



Circ-Williston EIS

www.circeis.org

Public comment is extensive in beginning (scoping) phase of Circ-Williston EIS



The Circ-Williston Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a fresh look at transportation improvements between I-89 and Williston, Essex, and Essex Junction. The EIS will be prepared through a Five-Step Process with public involvement at each step. The first step, Scoping has just been completed.

The outcome of the first step of the EIS is a Scoping Memorandum which documents the problems, issues of concern, and possible alternatives identified in interviews, public open houses, and written scoping comments. Its purpose is to provide a foundation for the following steps of the EIS.

Based on the information in the scoping memorandum, the project team is assembling a "long list" of over 50 potential alternatives for screening in Step 2 of the EIS process. This long list and a preliminary screening evaluation will be the subject of public forums to be held the last week of June (see the "Upcoming Public Meetings" box). Input from the June forums will be used

in the final screening, and a short list of alternatives will be publicly discussed in the Fall.

The comments and ideas collected during scoping came from several sources:

- Interviews with 16 city/town officials
- Interviews with 19 environmental, business, transportation, and other organizations
- Interviews with 28 individuals including 22 who commented on the Circ Highway 2003 Final Revised Environmental Assessment
- Open houses attended by over 173 people in Jericho, Williston, and Burlington
- Written comments from Colchester, Essex, and Essex Junction and from the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative, Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce/GBIC, and National Wildlife Federation
- Written comments from 249 individuals via the website, email, or hard copy
- Coordination with state and federal resource agencies

What people said

The open house format of public meetings encouraged active participation and sharing of ideas. Diverse opinions

Public Meetings Coming Up

Public forums will be held the **last week in June** on screening the long list of alternatives developed in the scoping phase at the following locations.

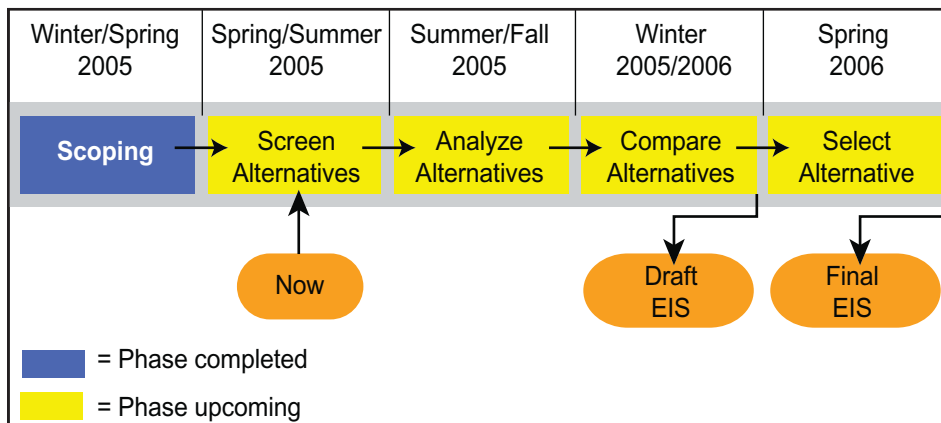
- Tuesday June 28, Champlain Valley Expo, Essex Junction
- Weds June 29, South Burlington High School
- Thurs June 30, Camels Hump Middle School, Richmond

All forums are from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. These forums are hands-on discussions, not open houses or hearings. You are encouraged to come at the beginning and stay until 8:30 to hear the wrap-up.

(listed in no particular order) were expressed on issues such as:

- The need to improve congested areas like Taft Corners in Williston and Five Corners in Essex Junction
- A roadway link to carry traffic from I-89 to VT 289 in Essex
- Infrastructure alternatives such as roundabouts
- System improvements to park-and-rides, public transportation, bike lanes, and pedestrian access
- Impacts of a new highway on sprawl

There were many scoping and open house comments in support of some form of a Circumferential Highway link and many opposed to a new highway. A large portion of the comments focused on specific issues apart from whether a highway should or should not be built.



Most of the comments stated or assumed a need for transportation improvements in the project area. Transportation problems that were repeatedly cited include VT Route 2A, VT Route 15, VT Route 117, Taft Corners, Five Corners, and I-89 Exit 12. Expansion of park-and-ride facilities, public transportation improvements including bus and rail alternatives were suggested.

Many people called for bicycle accommodation on existing roadways, on trails, or in a Circ greenway corridor.

Several cited the need for improvements in the VT 2A corridor including Exit 12 improvements and improvements at the intersections. Most of the comments on intersection improvements focused on roundabouts, both pro and con.

There were many comments with respect to deer wintering habitat, wildlife crossings, and indirect habitat impacts; neighborhood impacts including noise, light pollution, aesthetics, and disrupted pedestrian access; and impacts to community character and historic resources.

Many people suggested a “greenbelt” in the Circ highway corridor. Some

Many voices heard...

255 scoping comments (249 individuals, 3 towns (Essex Junction Village, Essex Town and Colchester), 3 organizations (Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative, Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce/GBIC, National Wildlife Federation)

63 interviews with 16 towns/cities, 19 groups, and 28 individuals

173 individuals signed in at open house meetings

The Scoping Memorandum documenting input is available at www.circEIS.org and at libraries in Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, and Williston and the VTrans Project Office, 20 Kimball Ave, South Burlington.

explicitly called for a greenbelt preserving habitat, agricultural, and recreational land, with cycling and walking paths instead of a highway while others suggested it in addition to a highway. Landscaping along a new highway, and providing animal crossings where

a new roadway crosses habitat were requested.

A complete listing of comments made at open houses and formal comments submitted during the scoping phase of developing the EIS is now available on the project website – www.circEIS.org.

Will public comments matter?

Yes.

Information received will be considered at every stage of the process, including the development of the Purpose and Need statement, which is a basis for evaluating transportation improvements.

Suggestions for alternatives to improve transportation will be considered in preparing a long list of alternatives for screening in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Specific environmental concerns communicated during scoping will be considered by VTrans and FHWA when evaluating the alternatives.

Working with other agencies

Circ Williston has been identified as a priority project under a federal Executive Order. VTrans and FHWA are working with federal, state, and regional transportation, planning, regulatory, and resource agencies to promote environmental stewardship and expedite reviews during the development of the EIS.

The cooperating agencies include the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization and Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, the Vermont Agencies of Agriculture, Farm and Markets, Natural Resources, Commerce and Community Development and Division for Historic Preservation, the Federal Transit Authority, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Workshops Planned on Land Use Impacts

Four technical workshops that will examine the relationship between transportation and land use in Chittenden County have been planned as part of the development of the Circ-Williston EIS project.. Known as Indirect and Cumulative Impact (ICI) Analysis, the first workshop was held at the University of Vermont on May 19. Another is planned for June 23.

The purpose of these ICI technical workshops (**which are separate from the general public forums announced on page one**) is to solicit specific input on the analysis that will be used to evaluate Circ-Williston alternatives and their potential effects on land use/growth and development patterns.

Anyone interested in land use trends and planning in northwest Vermont is invited to attend. The workshops will draw on the expertise of the people who attend, but no special qualifications are needed to participate. Each technical workshop will build on the previous workshops, so a commitment to attend the next three workshops is encouraged.

For more information or to register for upcoming workshops, contact Jim Purdy, jpurdy@louisberger.com, (800) 735-8999, extension 335. Directions and workshop materials will be provided in advance.