

CIRC A/B PREFERRED CORRIDOR

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

- The Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives all have adverse impacts to historic resources and parkland, as well as community character. All are also inconsistent with local and regional plans. While the Circ A/B Alternatives do have greater wetland impacts, they can be reasonably mitigated while the negative community impacts of the Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives can not.
- In addition, the Village of Essex Junction, which owns and controls certain segments of the necessary right-of-way for a Route 2A or Hybrid Alternative, has passed a resolution opposing these alternatives. Moreover, the resolution provides that the Village will not condemn additional property needed for these alternatives and will not agree to relinquish its condemnation authority to VTrans.
- Unlike the Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives, a Circ A/B Alternative corrects or counteracts the transportation problems in the project area without creating new transportation problems. A Circ A/B Alternative reduces traffic on Route 2A as well as other roadways, and improves mobility for automobiles, trucks, buses, pedestrians, bicycles and emergency responders. Because of these characteristics, a Circ A/B Alternative is a sound transportation investment and is the preferred alternative.

CONGESTION RELIEF:

- Circ A/B reduces traffic volumes on Route 2A by 15 percent, a typical effect of a corridor transportation project on parallel road traffic.
- Reduced traffic volumes translate into larger gaps in the traffic flow along Route 2A. This causes reductions in delays of 50 percent to 60 percent on intersecting side streets as well as residential and commercial driveways on Route 2A north of Industrial Avenue/Mountain View Road.
- Circ A/B corrects severe delays at all key Route 2A intersections.
- Circ A/B reduces traffic volumes at high crash locations on Route 2A, thereby reducing the number of potential conflicts between vehicles.
- Circ A/B reduces the severe congestion that affects 40 percent or 1.5 miles of Route 2A between I-89 and Five Corners.
- Circ A/B reduces traffic volumes and congestion on other roadways in the project area, for example, reductions in traffic on North Williston Road of over 50 percent, on VT 15 in Essex Junction up to 35 percent, and on VT 117 up to 25 percent.

MOBILITY IMPROVEMENTS:

- Circ A/B saves an average of four minutes per trip for travel between Essex and Williston during peak hours, a reduction in travel time of about 15 percent. When this

savings is multiplied by thousands of trips over many years, the time and vehicle operating cost savings are substantial.

- Travel time savings associated with Circ A/B results in reduced vehicle operating time and fuel consumption for autos, trucks, and buses.
- Circ A/B would save 483 vehicle operating hours every day just during AM and PM peak hours, which is the equivalent to 126,000 hours of savings over a year. This translates into a savings in gasoline consumption of about 94,000 gallons per year, or about \$378,000 at \$4 per gallon. This also means about 2 million fewer pounds of CO₂ emissions.

COMMUNITY ISSUES:

- All Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives negatively affect the community character of Williston and Essex Junction, while Circ A/B has no negative affect on community character.
- The Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives impact community character because they result in a loss of front yards for homes, increased traffic volumes through Essex Junction's village center, and create unfriendly pedestrian patterns in both Williston and Essex Junction.
- The Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives adversely impact historic resources and parkland, while the Circ A/B Alternatives avoid impacts on such resources.
- Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives have an adverse impact on as many as seven historic properties. The impacts range from the loss of setbacks and street trees resulting in a change in the setting of the historic resource, to the complete removal of a historic house.
- Installing a roundabout at Five Corners would negatively impact Veterans Memorial Park, an important local resource in Essex Junction.
- Circ A/B decreases traffic volumes on Route 2A as well as on other roadways through residential areas.

ROUTE 2A ALTERNATIVES ARE NOT PRACTICAL:

- Federal regulations forbid the Federal Highway Administration from funding or otherwise approving any of the Route 2A Alternatives because of the adverse impacts on historic resources and parkland coupled with the fact that Circ A/B Alternatives avoid such impacts.
- Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives are inconsistent with the comprehensive plans of Williston, Essex and Essex Junction, rendering them impossible to permit.
- Local officials strongly support an A/B Alternative, and intensely oppose any Route 2A or Hybrid Alternative.

- Given the Village of Essex Junction’s strong opposition to the Route 2A or Hybrid Alternative proposals, the only avenue for condemning the property needed for these alternatives would be an act of the Legislature. Even if VTrans, despite its conclusion that these proposals do not meet the objectives of the project, sought such authority from the Legislature, the Legislature would not act to wrest local control away from the Village, particularly given that the project is a local one rather than one with a state-wide scope.
- The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission has determined that only a Circ A/B alternative is consistent with all of the policies of the Chittenden County Regional Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

- Circ A/B alternatives do have greater wetland impacts than the Route 2A alternatives. However, these impacts are not extraordinary and can be minimized and mitigated.
- Through minimization measures, a Circ A/B alternative can be designed to impact fewer than 25 acres of wetlands. This impact is not extraordinary in comparison to other permitted road projects, including the previously permitted Circ project.
- More than 60 percent of the wetland impacts of Circ A/B are to low-value wetlands that were farm fields in the recent past. These fields are no longer farmed as VTrans purchased the land for the Circ in the early 1990s and the surrounding area, also once farmland, has been developed.
- The science and technology exists to fully compensate for the impacted wetland functions and values.

WHY ROUTE 2A OR HYBRID ALTERNATIVES DON’T WORK:

Although some transportation improvements are achieved, each of the Route 2A and Hybrid Alternatives is flawed operationally for one or more of the following reasons:

1. The alternative does not correct or counteract transportation problems.
2. The alternative worsens identified problems.
3. The alternative creates new problems.

These flaws relate not only to vehicle traffic but also to pedestrians, bicycles and emergency responders. Because of these flaws, none of these alternatives are sound transportation investments so it is not sensible to consider any of these alternatives.

- The four-lane Route 2A with signals alternative, as well as the four-lane Route 2A with roundabouts alternative, attract between 35 percent and 55 percent more traffic to Route 2A, which greatly impedes entry or crossing vehicles as well as pedestrians and bicycles. This increased traffic also negatively affects a community’s character as significantly more vehicles travel through its downtown. Some specifics:
 1. For the signalized alternative, this means that severe delays are not corrected at a key intersection – Five Corners.

2. Increased traffic volumes translate into fewer gaps in traffic flow along Route 2A. This causes increased delays, in excess of 200 percent in places, on intersecting side streets as well as residential and commercial driveways on VT 2A north of Industrial Avenue/Mountain View Road because there are fewer gaps in the traffic flow permitting entry onto Route 2A.
 3. Five of the non-signalized, side-street intersections on Route 2A are classified as high crash locations. Increasing the delay for entering vehicles translates into increased driver frustration and the likelihood of increased crashes as drivers take more risk.
 4. The lack of gaps in Route 2A traffic for vehicles entering the roundabout from Marshall Avenue translates into a 1/3-mile, 3-minute delay, or the equivalent of a 72-car back-up on the Marshall Avenue approach to Route 2A in the afternoon.
 5. Fewer gaps in traffic flow means fewer opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle crossings of Route 2A.
 6. These alternatives also increase traffic volumes and congestion on the area's other major roadways, specifically, up to 15 percent to 20 percent increases in traffic volumes on Route 15 and Route 117 in Essex Junction.
- The “roundabouts only” alternative that does not widen Route 2A is basically indistinguishable from doing nothing. Its beneficial effects – reduced delay, congestion, and crashes – are not area-wide; they are exclusively on Route 2A. And even on Route 2A, severe delays at a key intersection – Marshall Avenue/Maple Tree Place – are not corrected as a half mile, 5-minute delay (the equivalent of a 104-car back-up) on Marshall Avenue will occur each afternoon. Meanwhile, severe congestion affecting 40 percent or 1.5-miles of Route 2A between I-89 and Five Corners would not be reduced. Other north-south corridors also would see no reduction in traffic, and roads such as North Williston Road would continue to be used as a bypass to congested Route 2A.
 - As for the Hybrid alternatives – widening Route 2A plus Circ Street – they have similar transportation flaws to the Route 2A only improvements. Some even worsen severe congestion that affects 40 percent or 1.5 miles of Route 2A between I-89 and Five Corners, and creates severe congestion on North Williston Road.
 - There is no reasonable mitigation for the flaws, and these flaws worsen or create transportation problems that adversely affect the character of the local communities.