

Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) at VTrans

PROJECT TITLE

Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) at VTrans

STUDY TIMELINE

January 2021 – December 2022

INVESTIGATORS

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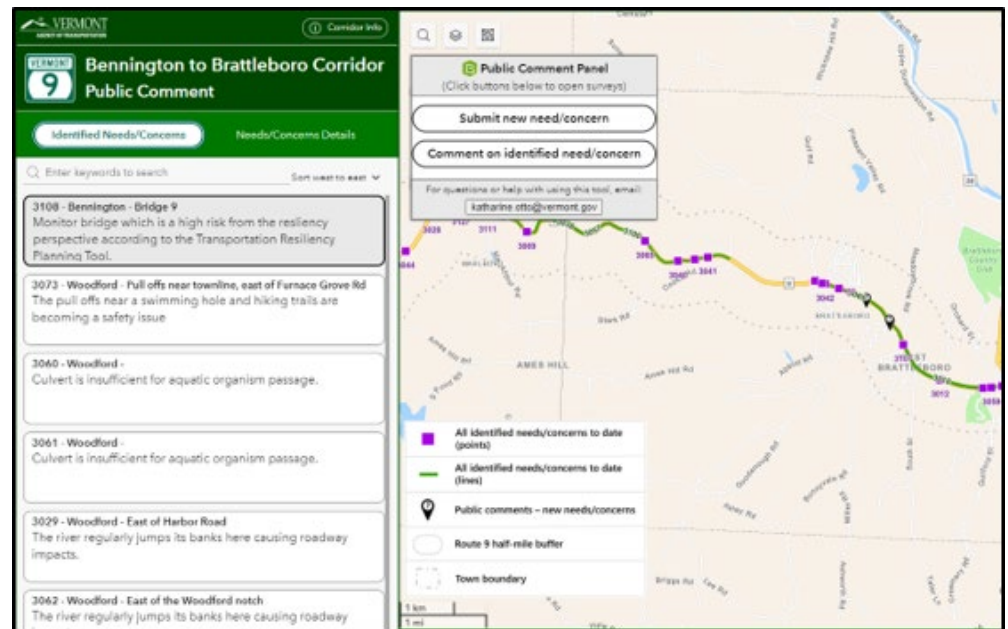
KEYWORDS

Virtual Public Involvement
Surveys
Crowdsourcing
Mapping Tools
Project Visualizations
Do-It-Yourself videos
Mobile Applications
Online Meetings

More information about the VTrans Research Program, including additional Fact Sheets, can be found at: <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/research>

Introduction

Reaching a wide range of the population and engaging them in meaningful ways is an important part of planning and asset management, project definition, design, construction, and maintenance activities at VTrans. Over the last few years VTrans employees have been exploring various Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) techniques to increase and improve engagement.



Snapshot of Route 9 Corridor Management Plan – Public Comment Tool

Action Taken

Traditionally, project outreach relies upon in person meetings. Relying solely on this approach limits engagement opportunities for those who may not have availability to attend in person.

Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) is not intended to replace traditional in-person methods of outreach, but instead diversify these methods. VPI is more than just online meetings and includes a wide variety of techniques including mobile applications, project visualizations, do-it-yourself videos, crowdsourcing tools and mapping tools. With VPI, people can:

- Review materials and provide comments at a time convenient to them
- “Drive” through a new roadway configuration to better understand what is being proposed
- Understand more about a project through videos and graphics rather than just written reports

Over the last few years VTrans has used VPI techniques for several projects:

- [VTrans On Road Bicycle Plan Phase 1 \(2016\)](#) – Wikimap
- [Exit 16 Diverging Diamond Interchange Project](#) (ongoing) – Project visualization (videos and driving simulator), interactive maps, project videos

- [Route 9 Corridor Management Plan \(2021\)](#), [Vermont Rail Plan \(2021\)](#), [State Freight Plan \(ongoing\)](#), and Reducing Repeat Damage Tool (2021)
 - Public Comment Tool using crowdsourced mapping
- And more!

In July and August 2021 VTrans and RPC staff joined their counterparts from across New England for virtual Peer Exchange. Presentations and discussions covered a wide variety of topics including VPI examples from state DOTs and RPCs, discussion about engaging underserved populations, as well as more technical information about how to implement VPI into our work.

Next Steps

In August a new Microsoft Team “VPI Collaborative” was set up to connect VTrans and RPC staff involved in VPI and share examples from Vermont. Over the next few months, we will be building this Collaborative and looking for new opportunities to implement VPI in VTrans and RPC activities.

Potential Impacts and VTrans Benefits

VPI is an important tool for outreach, particularly since Covid-19 restrictions moved everything online and 2020 brought increased awareness of the need to reach out to traditionally underserved communities.

As we seek to find the new normal, how can we use VPI techniques to augment our existing work?

- VPI can help us improve our outreach and communication with traditionally underserved communities (e.g. low income, single-headed households, minorities).
- VPI can help us to streamline our engagement processes.
- VPI can help us explain innovations to partners and the general public in easy to understand ways.
- VPI can help us target feedback where stakeholders can provide meaningful direction to a project (e.g. project alternatives)