

Meeting Notes
Regional Concerns Meeting
East Montpelier Bridge 68 Project
October 23, 2014
U-32 Middle and High School Cafeteria
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) held a regional concerns meeting in East Montpelier at the U-32 Middle and High School Cafeteria on October 23 2014 to update local residents about the revised plans for the reconstruction of bridge 68 on VT Route 14 and the associated rebuilding of US 2 east and west of the bridge.

The meeting began with introductions of project team and a PowerPoint presentation [see <http://www.vt14emontpelier.vtransprojects.vermont.gov/library.html>] summarizing this project—background, engineering and traffic challenges, comments related to an earlier design proposal, VTrans responses to those concerns, and changes to the plan. VTrans Project Manager Mark Sargent reviewed the purpose of the project. Tom Knight, from Stantec engineering providing consultant services to VTrans, spoke in detail about the challenges of reconstructing US 2 to add turning lanes due to the heavy volume of traffic (13,000 vehicles, 1500 in peak hours). Jill Barrett, the project’s Public Outreach Coordinator reported on outreach conducted with area businesses and town officials, including emergency responders and the supervisor of bus routes for the East Montpelier schools. Wayne Symonds, of the VTrans structures division, talked about the Agency’s excellent track record in rebuilding Vermont’s bridges using accelerated bridge construction methods. Highlights of the meeting presentation included:

- Bridge closure has been reduced from 75 days to no more than 40 days, using a lateral slide construction. Closure is projected to mid from mid-August to mid-September 2018.
- High traffic volumes on US 2 and the narrow village setting present significant challenges for this project.
- VT 14 will be closed for 40 days and traffic delays during peak hours will be up to 15 minutes delay on US 2 with the bridge closed vs. up to 45 minute delay if VT 14 remained open.
- The project team talked with, mostly in person, nearly 30 businesses affected by the project, East Montpelier Town Administrator, school bus supervisor and emergency responders. With proper lead time and planning, most said the impact of bridge closure could be managed.

- VTrans has used accelerated bridge construction, as is proposed on the East Montpelier bridge project, on over 25 projects. Every project has been either completed on time or ahead of schedule.

Following the presentation, members of the public provided feedback to the project design team and asked questions. *[See summary of public dialogue below; questions/comments by the public are in italics.]* Approximately 50 people attended the meeting. Responses to questions were made by Wayne Symonds, VTrans' Structures Design Manager.

- *You have done an excellent job solving a difficult problem. You did not mention potential impacts to archeological resources. I suggest that you talk to archaeologists early on to get the construction area assessed so that no surprises pop up that will delay the work. There was a lumber mill and granite shed on south side of bridge that may be of archeological concern.*

- *What about signals during construction?*

During daylight we plan on live flaggers to manage traffic. Temporary signals will be in place at the ends of the small work zones to provide controls 24/7.

- *Temporary lights will be a formula for disaster for the village as traffic snarls in both directions. Traffic might be backed up to north Montpelier and Plainfield. It will be impossible to access driveways, stores, post office, etc. Also, there will be a problem for Route 14 N traffic trying to get on to Route 2. I suggest flaggers and signals at perimeter of village instead.*

Your concerns about mobility and access are valid. We can hatch key locations on the Route 2 pavement to keep them open but we realize not everyone will honor them. We may need additional flaggers at key spots. The reason we do not want to put flaggers at the perimeter of the village is that we need to reduce the distance between where cars will wait their turn when there is one-way traffic in order to keep waiting time as short as possible.

- *There is a big elevation change on Route 2 approaching the intersection. Has the design allowed enough room for granite truck to stop behind cars making left turns when the work is complete?*

Yes, the length of the left turn lanes include an anticipated queuing length where cars wait to turn left and a deceleration length where cars and truck can stop. Having a dedicated left turn lane is a significant safety improvement over the existing condition because drivers are no surprised by traffic that is stopped behind left turning vehicles.

- How committed is VTrans to this plan? Is it still in discussion?

We want to be committed after this meeting to go full steam ahead. We know we have to replace the bridge and we have the funding in our 2018 budget plan. We are proceeding with our planning towards this date and the calendar includes the possibility of needing to use eminent domain if we can't reach agreement with all the property owners. Eminent domain is a legal process that doesn't operate on an accelerated timeline and can't be streamlined.

- *How can you reassure us that the bridge will last four more years?*

It is currently safe and is on an annual inspection routine. If it is found to merit closer watching, we will inspect even more frequently. I can't promise it will last four more years. If it is found unsafe, it will be closed.

We are not anticipating an emergency, but if a closing is ordered, we may be able to rebuild it a year earlier. We will have a contractor on board and there are different Right of Way rules that apply in an emergency situation. It would be closed more than 40 days, but wouldn't take two years to replace the bridge.

- *Have you considered posting the bridge at 20 tons to extend its life?*

There is a possibility that future inspections may recommend that. However, with this type of bridge there is a fine line between a recommendation to post weight restrictions or to close it.

- *This is a better design than last time, but I still don't like the closing especially since I fully expect the closure to be extended. I prefer a temporary bridge. At least then you are ready if the current bridge fails.*

- *If the bridge fix wasn't in the mix, would you still recommend closing Route 14S to reduce Route 2 traffic?*

Absolutely. It is important for the residents, businesses, and the traveling public to have a predictable traffic flow to plan around. That will be very difficult if 14S is open during the single lane traffic phase of US Route 2 construction. The current average traffic count on Route 2 is 13,000 vehicles/day. This is up significantly from the 11,000 count in place while the Route 14N work was done in 2011.

As far as meeting the deadline, I can say we have met or beat our accelerated bridge deadlines on 25 closures around the state. The attitude used to be that people had to

work around contractors. Now it's the other way around. Contractors face significant penalties for missing deadlines and new designs and materials allow them to get in and out faster while meeting safety standards.

- *Is the temporary bridge out of the picture even if the current bridge fails?*

At this point we don't have the right of way to put in a temporary bridge or use that area for building the new bridge deck. That is still part of our negotiation with property owners.

- *I live across from the intersection of 14 and 2 and will be significantly affected by the widening. No one has come to talk to us or told us anything. When will VTrans start negotiating?*

I hope soon. We were ready to have those meetings with property owners a year ago, but an issue came up and we had to recalculate exactly what property we would need. The Right of Way division did speak with some people on the Route 14 part of this project already because those needs were better defined.

- *Does the Route 2 work have to be done at the same time as the bridge work?*

They are not really separable. The plan includes adding a left turn lane and widening the bridge. If Route 2 remained in its current configuration, there is literally nowhere to add the extra bridge lane.

- *How will detours be handled? Our local roads are likely to get much more traffic.*

The posted detour will take westbound drivers on Route 2 to the roundabout, down the Barre/Montpelier Rd (Route 302), and back north on Route 14 if they need to go that far. That plan will include reprogramming signals on Route 302 to move more traffic during peak times. We know local residents will use town roads to cut their travel distance. We'll work closely with town officials on speed and load enforcements to keep these roads safe.

- *Did you consider a roundabout and get rid of the traffic light? At first I hated driving our trucks around the roundabout on Route 2 but now I think they work well.*

- *It looks like I'll have a retaining wall built right at the edge of my lawn. Is that already designed or can I have some say on what it looks like?*

Any decision about its appearance is definitely open for discussion. We have a variety of designs that meet safety and maintenance issues and will talk with you about them.

- *I have to express my huge frustration. This project has been talked about for 15 years and you still don't have the Right of Way figured out? All we've seen through the years are maps and plans. No one can undo what didn't get done. But I think it's ridiculous that no action has been taken and it should have done a long time ago.*