



GREATER VERGENNES TRAFFIC IMPACT FEASIBILITY STUDY

FINAL - July 2002

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1995, a comprehensive alternatives analysis was performed for the City of Vergennes to document the need for, and affects of, a truck bypass around the city. The primary objective of this bypass was to divert the majority of the some 700 heavy trucks which pass through the downtown area each day. Currently, local residents and business interests, as well as the wealth of historic sites, are being overwhelmed by the negative environmental effects of so many trucks traveling through town. During the public input stages of this analysis, the neighboring towns of Panton and Ferrisburgh expressed concern that a bypass would have a negative impact their communities.

In order to address this fracture in the Greater Vergennes community, a public workshop was proposed to assemble all concerned and knowledgeable parties and revisit the issues, with a bias towards developing a community-wide consensus of the critical issues *and* the most feasible solutions.

Public meetings were held in Panton, Vergennes, and Ferrisburgh to present the known resources and collect local concerns, as well as additional background information. A Steering Committee was assembled from volunteers solicited at these meetings (in addition to the project stakeholders). This Steering Committee guided the project planning and the development of this report. Comprehensive lists of available documents and data, as well as a list of the particular concerns and issues, were developed.

On September 14, 2002 approximately 70 people including citizens, local and state officials, consultants and environmentalists, gathered for the daylong problem solving session. The agenda for this workshop included an initial presentation by the managing consultant and various local officials. The resources and issues were reviewed, and then the participants broke up into four separate study groups. The study groups were each assigned one of the general solution categories: the bypass, alternative routes, downtown mitigation, and system solutions. Each group spent an hour or so exploring the possibilities for addressing the concerns, given their category of solutions. Each group was facilitated by a particular expert in the field, as suggested by the category. At the conclusion of each session, each group rotated to a new subject, thus each category was allowed input from everyone, in four separate sessions. At the conclusion of the four sessions the facilitators and managing consultants collated and summarized the results and made a formal presentation in the evening, which was open to the general public.

Results derived from the workshop included:

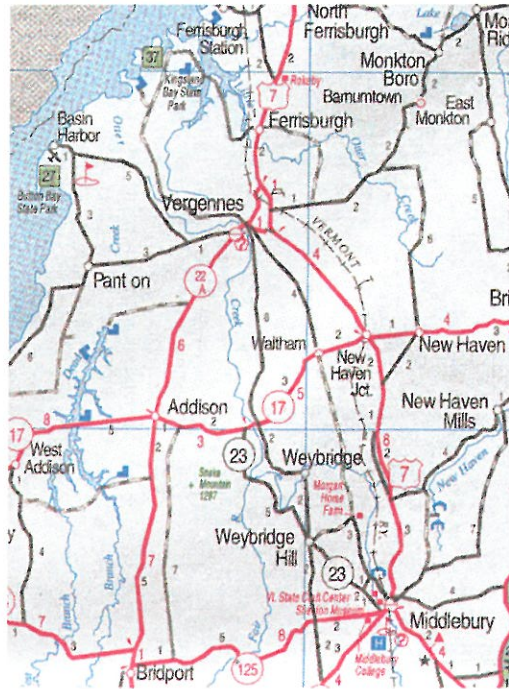
- 1) Downtown solutions follow the extensive work done in a previous workshop concerning the enhancement of the entire downtown Vergennes area – the “Finding Vergennes Workshop”. The relevant measures which address the current traffic issues include:
 - Adopting a long-term capital improvement plan for the City.
 - Lobbying the State to set appropriate environmental and safety standards.

- Enhanced law enforcement.
 - Implementing traffic calming measures.
 - Installing gateway treatments at the northern and southern City termini.
- 2) As an alternative route, rehabilitate Route 17 as a truck route from Route 22A in Addison to Route 7 in Hew Haven. This alternative shows promise when compared to the bypass for impacts and cost.
 - 3) The solutions suggested by the Alternative Transportation Systems study groups resulted in a promising list of solutions which can be implemented in the near term with little or no infrastructure required. These solutions include:
 - Intelligent Transportation System (referred to as ITS) measures such as better signage and traffic control.
 - Regulatory and enforcement changes.
 - Providing monetary incentives for changes in driver behavior and better freight movement modes, particularly rail.
 - Improving local roadway access to Route 22A; as well as traffic calming measures and expediting the planning and construction of the bypass.
 - 4) When pursuing the truck route around Vergennes as a long term solution, consider the following:
 - Economic impact on downtown Vergennes.
 - Location – modified from the preferred alignment of the 1995 bypass study.
 - Design features including intersection treatments, bridge aesthetics, road configuration and geometry, access and traffic control.
 - Land use impact restrictions/access management.
 - Road use goals.
 - Action items/next steps including project development and land planning needs.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 Background

On average, more than 10,000 vehicles go through the Vergennes downtown each day on Route 22A, also known as Main Street, and about 700 of them are trucks. Route 22A is a State designated truck route and part of the Vermont Truck Network. The proportion of trucks to cars is almost double the Statewide average for this class of roadway as Vergennes provides access for freight moving to and from Chittenden County and northern Vermont. Projections indicate that this traffic could grow by as much as 30-50% over the next 20 years.



PROJECT AREA

Route 22A has seen significant and ongoing road improvements to better serve as a major north/south transportation corridor. It is uniquely situated on the western side of Vermont, between the Route 4 entry point from New York and the City of Vergennes, which is conveniently located just off Route 7, the only other western Vermont highway corridor.

Citizens of the State's oldest city and its surroundings towns have repeatedly expressed concerns relating to truck traffic such as safety, hazardous spills, pollution, vibration, noise, and congestion. They desire to devise a method by which the increasing truck traffic may get past historic Vergennes without disrupting the community while considering its unique geography, and historic resources.

The City and the ACRPC have explored alternatives in the past which would address the problem, most notably the construction of a new bypass around the City. A 1995 study evaluated three possible bypass corridors and identified a route skirting the westerly side of the City as the preferred alternative. During that study, the towns of Panton and Ferrisburgh expressed their concern that this location would adversely effect their communities, and Panton's Town Plan notably opposes a westerly bypass.

2.2 Dufresne-Henry Hired

In May of 2001, the ACRPC solicited proposals from qualified consultants to help look for solutions to this dilemma. This project is charged with using and promoting public involvement as a way to develop and evaluate methods for solving the problems associated with truck traffic passing through downtown Vergennes. Specifically, the project involves:

- holding Local Concerns Meetings in Vergennes and surrounding communities
- investigating long and short term solutions through a public workshop

- conducting a feasibility study of selected alternatives that evolve from the workshop
- summarizing the findings in this report

The project will be concluded with follow-up meetings with the ACRPC and municipalities where the findings will be discussed.

2.3 Project Steering Committee

The ACRPC Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met on Wednesday, July 18th. At this meeting, a Steering Committee for the project was formed. Members were considered based on recommendations provided at the Local Concerns Meetings (see Section 5). The Committee included:

Paul Tippet (Panton), John Devos, Jr. (Ferrisburgh), Terry Faith Weihs (Vergennes), David Raphael (Panton), Randy Friday (Vergennes), David Shlansky (Ferrisburgh), Paul Vachon (Vergennes), Louise Giovanella (Panton), Garrett Dague (ACRPC), Tom Heeter (Vergennes), David Austin (Vergennes), John Emerson (TAC), and Dick Hosking (VTrans).

This committee was formed to facilitate the progress, planning, and outcome of the workshop and formulate recommendations to the TAC.

2.4 Public Workshop

During numerous Steering Committee meetings, a list of potential workshop invitees and a workshop agenda were developed. Potential invitees included interested area citizens, municipal and state officials (including VTrans planning personnel and legislators), planning, transportation, environmental, and other related professionals (see list of confirmed attendees in appendix). On September 14, 2001, a day-long workshop was held to review the stated problems and concerns. The goal of the workshop was to solidify these concerns into consensus and to formulate a vision for the community that will articulate solutions. Summaries of the individual work sessions is presented in section 6.0.

2.5 Summary Feasibility Report and Action Items

The information presented in this report is intended to be used by the ACRPC and the Vergennes area communities as a tool to take action, to address the applicable issues, to work with the Vermont legislature to gain funding and partner with VTrans in solving the communities' concerns.

2.6 Selectboard Presentations and final public comment

On May 14, June 4 and July 8th the summary report conclusions and implementation plan were presented to the Vergennes City Council, Ferrisburgh Town Selectboard and Panton Town Selectboard. Minutes from each meeting are included in the appendix.

3.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

A Purpose and Need Statement was developed and distributed for comment by the Steering Committee, resulting in the following:

Purpose

To address and mitigate the negative impacts, existing and anticipated, relating to the heavy truck traffic traveling through the City of Vergennes and to facilitate freight travel along the Route 22A corridor with a minimum of restrictions and hindrances.

Need

Recent truck traffic averages 700 trucks per day (1998 AADT), or 7% of the average daily traffic on Route 22A in downtown Vergennes. This is approximately double the average proportion of truck traffic for a similarly classified highway, minor urban arterial¹.

Route 22A, including the 2.19 miles of Class 1 highway through the City of Vergennes, has been recently designated part of the Vermont State Truck Network (2000 VT State Legislature Bill H-188), which allows trucks up to 72 feet in length and 80,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight without a permit.

The extensive and unique historic infrastructure along Route 22A is being damaged by vibrations associated with the heavy trucks.

Unusually high truck traffic volumes negatively affect proximate property values.

Environmental affects of truck traffic, including vibration, noise, fumes, dust, are detrimental to the health and quality of life of Vergennes residents.

The volume, speed and proximity of trucks deters nearby pedestrian and bicycle traffic, as well as threatens their safety.

Business patronage along Route 22A in Vergennes is negatively affected.

Emergency services lack equipment, training and facilities to handle the unusually high potential for hazardous materials spills relating to the typical freight cargo of the truck traffic.

Freight transport is essential to the economy of Vermont and the transport capacity provided by Route 22A is, therefore, also essential.

¹ Vergennes is not an urban area per the AASHTO definition since its population is less than 5,000, however, practically speaking the City of Vergennes has all of the relevant characteristics of an urban area, including building density, proximity and configuration of sidewalks, parking configuration, density of side roads, and proximity to dense residential areas.

4.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1 Existing Conditions

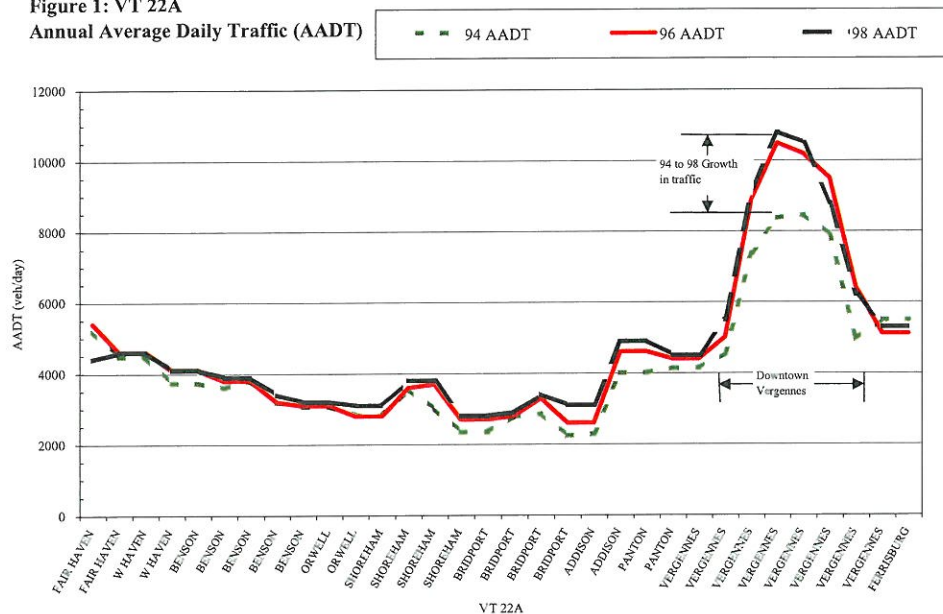
Roadway

Route 22A is a two lane highway, designated as a *Minor Rural Arterial*¹. In addition, it is a designated truck route in the State of Vermont, and part of the Vermont Truck Network. As part of this network, it is expected to meet certain special guidelines for geometry such as curvature and pavement width. These special guidelines account for the fact that these types of routes carry abnormally large trucks - up to 72 feet in total length (53 foot trailers). Recent improvements along the roadway have made major strides in bringing this highway into conformance with these guidelines, with one glaring exception: Downtown Vergennes. According to the *Truck Network Improvement Study* commissioned by VTrans "...large trucks should avoid congested and historic urban areas that have on-street parking and pedestrian and bicycle traffic." The current route through downtown Vergennes directly conflicts with this criteria. In addition, the steep grade north of Otter Creek violates the desired grade of 7% (existing grade is 10%).

Traffic

Average Daily Traffic (ADT), including all vehicles, varies along Route 22A, peaking in the center of downtown Vergennes at 10,800 (1998 est.) vehicles per day (vpd). Recent growth in traffic is also most pronounced in the downtown area. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: VT 22A
Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)



¹ using American Association of State Highway and Transportation officials (AASHTO) criteria for Functional Classification. Note that Vergennes is not an "urban" area per the AASHTO definition since its population is less than 5,000, however practically speaking the City of Vergennes has all of the relevant characteristics of an urban area, including building density, proximity and configuration of sidewalks, parking configuration, density of side roads, and proximity to dense residential areas.

Environmental and Cultural Resources

Significant environmental and cultural features in the project area are shown on the Existing Resource Map and include:

- Otter Creek
- Town boundaries
- Wetlands as depicted by the National Wetlands Inventory
- Conserved lands, including the Comfort Hill Farms
- Public, residential and commercially zoned land
- Downtown Vergennes historic district
- Fire and rescue stations
- Proposed Multi-modal Transportation Center in Ferrisburgh

Economic

Significant economic resources in the project area include agricultural lands, commercial and industrial facilities and downtown Vergennes where a majority of the areas retail establishments are located. (See Existing Resources Map in appendix.)

5.0 LOCAL CONCERNS

Three formal local concerns meetings were held prior to the workshop. These meetings were announced in the local papers and held separately with each Town Selectboard (Panton and Ferrisburgh) and City Council (Vergennes). In addition, a local concerns meeting was held as part of the 1995 Bypass Study.

Minutes from each meeting can be found in the appendix. Below is a summary of the concerns expressed, sorted by subject:

The Vergennes Bypass

General Concerns:

- Residential / property impacts
- Physical & environmental impacts of the road and bridge alignment
- Speed, noise and other impacts of traffic on the bypass
- Control of access along the bypass
- Funding - where's the money going to come from?
- Affect on existing traffic patterns on the crossing roads (Panton Road, McDonough Road, etc.)

Specific Concerns:

- The need for a bypass is minor compared to other Towns such as Middlebury or Brandon. The expense doesn't seem to be worth it.
- The western bypass route around Vergennes makes the most sense. The bridge shouldn't affect boat traffic. We should encourage that as a resource. The falls in Vergennes are an incredible asset to the area and an attraction to boaters.
- Concerns and ideas about a new roadway or bypass included, having a view of the falls and good information signage at the intersections concerning the attractions in Vergennes.
- Concerns regarding changes in land use due to a bypass? Isn't the planned bypass route all conserved? What about making it a limited access road?
- Aren't there implications to the cars using the bypass and effecting local businesses. Takes 10 years to recover from a bypass. Isn't Vergennes just recovering from building Route 7 [as a bypass]?

Environmental

- There seems to be a lot of hazardous material. If the placard says "dangerous" - it includes a wide range of materials.
- Trucks stopping and starting at the traffic lights in town are a significant detraction to the environment (exhaust, noise, vibration).
- Trucks are seriously affecting the historic structures in Vergennes.
- Are there any road surfaces that are better at absorbing noise than others? (Subsurface conditions such as ledge or underlying concrete may be transmitting noise and vibrations)
- Noise - Some responded that it will be the same [with a bypass] but just transferred somewhere else. Some argued it will be less. Some argued people will be less impacted.
- Air quality will be the same, pollution will be moved to another area. May be less due to lack of stopping and starting due to traffic lights.
- Vergennes is on bedrock - never taken down for a proper gravel base. This causes a lot of vibration which effects the buildings.
- Otter Creek is the only navigable river in the state - lots of boat traffic come to Vergennes.
- Noise - there's no need for engine brakes. The road's not that steep. Should be some way to regulate this. But we can't make them shut it off because it's a federally mandated piece of equipment - this could come back to bite you if the truckers are spiteful.
- The City has a noise ordinance - it may apply.
- Check out the closed doors and windows in town along Route 22A. Even on a hot summer day. They're all closed because of the noise and exhaust.

Financial and Economic

- Trucks have a significant affect on property values in Vergennes due to the unpleasant environment they create.
- Local businesses have made great investments and it shouldn't be all for naught.
- Downtown designation and Scenic Byways status - we spent \$850,000 on improvements. This competes with the truck route designation.

Bike And Pedestrian

- A lot of pedestrian traffic comes from / are due to the businesses. For instance, Job Corps people are regularly seen walking to and from Little City Market.
- Bicycles are trouble. They don't share the road. Bike path should be separate. Bikes won't use the bypass, they'll go through town. But if you build a bike path, make it separate.
- How about the Rail Trail [for peds and bikes]?
- Bike destinations - lots of touring groups using the roads, destinations include the Strong House, other B & B's, and the State parks. They use Lake Rd. but must cross at the Otter Creek bridge.
- Pedestrians and bikes have to cross on the bridge, but there's only one side that's safe to cross [south side] but attraction [the basin] is on the north side.
- Need sidewalks along Rt 22A on the other side of the bridge. Very dangerous to walk on the road with trucks passing by.
- Bikes slow trucks and traffic down because there's no room for both.

Alternative Routes

- Could Route 17 be used as an alternate truck route?
- What are the impacts of using Route 17?
- Route 17 is out of the way compared to 22A, it's crooked, and narrow. It has bad intersections, and rail crossings.
- We need an alternative to the one bridge over Otter Creek.

Rail

- Freight, particularly petroleum products, used to go up the lake by barge.
- It seems that rail freight is uneconomical in Vermont.
- How about piggybacking freight containers on rail? Divert trucks to New Haven Jct. via Route 17?

- It doesn't work that way in US [forcing freight by rail] - that will never happen. We don't want to take on the charge of changing the way the US does business. We need realistic solutions that can be done now.

Safety

- Vergennes provides the Fire and Rescue service to Panton, there are concerns of what might happen to these services if the bridge over Otter Creek were blocked by an accident or stopped truck. Panton would have to rely on the next town, Addison, to respond to an emergency.
- Truck accidents have a much bigger impact. This should be taken into consideration.
- A second bridge would help in responses to emergencies in W. Ferrisburgh. If the main bridge over Otter Creek was closed or blocked then the Vergennes Fire and Rescue vehicles couldn't get there.
- What about farm equipment on the road? This should be considered too.
- Fire Department can't handle hazardous spills.
- What are the trucks carrying - consider that trucks sometimes travel in convoys.
- Trucks seem to travel in groups. Accidents could be worse if more than one truck was involved.
- Trucks are not being inspected properly. They are not looking for type of cargo or conditions of trucks.
- Emergency services in Vergennes have a real lack of capability to handle an accident involving hazardous materials.
- It seems that trucks never get speeding tickets here in Vergennes.
- The Coalition Against Illegal Trucks [CAIT] found that many trucks on Vermont roads are substandard.
- Only a matter of time before a bad truck accident happens.

Trucks

- Truck traffic is constant.
- We need to invite truckers and others in the trucking industry to the next meeting to see what their concerns or suggested solutions are. Do they like going through Vergennes? Contact the American Trucking Association to see if they have any information or suggestions from experience with similar situations.
- Problem is that 22A has a truck route designation thus only certain things can be done here.
- Chittenden County creates much of this traffic.
- There are more trucks here than on I-89.
- Where are the trucks going in the summer? Look at seasonal variations.
- Look at number of trucks in Woodstock to compare.
- We want to get the trucks involved - educational component - want to encourage this.
- State meets increasing demand for capacity by increasing the size of trucks. We can handle some trucks, but the big ones are a large part of the problem. They are doing serious damage (to our streets and buildings).
- It's uncivilized to run trucks through small villages.
- Federal regulations distinguish towns as "heavily populated" vs. not - VTrans made sure we're not so that Route 22A could be a truck route.
- Vergennes is the leading edge of the Chittenden Co. problem. What does the VTrans Statewide Transportation plan say?
- Truck lobby is hard to fight. We should make it hard for the trucks to get through town. [Response: Could be at risk for Federal dollars.]
- Why are some trucks quiet and some noisy?
- Make sure you take the seasonality of the truck traffic into account.
- It's bizarre to move all this truck traffic on a 2 lane highway.

General

- We should be creative about this. Great Britain has addressed this. We don't want a Bennington Bypass.
- Too many studies. There's been no response from VTrans.
- We should be informed of the consultants proposal, what are they commissioned to do.
- Transportation dollars follow the path of least resistance - need the community to get behind this - then it will get built.
- Barry Driscoll [VTrans planning] Brian Searles [VTrans Secretary] - we would like to invite them.
- We've had David Scott [Director of Project Development] and Patricia McDonald [DMV Commissioner] to an ACRPC meeting and gave a presentation and they were very receptive, yet nothing ever happened
- We need to persuade [the State]. They think Vergennes is just in the way [of the truck route]. Transportation Committee said "improving an existing route" was the best solution.
- How is this project being funded? [Federal T21 funds.]
- Do you really have the power to get something done?
- Regional planning has the power to push this forward [by listing the necessary improvements on the priority list, and scheduling them for funding]
- How do we know you will take charge and make what we want gets done? [DH is not the mechanism for advocacy in Montpelier.]
- Seems this is a closed loop process. It needs to be a continuum which includes our input. We need your RFP & proposal so we can have input on what you do.
- How does this move forward after the workshop?
- We should capture truck traffic on video for people in Montpelier to look at.
- We're not just sitting here waiting, we're angry and want results.
- We should take enforcement into our own hands. Federal regs. may compel something to be done.

- Publicize meetings and give us something to look at and consider during the process.
- The letters represent a lot of people. We've already been through this. A lot [of citizens] won't come because they've been here before.
- Bypass is a long way away. Short term is very important. We're looking for something immediate!
- Please take into account the changes in the Vergennes area since the 1995 study.
- Needs to be some level of action to occur immediately after the workshop. Need some political will. Need to consider this at the charette [workshop]. Planning Committee & City Administrators need to take charge and get something done.

Summary of Survey Results

Response to the survey published in the newsletter (published and distributed locally in August - see copy in appendix) were few (4).

Typical responses for words which portray the Vision for Vergennes in the future are:

- Quiet/peaceful/small
- Clean/pristine/less pollution & noise
- Safe/friendly/welcoming/pedestrian & bike friendly
- Scenic/historic/New England/tourist friendly
- Thriving/stable/strong businesses/economy

6.0 TRAFFIC IMPACT WORKSHOP

Solutions to Alleviate Truck Traffic Problems in the Greater-Vergennes area Along the Route 22A Transportation Corridor.

6.1 Workshop Format

Approximately 70 area citizens, municipal and State officials, planning, transportation, environmental, and other professionals came together in a day-long workshop to review truck traffic related problems in the greater-Vergennes area. Their goal was to turn concern into consensus, working to create a vision for the community that would articulate solutions. Based on their varying areas of expertise, attendees were placed into one of four work groups. In 'round robin' fashion, each group visited facilitators assigned to four solution areas. Facilitators met with each work group for approximately 1½ hours to consider the issues and annotate each group's solution set.

The four solution areas and round robin format were chosen after extensive discussions with the forum steering committee. The study of four solution areas was based on the need to mitigate the present and growing traffic dilemma as repeatedly voiced during local concerns meetings. Experts were evenly spread amongst the work groups allowing each group to effectively look within its own membership for knowledge while creating four independent solution sets.

Each solution area has unique aspects that do not entirely overlap or replace all aspects or benefits of another. Therefore, no single solution area is considered 'stand alone'. While some solutions areas are achievable only in the long-term, equal emphasis was placed on short- and intermediate-term solutions. The four solution areas are:

- ◆ **BYPASS AROUND VERGENNES**

- As developed in the 1995 Vergennes Route 22A Bypass Preliminary Design Report.

- ◆ **ALTERNATIVE ROUTES**

- Yet to be identified, such as use of Route 17.

- ◆ **ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS**

- Developing and/or enhancing systems such as rail, ferry, or Intelligent Transportation Systems.

- ◆ **DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENTS**

- Lessening and/or mitigating the impacts of truck traffic passing through the city of Vergennes.

The solution sets offered by workshop participants are far-reaching. Because the list of recommendations is extensive, only the highlights of each solution set is presented below. Readers are urged to critique the complete summaries found in the appendix.

6.2 Bypass Around Vergennes

The group deliberations focused on the following four aspects: *Location*, *Design Features*, *Land Use Impact*, and *Road Use*. The following outline describes some common features suggested by analyzing the results from each of the workshop solutions groups:

LOCATION

- Locate bypass to the west of Otter Creek Park;
- Bypass should encircle Vergennes to identify and encourage development within city borders;
- If possible, northern and southern bypass terminuses should be located within Vergennes city limits to minimize impact on surrounding towns;
- Define road perimeters to safeguard viable agricultural land; don't create parcels "*too small to farm.*"

DESIGN FEATURES

- Create "gateway" to the City to introduce and define residential and commercial area by means such as markers, monuments, signage, and road treatments;
- Construct roundabouts or other mechanisms so that the bypass "*is the turn*" and that downtown "*is straight ahead,*" easily identified, and accessible to the traveling public;
- Road configuration should facilitate truck traffic while encouraging moderate speed travel;
- Road configuration should take into consideration bike and pedestrian pathways;
- Use roundabouts to clarify road function and regulate speeds along Route 22A/truck bypass intersections;
- The Otter Creek bridge should make an architectural statement and serve as an enhancement to the surrounding area;

- Grade road to minimize visual impact, particularly in conservation areas;
- Landscape roadway to provide screening for noise and visual impacts, particularly at bridge approaches, along the ridge line, and in conservation areas;
- Provide farm and wild animal access tunnels;
- Incorporate two-way stops at intermediary intersections.

LAND USE IMPACT

- To prevent sprawl, state and municipalities should control access points by planning land use along the bypass corridor in advance of construction. Accomplish this through easements and controlling development rights. Put municipal planning controls (all three towns) in place as soon as possible.

ROAD USE

- Traditional high speed truck route with limited access and with no consideration for bicycle and/or pedestrian pathways; *or*,
- Moderate speed, limited access route with the following considerations:
 - Bicycle and/or pedestrian pathways (pathways could be coordinated with the recent bike/pedestrian study and community recreation plans, be offset in a non-parallel fashion to the bypass, and/or be available within a section of the roadway);
 - Limited, yet, easy on/easy off access to the Panton Road industrial park to serve to facilitate transport of goods and to reduce in-City industrial traffic;
 - Limited, yet, easy on/easy off access to Panton Road by area residents living west of Vergennes; and by visitors to and employees of the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, Basin Harbor Club, and Button Bay State Park to reduce in-City traffic;
 - Limited, yet, easy on/easy off access to McDonough Road by Job Corps residents and employees to reduce in-city traffic;
 - Direct, unobstructed access to fire and rescue services for Vergennes and all outlying areas.

ACTION ITEMS/NEXT STEPS

- ACRPC and VTrans should be asked to document the potentially positive impact of the bypass on Route 7 through traffic from Route 4 north to Ferrisburgh;
- As support by the Vergennes City Council for the westerly bypass is already in place through the Vergennes City Plan, the next step for the Council should be to establish a Bypass Task Force under the guidance of the City Manager to expedite approval of the Vergennes area bypass with the State of Vermont, municipalities, and appropriate organizations;
- To prevent sprawl, the State should be asked to designate Route 22A (Route 4 to Route 7) and Route 7 (Middlebury to Shelburne) as official “*green belts*”;
- The State and municipalities should control access points by planning land use along the bypass corridor in advance of construction through acquisition of easements and development rights, by putting municipal planning controls (all three towns) in place as soon as possible, and by initiating land acquisition.

6.3 Alternative Routes

Each team had a fresh look at the conceivable alternative routes. Potential solutions include:

- *Upgrade and/or rely on the east-west corridors connecting Route 22A and Route 7 such as Routes 17, 30, 125, 4, or 9.*

These alternatives in routing truck traffic have the dubious benefit of avoiding the City of Vergennes while placing increased truck traffic loads on sections of Route 7, as well as the particular route chosen. The further south the chosen route the more use of the already overtaxed urban and town sections of Route 7 and the less used of sections of Route 22A.

Route 17 would take the most advantage of the well-suited sections of Route 22A and avoid the congested parts of Route 7.

- *Build the Vergennes Bypass.*

Three of the four study groups identified this route as one of their most promising routes.

- *Rely on the existing interstate system.*

In particular, VTrans should determine the means (i.e. regulation, incentives) to encourage trucks to use I-87 in New York and I-89 in Vermont. These routes have a unique suitability to handle truck traffic, and much of the Route 22A traffic is bound for destinations served by these routes. An analysis of the economic effects of eliminating the travel time-savings provided by Route 22A as compared to the overall safety and environmental factors should be conducted.

- *Use, augment, and/or enhance the rail and ferry routes.*

Numerous possibilities for enhancing rail and ferry capabilities exist. The existing ferry crossing at Essex/Charlotte could be enhanced as a direct link from I-87 to Chittenden County. A bulk goods ferry from Whitehall, NY to Burlington might relieve some of the traffic on Route 22A, particularly petroleum and other hazardous materials cited so often as a concern. VTrans should determine the means (i.e. regulation, incentives) to encourage industry use.

The State is presently upgrading the rail linkages into Chittenden County. The State's current emphasis is to use federal funds (80% & 20% split) to upgrade rails, which has been done in Chittenden and Rutland counties, while upgrades in Addison County are scheduled for 2002. Establish and make use of regional trucking facilities to transport goods locally with smaller trucks, not necessarily only with bigger/more tractor-trailers.

- *Utilize the Champlain bridges, and/or construct tunnels under Vergennes and bulk material pipelines.*

While physically possible and likely to mitigate some of the problems at hand, these solutions have a low degree of feasibility in terms of cost or efficacy compared to other solutions presented. The State of Vermont is currently discussing a direct link bridge with Plattsburgh, N.Y. and is considering upgrades to the existing Lake Champlain bridges. However, the current lack of transportation funds at the State level will most likely prohibit these actions.

While the optimum solution differed for each of the four workshop solutions groups, taking the results and rankings as a whole was more conclusive.

6.4 Alternative Transportation Systems

Many of these potential short-term solutions do not involve infrastructure improvement, but result in affecting driving behavior in order to lessen the negative impacts of truck traffic.

Intelligent Transportation System Solutions

- Improve enforcement efforts through more surveillance, inspections, and vehicle tracking;
- Perform vehicle surveys to include O & D, goods transported, truck weight/size/speed and general traffic statistics;
- Regulate the nature of the flow of traffic by coordination of traffic signals;
- Provide better travel information to truckers in the form of signs, radio messages, and contacts through the trucking industry and organizations.

Regulatory Changes

- Improve regulations and restrictions on the transport of hazardous materials;
- Improve regulations on truck size, weight, and equipment.

Other Solutions

- Provide monetary incentives for changes in behavior and better freight movement modes;
- Improve local roadway access (to Route 22A);
- Traffic calming;
- Expedite the planning and construction of the bypass.

6.5 Downtown Solutions

The downtown solutions groups had the distinct advantage of drawing upon the *Finding Vergennes* report resulting from the May 8, 1998 workshop. This in-depth report aimed at improving and revitalizing downtown Vergennes. It included recommendations to deal with the impacts of truck traffic. By revisiting this issue in a concentrated fashion on September 14th, the groups were enthusiastic in their support of the recommendations of the *Finding Vergennes* report and were able to further identify an extensive, well-defined list of recommendations to mitigate the impact of truck traffic on the downtown. The following list represents only an indication of some of the highlights of the report. As

with the other solutions group recommendations, these should be viewed in the context of the entire body of the *Downtown Solutions* report.

- Urge the Vergennes City Council to take the following steps:
 - Adopt a long-term, incremental, annual capital improvement plan for the city based upon the entire recommendations of the *Finding Vergennes* report and place the Vergennes Partnership in charge of administering its implementation.
 - Petition VTrans to conduct an engineering study of road base substrata of Main Street (Route 22A) as a step to mitigating damage caused by constant truck vibration of all Main Street structures. If it is determined that the road base is substandard and has disintegrated, the road length from the Otter Creek bridge to the Kayhart Crossing should be dug up and replaced.
 - Petition the VTrans to set environmental and safety standards for mitigating truck noise, vibrations, and air pollution; transportation of hazardous materials, truck convoys in close succession, and emergency strategies.
 - Define the City Police Department's mission as it relates to truck enforcement along 22A and seek officer staffing/training, as needed.
 - Implement traffic calming measures such as curb bulb-outs, increased number of clearly and consistently identified textured crosswalks, expanded streetscaping, appropriate signage, increased parking opportunities along the entire length of Main Street; pedestrian actuated crossing signals, and intelligent traffic controllers at intersection that adjust to traffic flow.
 - Install gateway treatments at the northern and southern city terminuses and extend city sidewalks to its border in order to define change from a highway to a pedestrian-oriented community.
 - Define the City's northern end as a distinct gateway to the city: re-scale Main Street from Kayhart Crossing to Denecker Chevrolet through narrowed street width; install sidewalks with distinct curbs extending to the restored railroad station, planted bulb-outs, textured crosswalks; create an alley of large caliper street trees, and distinct downcast period street lighting.
 - West Street should be a dead end, or a one-way street directing traffic away from Main Street.
 - Petition Green Mountain Power to place power lines underground or rerouted off Main Street as a traffic-calming feature.

- Build a sidewalk on the waterfall side of the bridge over Otter Creek to accommodate pedestrians.
- Install a Panton Road/Main Street stoplight or roundabout.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS, ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

7.1 Conclusions

The City of Vergennes and citizens that enjoy the benefits of the unique and vibrant Downtown area of Vergennes have known for a long time that something must be done to mitigate the affects of the ever increasing, and now even larger truck traffic.

An interesting and significant dilemma is that Vergennes is an “urban” area, with all the expected attributes such as pedestrian traffic, businesses and residences, yet the highway designation is “rural”. This misnomer creates many of the misconceptions that, somehow, this type of roadway and traffic is acceptable.

Current VTrans guidelines, or guidelines recommended in the Truck Network Improvements Constraint Prioritization Study by VHB, Inc., are not met for this truck route in the downtown area, as follows:

- Vertical grade on Main Street significantly exceeds the current standards, and the recommended standards cited in the Truck Network Improvements Constraint Prioritization Study by VHB, Inc.
- The “surrounding environment” criteria recommendations of the Truck Network Improvement Study clearly recommends that “...large trucks should avoid congested and historic areas.....” such as Vergennes.
- Shoulder width is recommended to be six (6) feet in order to accommodate bicycles – as well as provide a safety area and buffer between the trucks and the surrounding environment. However, this criteria is not intended to address urban areas (see previous item). Throughout Vergennes, particularly where there’s on street parking, there is no safety area or buffer between the trucks and the surrounding environment.

Results from the traffic impact workshop comprehensively address the needs, long term and short term, for mitigating the impacts of heavy trucks. Clearly the long term approach should be to remove the truck designation from downtown Vergennes and find an alternative route. This rerouting would be mandatory for through trucks.

The previous Bypass Study logically identifies the best alignment corridor, which takes advantage of available land *within the City of Vergennes*, however further “tweaking” of the bridge location is needed. In addition, Route 17 should be further explored as an alternative route since the costs are comparable, yet no new alignment is required.

7.2 Action and Implementation Plan

A. The ACRPC supports a comprehensive mitigation plan for the downtown impacts, as documented in this report, by identifying a specific TIP item which funds (in part or whole, as allowed) the following measures:

1. Aiding the City in adopting a long-term, incremental, annual capital improvement plan for the city based upon the entire recommendations of the Finding Vergennes report.
2. Conducting an engineering study of road base substrata of Main Street.
3. Petitioning VTrans/State of Vermont to set environmental and safety standards for mitigating truck noise, vibrations, and air pollution; transportation of hazardous materials, truck convoys in close succession, and emergency strategies.
4. Helping define the law enforcement mission as it relates to truck enforcement along 22A.
5. Implementing traffic calming measures including:
 - Installing gateway treatments at the northern and southern city termini;
 - Re-scaling Main Street on the northern end;
 - Installing sidewalks, planted bulb-outs, textured crosswalks;
 - Creating an alley of large caliper street trees, and distinct downcast period street lighting;
 - Making West Street a dead end, or a one-way street directing traffic away from Main Street.
 - Placing power lines underground or rerouted off Main Street
 - Building a sidewalk on the waterfall side of the bridge over Otter Creek.
 - Addressing the need for Panton Road/Main Street stoplight or roundabout.

Prioritization and implementation of these measures would follow the Capital Improvement Plan, as identified in item 1 above, and be administered by the Vergennes Partnership, or similar consultant.

B. The ACRPC addresses the scoping and implementation of system improvements, as follows:

1. Intelligent Transportation System Solutions:

- Improve enforcement efforts through more surveillance, inspections, and vehicle tracking;
- Perform vehicle surveys to include O & D, goods transported, truck weight/size/speed and general traffic statistics;
- Regulate the nature of the flow of traffic by coordination of traffic signals;
- Provide better travel information to truckers in the form of signs, radio messages, and contacts through the trucking industry and organizations.

2. Regulatory Changes:

- Improve regulations and restrictions on the transport of hazardous materials;
- Improve regulations on truck size, weight, and equipment.

3. Other Solutions:

- Provide monetary incentives for changes in behavior and better freight movement modes;
- Improve local roadway access (to Route 22A);
- Traffic calming in the rural areas;
- Expedite the planning and construction of an alternative truck route.

Many of these items (i.e. regulatory changes, providing monetary incentives for improvements by the trucking industry, progressing the project development process for the preferred bypass alternative, or providing funding for more enforcement) can be addressed through the legislative process which is participated in by the ACRPC TAC members. In addition the Regional Transportation Plan should identify planning needs such as future signal coordination and access management. The

remaining items, which would include the identifiable infrastructure improvements (i.e. signage, traffic calming measures) or the need for further studies, should be tagged as suitable projects, and specific TIP items.

C. The ACRPC should progress the Greater Vergennes Truck Route by including it in the transportation prioritization and funding list (the TIP). This would include a report which meets the VTrans Scoping guidelines, which is the next necessary step(s) in the project definition process. This report should identify in detail a preferred alternative which has the following characteristics:

1. Be acceptable to the Towns directly involved, the ACRPC and VTrans.
2. Have acceptable and permissible environmental impacts.
3. Have acceptable economic impacts.
4. Addresses the Purpose and Need Statement.
5. Includes the following three alternatives:
 - Do nothing.
 - The truck route, as specified in the bypass study, (in corridor alignment B), including sub-alternatives for the bridge and approach alignments, and as further refined in Section 6.0 of this report.
 - Upgrade Route 17, and mandate its use by through trucks.
6. In addition, the bypass alternative should be configured as suggested in the summary details described in Section 6.0.