and municipal plans. In addition, the 1991 federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and successive Acts mandate states consult with non-metropolitan officials in their statewide transportation processes.

In 2007, the Vermont legislature amended the Vermont Highways law, Title 19 Chapter 1, section 10l, to recognize the unique expertise of the regional planning commissions in performing rural transportation planning.

In the spirit of these laws, VTrans, in consultation with Vermont’s regional planning commissions and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), created the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) as a means of organizing a transportation planning process in which local municipalities, citizens and stakeholders could participate directly. The fundamental principle is to enable all levels of the community to influence the planning of transportation policy and projects and compatibility in local, regional and state plans. Thus, through the TPI, statewide transportation plans, priorities and projects are meant to reflect local, regional and statewide goals and interests.

In this ongoing program, Vermont’s 10 non-metropolitan Regional Planning Commissions are soliciting local community input on all transportation related matters. Active participation and concurrence of local officials is essential to the success of the program.

Local official consultation within the TPI happens in a number of places, including in the Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs), in the local concerns meetings, through town approval of the regional transportation plans,

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Federal Regulation 23 CFR, part 450.204 Definitions.



review and comment on VTrans modal plans and through other projects and planning coordinated through the TPI.

Each regional commission has a transportation advisory committee (TAC), or the equivalent, with representation of member municipalities. Municipal representatives are appointed by local legislative bodies (i.e. as defined in 24 V.S.A. §4303).<sup>2</sup> The broad responsibilities of the TAC are to concur in the region's work plan, approve the planning products performed in the region, and to recommend plans, projects, project priorities and transportation policy.

An annual work plan delineates the planning projects and tasks to be conducted by the regional planning commission during the course of a TPI program year<sup>3</sup>. The plan is developed by the regional planning commission in consultation with the TAC. TAC members are expected to review the yearly work program with their towns.<sup>4</sup> The work program is to include how the TAC members communicate back with their local planning commissioners and select board on a regular basis. Evidence of TAC support is to accompany the proposed work plan when submitted to the Agency of Transportation.<sup>5</sup>

As indicated in the TPI program guidance,<sup>6</sup> a broad array of long range, short range, project development planning and public participation activities and tasks are eligible to be performed by regional planning commissions and TACs under the TPI program – most directed to evaluating specific local and/or regional transportation problems/issues, and providing input and recommendations to the state's transportation decision making processes; including the state long range transportation plan, the Transportation Capital Program, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and in direct testimony to the Vermont Legislature. With respect to planning studies, a program stipulation is that local governments be actively involved in all local planning projects from inception to completion – the final planning work product to be endorsed by the affected community or communities.<sup>7</sup>

Regional transportation plans are prepared or updated in each region, reflecting the input of local officials in a substantive way. The regional transportation plans describe the long-term transportation goals of each region and are adopted into the Regional Plan, pursuant to 24VSA, section 4348. Upon completion of draft regional transportation plans, TAC input and approval is solicited before adoption of final plans. Each plan is updated at intervals of no more than eight years. The regional transportation plan is furnished to the VTrans as a basis of the State's Long Range Transportation Plan.

No less than annually, VTrans will request TAC input with respect to the priority of transportation projects proposed for their respective regions, and TAC nominations for project substitution<sup>8</sup>, project deletion and/or new projects<sup>9</sup>. VTrans will coordinate with RPC staff and provide the information and data necessary to support the TAC/RPC prioritization process. The input from each region will be used by VTrans in its on-going process of identifying needs and relative priorities throughout the state, and preparing the Capital Program and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

<sup>2</sup> Transportation Planning Initiative Manual & Guidebook 2007, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> See 19VSA chapter1 section101

<sup>4</sup> Transportation Planning Initiative Manual & Guidebook 2007, p.16

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid pp. 15 – 19.

<sup>7</sup> Transportation Planning Initiative Manual & Guidebook 2007, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Using the written procedure as agreed by VAPDA and VTrans

<sup>9</sup> Per VTrans guidance for Town Highway Bridge pre-candidate needs



B. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan: In accordance with the requirements of 23 CFR 450.214, the Agency of Transportation has prepared a Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan. The statewide long range transportation plan will be updated at approximately five year intervals and will document responsiveness to the public involvement requirements of relevant portions of 23 CFR 450.212 via use of a process as follows:

In conducting the study, a number of regional meetings will be held in conjunction with the ongoing transportation planning initiative. During these meetings, in accordance with the requirements of 23 CFR 450.214 (g), input will be sought from affected local officials. Upon completion of a draft long range plan, local official comments and concerns will be solicited through the regional planning process before adoption of a final plan. The draft plan will be published and a public notice about its availability will be issued statewide. The notice will provide information on how copies of the plan may be obtained and it will solicit comments on the draft plan. In addition, a copy of the draft accompanied by a written invitation for comments will be provided to each regional planning commission TAC. Written comments on the draft plan will be accepted for five weeks from the date of the notice and invitations. Comments will be carefully considered in the development of the final plan. After publication of the final plan, a responsiveness summary discussing the comments made on the plan will be provided to each TAC. The final plan will be published and a statewide notice will be issued advising of its availability.

Minor changes to the plan may be made by the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Two weeks prior to making any such minor changes, a notice to each TAC soliciting comments and concerns will be issued outlining the proposed minor changes. The Agency of Transportation will consider the comments received prior to finalizing the minor changes.

C. Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP): In accordance with 23 CFR 450.216 the state is responsible for developing a statewide transportation improvement program for all areas of the state. In developing the statewide transportation improvement program, affected local officials with responsibility for transportation shall be involved on a consultation basis for the portions of the program in non-metropolitan areas of the State.<sup>10</sup> The Agency of Transportation will use the regional planning commissions to facilitate and consolidate input.

Each year, the Agency of Transportation adopts a State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP is a four-year, financially constrained schedule for obligation of Federal transportation funds. It is closely linked to, and must be consistent with, a five-year capital budget for expenditures, forwarded by the Agency of Transportation to the Vermont Legislature annually. Non-metropolitan local official involvement in the development of the STIP will be achieved in a number of ways.

(1) Once each year during June and July or as soon as possible thereafter following adjournment of the legislature, the Agency of Transportation, in cooperation with the regional planning commissions, will hold a public meeting to solicit public comment on the STIP. Online webinar facilities may be used to provide simultaneous dispersed geographic access for public input. The public meeting will discuss: 1) needed amendments to the current year's STIP, arising either from legislative action or from other causes; 2) input and comment on the coming year's STIP. In addition to soliciting comment from the general public, notice of this meeting and an invitation to submit comments will also be offered to regional planning commission TACs and to affected municipalities. Two weeks prior to the meeting, the draft STIP will be printed and a public notice about its availability will be issued statewide. The notice will provide information on how copies of the draft STIP may be obtained, will solicit comments on the draft STIP, and will provide a schedule for the public meetings. Copies of

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<sup>10</sup> 23 CFR 450.216 Statewide transportation improvement program, (e); added January 23, 2003.



the notification and a copy of the draft will be provided to each regional planning commission. Written comments on the draft STIP will be accepted for two weeks following the public meeting. All comments will be carefully considered in the development of the final STIP.

(2) If necessary, each year during November or December, or otherwise as necessary, any major changes to the STIP will be made using a public involvement process similar to that found in part (1) above. Major changes shall consist of the addition of new large projects (over \$2,000,000) to the STIP, or cumulative changes which would drop a large project out of the STIP. The process shall be the same as found above, accepting that one meeting will be held in a suitable central location and comments will be accepted for three (3) days after the meeting. Affected regional planning commission's TACs and municipalities will be notified directly in writing of proposed major STIP changes one week prior to the meeting.

(3) The Agency of Transportation may make minor changes to the STIP. Minor changes may include but are not limited to moving a project from year one to year two or three of the STIP, or vice versa; \$2,000,000 or larger changes to a project already in the STIP; or, the addition or deletion of projects of \$2,000,000 or less. One week prior to making such minor changes, a statewide notice outlining the proposed changes will be issued. Affected regional planning commissions will receive this notice directly. The notice will provide information on how comments can be made about the proposed minor changes. Public comment will be accepted up to the effective date of the change as stated in the statewide notice, but shall not be less than seven days from the appearance of the public notice.

(4) No comments from TACs or other non-metropolitan local officials will be pursued for cost changes to a project in the STIP of less than \$2,000,000, for adding a phase of work for less than \$2,000,000 for a project already on the STIP, or changes to the description of a project already on the STIP, although comments on changes are accepted.

**III. Periodic Review:** Within five (5) years of the effective date of this document, or no later than February 24, 2021, the Agency of Transportation will review and solicit comments from non-metropolitan local officials and other interested parties for a period of no less than 60 days regarding the effectiveness of the consultation process and proposed modifications, and thereafter at least once every 5 years.<sup>11</sup> A specific request for comments shall be directed to the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (as being the state municipal league cited in the federal regulations) and to the TACs of each regional planning commission participating in the TPI program.

In accordance with federal policy, the state, at its discretion, shall be responsible for determining whether to adopt any proposed modifications.<sup>12</sup> If a proposed modification is not adopted, the state shall make publicly available its reason for not accepting the proposed modification by written notification to the Vermont league of Cities and Towns and regional planning commission TACs.

State of Vermont  
 Agency of Transportation  
 Division of Policy, Planning and Intermodal Development

Amended: February 24, 2016

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<sup>11</sup> In accordance with 23 CFR 450.210 Interested parties, Public involvement and consultation.

<sup>12</sup> 23 CFR 450.212 Public involvement, (i); adopted January 23, 2003.

