

Date: June 5, 2024

Notes Taken By: VHB & Toole Design

Place: Zoom

Re: VMHG SAG & TWG Meeting #1

Project No.: 59029.01

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### **Attendees:**

*Wayne Symonds (VHB), Drew Gingras (VHB), Rick Plenge (VHB), Jenn Conley (VHB), Matt Hogan (VHB), Bill Schultheiss (Toole Design), Laura Cabral (Toole Design), Margaret Krauss (Toole Design), Kara Yelinek (VTrans), Matt Musgrave (AGCVT), Aaron Guyette (VHB), Laura Stone (VTrans), Patricia Shedd (F&O), Ben Tietze (VTrans), Mason Kemerer (VTrans), Matthew Arancio (VTrans), Ryan Darling (VTrans), Chad Greenwood (VTrans), Erin Sisson (VTrans), Karen Sentoff (VHB), Jason Rasmussen (MARC), Rob White (VTrans), Michele Boomhower (VTrans), Jonathon Weber (Local Motion), Joe Sculley (VTBA), Bill Smith (VTBA), Elaine Haytko (VPTA), Ian Degutis (VTrans), Matt DiGiovanni (FHWA), Sommer Bucossi (VTrans), Amy Bell (VTrans), Josh Hanford (VLCT), Jesse Devlin (VTrans), Billy Coster (ANR)*

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this meeting was to serve as the overall project kick-off meeting for the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) and Technical Working Group (TWG) and begin to solicit input from attendees as to the needs of the Vermont Multimodal Highway Guide.

### **Discussion Items:**

- Welcome and Introductions
  - Kara opened the meeting, and introduced the project aimed at updating Vermont State Design Standards.
  - Wayne introduced the consulting partners from VHB and Toole Design, emphasizing the project's significance and the critical role of stakeholder input.
  - Everyone in attendance introduced themselves, noting their affiliation.
- Project Overview
  - Wayne provided an overview of the project, highlighting the goal of making the new design standards more practical, multimodal and user-friendly.
  - Drew discussed building on the previous M2D2 effort to develop a comprehensive design guide.
  - Rick introduced the focus of the meeting in soliciting input from the SAG and TWG members to help the project team better understand the needs of the new VMHG.
- Breakout Groups

- Participants were divided into breakout groups to have an open discussion about several topics.
- The breakout group meeting notes are provided below, as is a cumulative summary of key takeaways from the exercise.

### **Breakout Group #1 (Moderator: Jenn)**

Participants: Jesse Devlin, Jonathon Weber, Matthew Arancio, Patrica Shedd, Laura Stone, Mason Kemerer

#### Key Discussion Points

- Introduction and Icebreaker
  - Jenn welcomed everyone and introduced Jesse, highlighting his expertise in the current VSS.
  - She asked participants to consider what they need from the guide to support their projects.
- Initial Responses and Suggestions
  - Rural Roads Guidance: Need for specific guidelines tailored to rural roads.
  - Case Studies: Inclusion of real-world examples and best practices.
  - Simplified Processes: Clear, simplified process representations for stakeholder communication.
  - Document Prioritization: Clear instructions on using and prioritizing various guidance documents.
  - Context Consideration: Guidance should be sensitive to project type, funding, and setting.
- Further Suggestions and Input
  - Design Criteria: Shift focus from level of service to more holistic criteria.
  - Bike/Ped Accommodations: Enhanced guidance for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
  - Context-Sensitive Guidance: Flexible guidelines adaptable to different project contexts.
- Feedback on Existing Standards
  - Table of Contents: Useful for quickly locating relevant sections.
  - Green Book Format: Familiar and structured approach appreciated for ease of use.
- Discussion on Non-VTrans Guides
  - Oregon's Guidance: Highlighted as a valuable resource for innovative treatments.
  - External Guides: Importance of integrating best practices from various sources.
- Successful Projects

- Public Engagement: Genuine public involvement noted as crucial for success.
- Subsurface Exploration: Proper exploration critical for infrastructure projects.
- Stakeholder Involvement: Early and continuous engagement ensures project success.
- Closing Remarks
  - Jenn thanked participants and encouraged continued input on the Miro board.
  - She outlined next steps and future meeting plans.

### **Breakout Group #2 (Moderator: Drew)**

Participants: Ian Degutis, Rob White, Jason Rasmussen, Josh Hanford, Bill Smith

#### Key Discussion Points:

- Balancing Flexibility and Guidance:
  - Emphasized the importance of providing guidance that balances various transportation modes and user needs.
  - Discussed the necessity of having flexible guidelines that allow for balancing different types of modes and users within constrained project areas.
- Project Types and Improvement Levels:
  - Highlighted the importance of setting clear expectations for different types of projects, such as repaving versus full reconstruction. Also discussed how different funding sources can limit flexibility.
  - Mentioned Route 116 project as an example, where the scope of repaving does not include widening the road for bike lanes, which would require a full reconstruction.
- Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:
  - Addressed the need for clear documentation to communicate project scopes and limitations to stakeholders.
  - Discussed how to manage stakeholder expectations by explaining the funding and planning constraints of projects.
  - Discussed how different perspectives and feedback can inform the guidance document, ensuring it addresses the needs of diverse users.
- Challenges in Applying Standards:

- Discussed the difficulty for localities in understanding nuanced design standards, particularly related to lane widths and other specifications.
- Suggested improving standard sheets to reflect these nuances for better local understanding and application.
- Design Guidance and Best Practices:
  - Highlighted the importance of having clear guidance on design thresholds for various facilities, particularly for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.
  - Referenced the MassDOT separated bike lane planning and design guide as a good example.
- Integration with other VTrans Document / Guidance:
  - Suggested creating a roadmap within the guidance document that points to relevant state and national standards and best practices.
  - Proposed including a flowchart to help users navigate through various resources and standards related to different project aspects.
  - Proposed temporal guidance for legacy projects and when to review permitting.
- Addressing Smaller Municipalities:
  - Emphasized the need for the guidance to cater to smaller, resource-limited municipalities.
  - Discussed including flexibility and specific guidance for rural areas and smaller communities.
- Conclusion:
  - Participants expressed the need for a comprehensive and flexible guidance document.
  - The group agreed on the importance of integrating feedback from various stakeholders to ensure the document meets diverse needs.

### **Breakout Group #3 (Moderator: Rick)**

Participants: Erin Sisson, Ryan Darling, Matt Musgrave, Chad Greenwood, Amy Bell, Matt DiGiavanni, Bill Schultheiss

#### Key Discussion Points:

- Successful Project Examples
  - Shelburne Rd. Roundabout
    - Multimodal application with high vehicle, bike, pedestrian, and transit use.
    - Extensive stakeholder engagement and coordination.

- Challenges with right of way constraints and complex utilities.
- Montpelier Bike Lanes
  - Effective communication between contractor and town.
- Waterbury Public Information
  - Good feedback from the town about contractor communication during construction.
- Irasburg Bridge
  - Efficient emergency project with quick team assembly.
- Middlebury Bridge and Tunnel
  - High engagement and communication throughout the project.
- Sharon Bethel IM
  - Pilot project for stone matrix asphalt with extensive internal and external coordination.
  - Challenge of incorporating new materials into projects that don't have specs or guidance.
- Killington / Woodstock US 4
  - Implementation of centerline rumble strips with good town coordination and positive feedback.
- Challenges and Lessons Learned
  - Legacy Projects
    - Often involve significant trade-offs and challenges with accommodating all modes within limited right-of-way.
  - Class 1 Town Paving Projects (e.g., Ludlow)
    - Criticism for not including small improvements like curb cuts and crosswalks.
    - Parking issues often arise as a major challenge.
  - Middlebury Bridge and Tunnel
    - Missing pedestrian signals on legacy signal infrastructure despite significant investment and repaving of roads.
  - I-89 Bridge Project in Colchester

- Several reorganizations of traffic patterns during construction due to safety concerns and collisions.
- MOT application needed improvement and adjustments to construction conditions.
- Williston Road Bike Lanes
  - Underutilization of newly built bike lanes, with cyclists preferring sidewalks.
  - Discussion of challenges of providing facilities people want to use versus providing facilities that are easy to implement.
- General Observations
  - Need for improved integration of stakeholder feedback and better communication between VTrans and local agencies.
  - Importance of aligning project designs to what people want and the demand to maximize value of infrastructure.
  - Recognition of the complexity of balancing various modes of transportation within constrained spaces.
- Closing Remarks
  - Emphasis on the value of diverse input and the need for ongoing stakeholder engagement.
  - Encouragement to think critically about past projects and their outcomes to inform future improvements.

#### **Breakout Group #4 (Moderator: Laura)**

Participants: Kara Yelinek, Sommer Bucossi, Ben Tietze, Michele Boomhower, Elaine Haytko, Billy Coster

#### Key Takeaways:

- Importance of Data-Driven Decisions:
  - Emphasis on justifying policies with data, especially when questioned by the public.
- Successful Projects and Standards
  - Roundabouts and Intersections:
    - Limited use of 1997 standards.
    - Creative solutions and other resources were often utilized.

- Specific mention of Shelburne Road roundabout, which required significant advocacy for its design.
- Key Success Factors in Projects
  - Early Input and Stakeholder Engagement:
    - Early involvement of stakeholders is crucial.
    - Specific design guidance sometimes includes when to seek public input, which is helpful.
- Accommodating Multiple Users:
  - Success often linked to the ability to accommodate various users (e.g., pedestrians, bicyclists).
- Influence of Guidance on Project Success
  - Examples of Guidance Benefits:
    - Clear guidance can aid in the justification of decisions.
    - Existing standards have informed current common practices (e.g., stakeholder engagement, subsurface utility exploration).
  - Vague Guidance Areas:
    - Earlier standards included vague language about accommodating different road users.
    - More detailed guidance now available for specific groups (e.g., bicyclists, pedestrians).
- Specific Project Discussions
  - Shelburne Road Roundabout:
    - A hard-fought design incorporating various users.
    - Commitment from multiple stakeholders was key.
    - Example of successful advocacy and design collaboration.
- Needs for New Guidance
  - Current Practices and Standards:
    - Need for new guidance to reflect current practices and fill gaps in existing standards.
  - Decision-Making Tools:
    - Desire for decision trees to help navigate project decisions.

- Clear trade-off discussions to understand ramifications of different design choices.
- Detailed Justifications:
  - Including the rationale behind guidance in documents.
  - Helps in responding to public inquiries and justifying decisions.
- Closing Remarks
  - Importance of Flexibility:
    - Balancing rigid tables and flexible, context-sensitive guidelines.
  - Continued exploration of balancing clear guidance with flexible applications.

### **Summary of the Miro Board Workshop**

#### What do you like about the existing guidance?

- VSS is easy to use/navigate
  - Table of contents and list of figures and tables that are clickable and linked to the appropriate page.
  - Chapters are organized by roadway classification, which mirrors the Green Book.
- Flexibility with emphasis on context sensitive design
  - Emphasizes the overarching idea of using contextual-based design.
  - Ranges of values are provided such as road widths based on AADT and Design Speed for different functional classes.
- Understood to be a "primary source of guidance"
  - Clear and definitive guidance in many cases.
  - Initially designed as an all-inclusive document.
  - Principles written in the guidance that were "reach goals" at the time are now common practice.

#### What are example projects that have been successful and why?

- Several projects were mentioned with an explanation of their success:
  - Williston Road (US 2) Bike lanes - Not in standards, but policy on green paint for bike lanes.
  - West Rutland Route 4 – Removal of 'jug handle' turning movements, improved geometry.
  - Shelburne Street Roundabout in Burlington – Early engagement, subsurface exploration.



- Multimodal, high use area (bike, ped, car, trucks, transit), a lot of stakeholder engagement, outreach, ROW constraints, contaminated soils, utility challenges.
- Cavendish-Weathersfield VT 131 – FDR, Cement Treatment. Spec development and follow up lessons learned.
- Sharon-Bethel IM – Use of creative materials; Pilot SMA.
- Waterbury Downtown – Great communication between contractor and town
- Irasburg Bridge – Decisions were made quickly.
- Killington-Woodstock US 4 – Implementation of CLRS and BWC.
- Class 1 TH Repaving (US4/US7 in Rutland) – Included road diet (4 to 3 conversion) and an extensive community engagement process to arrive at the decision.
- Some process improvements were identified as enhancing the success of projects, including:
  - Early and frequent engagement with the public, stakeholders, and environmental regulators.
  - Including safety and mobility concerns in paving projects.
  - Understanding need/want, feasibility before/with development of initial schedule and budget.
  - Statewide marking contracts taking over maintenance of green pavement markings – maintenance is otherwise a deterrent in some locations.
  - Projects that consider the entire corridor, with logical end points and connections.

What are examples of projects that did not achieve desired multimodal outcomes?

A variety of specific projects were listed with an explanation of their limitations, such as:

- Berlin “rail with trail” – non-railroad support hindered rail trail completion leaving a gap in the trail that had to be closed with on-road facility: public may be unaware about the “why” for the gap leading to concerns about VTrans implementation.
- MOT work on I-89 which resulted in crashes.
- Rutland 4-to-3 conversion – bike infrastructure was dropped at intersections.
- Bellows Falls Bridge – Lacks sidewalks and bike facilities.
- Williston P&R – Didn’t consider other projects in the area.
- North Ave Bike Lanes – Were parallel to a bike path.
- Chelsea bridge replacements on VT 110 – Scope eliminated sidewalk connections.

Beyond specific projects, some overarching issues were identified, including:

- Class 1 projects that don't achieve desired outcomes:
  - Paving projects typically replace like for like.
  - Tension between community expectations, municipal desires (e.g. reduced lane widths), and internal project delivery processes.
- Issues with project limits and scopes including:
  - Removing sidewalks or bike lanes from scopes because they don't connect to anything, but if nothing is ever built, there is nothing to connect to (chicken and egg problem).
  - Lack of coordination with other projects in the same area or with other agencies.
- Inappropriate bike facility selection for the context, in some cases resulting in constructed bike infrastructure being underutilized.
- Environmental constraints not being fully understood or requiring expensive re-design.
- Systemic issues such as funding limitations, regulatory barriers, lack of flexibility in design standards.
- Multimodal lens not automatically applied when designing a project.
- Maintenance worries hinder multimodal design: additional equipment and time required.

What do you need out of this guide to support your project needs and interests?

- Guide to other state documents/guides, and harmonization:
  - Consolidate various guidance documents in this guide, or provide hierarchy of applicable guidance.
  - Ensure guidance reflects details in applicable design standards.
- Keeping the guide up to date:
  - The guide needs its own maintenance plan and a clear structure to update it.
- Maintain and add to context-sensitive design:
  - Include better guidance on appropriate bike/ped accommodations in different contexts, and at intersections.
  - Guidance for class 1 state highways through villages and supporting public realm.
  - Include design flexibility as practical and preferred min and max values.
  - Move away from LOS and prioritize V/C in village and town contexts.

- Resources for stakeholder engagement:
  - Simplified representation of process and of contextual considerations
- Environmental considerations
  - Include nature-based solutions.
  - Consolidate guidance on environmental constraints, permitting and addressing environmental constraints in pre-development process.
- Additional guidance for:
  - Ped/bike accommodations
  - Transit accommodations
  - Intersection design
  - Winter maintenance of active transportation facilities and elements such as curb extensions
  - Sidewalk design
  - Shares streets
- Include life-cycle costs estimates
- Education components:
  - Case studies and best practice examples in guide
  - Common language, appendices to provide context
  - Encourage collaboration with Town/Regional/ State planning efforts through a shared 'toolbox'