

What is an EIS?

An EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) is a detailed report describing the potential effects of a project on the environment, as described in the regulations of the U.S. Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). The Circ-Williston EIS covers transportation improvements in the specific project area between I-89 and Williston, Essex, and Essex Junction.

Why is an EIS needed?

The ultimate purpose of the EIS is to assist in decision making – “to help public officials make decisions that are based on understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment “ (43 CFR 55990 Section 1500.1, CEQ Regulations.)

When is an EIS done?

An EIS is carried out for certain types of projects in response to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). NEPA applies to “proposed actions” -- development projects, legislation, and even policy decisions -- that are federally funded (or partially federally funded), licensed, or permitted. An EIS is the most thorough and comprehensive level of NEPA documentation.

What’s included in an EIS?

An EIS report includes physical, biological, and social elements in the project’s environment.

Who is responsible for the EIS on the Circ-Williston project?

VTrans (Vermont Agency of Transportation), and the Federal Highway Administration, are the lead agencies responsible for developing the EIS document. The Louis Berger Group has been hired as consultants to conduct the study. The Berger Group is nationally recognized as having expertise in the types of issues likely to be involved in the Circ-Williston EIS.

How is an EIS done?

An EIS report is conducted through a study process that includes extensive coordination and information-sharing among public officials and citizens about possible environmental consequences, as well as scientific investigations into key pertinent issues. The study is conducted in five steps.

Are there regulations for how an EIS shall be done?

Yes. The federal Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and FHWA have regulations that describe when and how the NEPA process which guides the development of an EIS should be carried out.

How are the study objectives achieved?

EIS study objectives are achieved through interagency coordination and public participation in planning and project development, in addition to scientific study and analysis.

What agencies besides VTrans have a role in seeing that objectives are met?

The Circ-Williston EIS is being conducted by VTrans as the sponsoring agency and FHWA as the lead federal agency, with input and assistance from the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission as well as state and federal resource agencies. State agencies include the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the Agency of Agriculture. Federal agencies include the EPA, Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. The study is actively seeking input from the communities in and around Chittenden County and from environmental, business, transportation, and other stakeholder organizations.

What are the five phases of developing an EIS?

1. Scoping (identification of issues to be studied)
2. Screening a long list of potential alternatives
3. Analyzing and evaluating a short list of alternatives in detail
4. Comparing alternatives and preparing the Draft EIS (DEIS)
5. Responding to comments, revising, and preparing the Final EIS (FEIS) Identifying the Preferred Alternative

Through every step of developing the EIS, the study team will be gathering information/input from agencies, communities, organizations, and citizens and looking squarely at the environmental consequences of the various alternatives

What phase of the EIS are we currently in?

We are now in the scoping phase. This phase will last until approximately April 2005.

How long will it take to complete the EIS?

About 18 months. The final document is expected to be completed in the spring of 2006.

When and how can the public have a voice in developing the EIS?

The development of the EIS will be an open process, and the public will be encouraged to participate throughout the study. Documents will be accessible on this website and at public libraries. Public forums will be held during each phase in communities within the study area, beginning with three scoping meetings in Open House format on March 15, 16, and 17. Formal comments can be submitted in writing or through this website until April 7, 2005. Comments received during this period will become part of the Scoping Memorandum that will guide the EIS.