

# SCOPING MEMORANDUM

## Circ-Williston Environmental Impact Statement

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Prepared on behalf of:



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are the sponsor and lead agency for the Circ-Williston Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published by FHWA in the Federal Register on November 26, 2004. It is reproduced in Appendix A.

This Scoping Memorandum summarizes the input received during the scoping phase of the EIS process; this information is the foundation for the subsequent phases. Detailed public and agency comments and suggestions received during scoping are presented in the appendices to the memorandum, including all public and agency scoping comments.

## 1.1 Project Area

The Circ-Williston Project is intended to improve transportation in the area between Interstate 89 (I-89) and the towns of Williston and Essex and Essex Junction Village. The project area is shown in **Figure 1**. This is the area within which transportation needs and problems will be addressed. The study area for impacts of the improvement alternatives is not limited to the project area and may extend outside Chittenden County for the analysis of some potential impacts. As discussed below, a wide range of alternatives will be considered, including the previous proposal for a circumferential highway.

## 1.2 Scoping and the EIS Process

Scoping is an open process involving the public, communities, concerned organizations, and state and federal agencies. Its purpose is to identify the major and important issues that should be considered in the EIS, including current and future transportation problems. Scoping also identifies possible options for addressing transportation problems, which should be studied in the EIS. The result of this phase is a Scoping Memorandum that records all comments and serves as the foundation for the EIS.

### 1.2.1 The Five Step EIS Process

The Circ-Williston Environmental Impact Statement process has five steps (see **Figure 2**):

1. Scoping;
2. Screening a Long List of Potential Project Alternatives;
3. Analyzing Environmental Impacts of a Short List of Potential Project Alternatives;
4. Comparison of Alternatives and Preparation of the Draft EIS;
5. Public Hearing on the DEIS, Public Comment Period, Response to Comments, and Preparation of Final EIS (FEIS) with a Preferred Alternative.

Public involvement is a key part of the Circ-Williston EIS process and includes public meetings, meetings and interviews with local boards, state and federal resource agencies, concerned organizations, and individuals. A project website [www.circEIS.org](http://www.circEIS.org) will be updated throughout the project with public information, announcements of meetings, and opportunities to comment on the process and its public documents. The five-step EIS process provides multiple opportunities for public involvement between the scoping phase and the DEIS hearing.

## **1.3 Information Gathered during Scoping**

Scoping for the Circ-Williston EIS was focused on collecting as much information, comments, and suggestions from the public and agencies as possible. The following mechanisms were used; input from them is summarized in this Scoping Memorandum and its appendices.

### **1.3.1 Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with town and city officials; concerned business, environmental, and transportation organizations; and individuals who had commented on the previous environmental documents for the Circumferential Highway. Follow-up interviews were held with many local governments to obtain data on land use, planning, zoning, demographics, housing, employment, and other topics. The questionnaire is included in Appendix B along with interview notes.

### **1.3.2 Open Houses**

Three public scoping meetings were held in open house format, i.e., the public was invited to attend at any time during the open house and to circulate to information stations where consultant, VTrans and Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) staff explained exhibits and recorded comments and suggestions on flip charts.

Open Houses were held from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. at:

- Browns River Middle School in Jericho, Tuesday March 15; (50 people signed in)
- Williston Town Hall, Wednesday March 16; (86 signed in)
- Burlington City Hall, Contois Auditorium, Thursday March 17; (37 signed in)

Open Houses were given legal notice in the Burlington Free Press and Seven Days and display ads were placed in local newspapers.

Future public meetings in various formats will be rotated to other locations convenient to people at inner, project area, and outer locations. The notice, ads, exhibits and information recorded are reproduced in Appendix C.

### **1.3.3 Comments**

Public comments were accepted through April 7, 2005. Comments were received through the project website, by mail or email to the VTrans Project Manager, or in person at the Open Houses. Comments were submitted by 249 individuals, three towns, and three organizations. They are reproduced in Appendix D.

### **1.3.4 Coordination with State and Federal Resource Agencies**

VTrans and FHWA, as lead agencies, began a process of consultation and coordination with the state and federal resources agencies with a pre-meeting to gather their input in August 2004. Cooperating Agency Agreements were prepared for each participating agency. An Agency Scoping Meeting was held on February 10, 2005. Coordination will continue throughout the 5-Step EIS Process.

Meeting notes, exhibits, and agency comments are reproduced in Appendix E.

### 1.3.5 How Scoping Input Will Be Used in the EIS

Scoping input has been documented in interview memos and transcribed flip charts, and submitted comments have been stored in a database for future reference. Substantive input on the EIS analyses and process will be accounted for as the analyses are undertaken and the process advances. This includes the input received during scoping and additional input during the subsequent steps of the EIS.

A variety of input was received during scoping on transportation problems in the project area. This information, in combination with an analysis of transportation problems, will form the basis of the purpose and need for the action.

Similarly, many suggestions for alternatives to improve transportation in the Project Area were received, and these will be utilized in preparing a long list of alternatives for screening in Step 2 of the EIS. Potential improvements in all the categories listed in the Notice of Intent will also be suggested by the consultant team, and all alternatives in the long list will be specified at a sufficient level for screening.

Many specific environmental concerns were communicated during scoping; these concerns, and suggestions for appropriate evaluation criteria and analytical approaches to the issues, will be used by the consultant team to prepare a list of measures of effectiveness and criteria for evaluating the alternatives.

Public discussion of the purpose and need, alternatives, and evaluation criteria/measures of effectiveness will take place in the subsequent steps of the EIS process.

### 1.3.6 Public and Agency Review and Comment on This Scoping Memorandum

This Scoping Memorandum will be posted to the public website and available in document repositories in the public libraries in Burlington, Colchester (added at the request of the Town Manager), Essex, Essex Junction, and Williston. Comments are invited on the memorandum's completeness and accuracy in conveying the input received. Additional comments during subsequent steps of the EIS are also welcome at any time. (There will also be a formal comment period following the publication of the Draft EIS.)

## 2 ALTERNATIVES

### 2.1 Introduction

Comments and suggestions on project alternatives were gathered from interviews, open houses, and comments. Alternatives are potential means to fulfill the purpose and need for transportation improvements in the project area. In addition to the No-Action Alternative, alternatives fall into five general categories:

1. Actions to better manage transportation demand, such as ridesharing
2. Improvements to public transportation to and through the project area
3. Improvements to pedestrian and bicycle transportation to and through the project area
4. Improvements to the existing roadway network serving the project area
5. New roadways serving the project area.

In Step 2 of the EIS Process, a long list of alternatives based on scoping and consultant input will be reviewed with the public and agencies and screened. After screening, the short list of alternatives will be developed in greater detail and analyzed in Step 3 with additional public and agency involvement. During screening, if an alternative does not meet the project purpose and need, or if it is clearly not reasonable or has clearly unacceptable impacts, it will be dropped from further consideration. If an alternative contributes to the project's purpose and need but is not in itself sufficient to meet these objectives, it may be retained and combined with other potential alternatives; an example might be pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

In Step 4 the short-listed action alternatives will be compared with each other and the No-Action Alternative in a Draft EIS report. In Step 5 a preferred alternative will be chosen and compared with the No-Action alternative.

In summary, there will be public meetings and other opportunities to involve the public, local officials, concerned organizations, and state and federal resource agencies in development and evaluation of alternatives during the subsequent steps in the EIS process.

## **2.2 Alternatives to be Considered**

### **2.2.1 No-Action Alternative**

All Environmental Impact Statements must consider the option of taking no action and assess its consequences in the same manner as other alternatives. For the Circ-Williston EIS, the No-Action includes all projects currently programmed in the CCMPO's current Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) or in the capital improvement plans of Williston, Essex, and Essex Junction.

### **2.2.2 Action Alternatives**

For short-listed alternatives involving public investment or other actions, two types of consequences will be assessed in Step 3: direct and indirect. Direct consequences result immediately from the construction and operation of new facilities and services, such as right-of-way taken for the improvements, stormwater runoff from new pavement, or noise from vehicles. Indirect consequences include changes in land use and development patterns and the impacts of these changes, such as runoff from impervious surfaces and traffic generation. Consequences of the No-Action Alternative will also be assessed for comparison. The analysis of all alternatives will also include the cumulative impacts of all foreseeable public and private transportation and development projects in the study area.

Existing data from previous studies will be utilized where relevant (for example, data on historic resources), but in general new data will be collected as needed to provide a current baseline of information. The CCMPO travel demand model will be used to project future traffic volumes and public transportation ridership.

A number of action alternatives were suggested by the comments and suggestions received from the interviews, open houses, and public scoping comments and others will be added by the consultant team. Suggested alternatives are highlighted in the summaries of input received and in the appendices to this Scoping Memorandum.

## **3 ISSUES AND EVALUATION CRITERIA/ MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS**

During interviews, many concerns and issues were cited as important to consider in evaluating transportation alternatives. These issues ranged from transportation benefits and impacts for all modes, including pedestrian, bicycle, and public transportation; and the consequences of the alternatives on land use and development patterns, regional and local economies, housing, and local services; open and agricultural land; air and water quality; wildlife habitat; historic and archeological resources; energy use; and community quality of life, including spill-over traffic, noise, and visual impacts. The consequences of all alternatives will be assessed using specific Evaluation Criteria (for impacts) and Measures of Effectiveness (for transportation benefits). These Evaluation Criteria and Measures of Effectiveness will be developed with public and agency involvement during Step 2, utilizing the input received during scoping as well as additional agency coordination and public involvement opportunities.

## 4 SUMMARY OF INPUT RECEIVED

Note: The summaries in this Scoping Memorandum characterize the specific input received based on the relative proportion of individuals, organizations, and municipalities providing the specific or similar input. The characterizations of “many”, “some”, “few”, etc., have a qualitative basis and reflect the actual interviews, open house flip charts, and submitted comments, which are reproduced in the Appendices. All input will be treated equally in the EIS process regardless of the number of individuals providing the input.

### 4.1 Interviews and Meetings

Interviews were conducted with local officials from all Chittenden County municipalities except Winooski and Huntington, which were unable to schedule an interview. Interviews were also held with environmental, business, transportation, and other organizations and with staff of the regional planning commissions in Lamoille, Franklin, and Addison County. (Chittenden County RPC and Chittenden County MPO are providing technical support as cooperating agencies.) VTrans sent letters to all individuals who commented on the 2003 Final Re-Evaluation of the Chittenden County Circumferential Highway and the consultant team was able to contact and interview 22 of these individuals and six others who expressed interest. In addition, VTrans offered to meet with local boards and other groups, and meetings were held with the Williston Select Board, the Burlington Planning Commission, and two neighborhoods in Williston. Additional meetings are scheduled or planned in the future.

The questionnaire used to guide the interviews was sent to interviewees in advance along with the Notice of Intent; the questionnaire is included in Appendix B. Interviews began with a brief discussion of the project area map and a diagram of the Five-Step EIS Process (See Figures 1 and 2.)

### 4.2 Summary of Interviews

This summary is organized into sections corresponding to the scoping questions in the questionnaire.

#### 4.2.1 Travel Patterns and Transportation

Most persons acknowledged that traffic is congested in the project area, although some persons felt this congestion is relatively minor compared to large metropolitan areas like the District of Columbia or Boston. Major regional destinations include the Vermont Route 2A (VT 2A) corridor north of I-89 (industry including IBM and Taft Corners shopping), central Burlington and the Hill, and commercial/industrial areas in South Burlington, around the airport, and in northwest Williston. It was noted that more shopping and cinema-related trips are going to Williston and Essex than in the past, and the project area is now perceived by many as the regional retail center. Through-traffic in the project area was cited by nearly all interviewees as a major part of the volumes.

Vermont Route 15 (VT 15) is one of the busiest routes taken by the commuters and thus has a significant level of congestion. Residents of Essex, Jericho, Underhill and towns to the north such as Fairfax take VT 15 to get to the core employment area (Burlington, South Burlington, Essex Junction, and northwest Williston), some of them filtering south through Jericho to Vermont Route 117 (VT 117). Old Stage Road, Tower Road, Rte. 108/Sand Hill Road, and Susie Wilson Road are routes with heavy volumes and congestion at their intersections with VT 15.

Other roads, such as U.S. Route 2 (US 2), VT 2A, Vermont Route 116 (VT 116), VT 117, Governor Peck, Oak Hill, and Brownell Roads are also being used as routes to the project area by the commuters. A Select Board member in Bolton noted that many commuter and recreational trips go not only to Williston but on to Colchester. Hinesburg, Shelburne, and Richmond experience heavy volumes from towns to the south.

Milton identified Middle East/East Road as alternate routes to the project area from the north. Charlotte and Shelburne noted that traffic filters toward South Burlington and Williston by using the east-west roads to reach VT 116 and VT 2A. Governor Peck Road in Richmond and US 2 or VT 117/North Williston Rd are commuter routes from the east and northeast.

Everyone agreed that volumes in the project area have increased substantially over the past 25 years, particularly over the past four to five years, and will continue to grow, regardless of Circ-Williston improvements. The discussion of deficiencies tended to focus on areas of congestion, particularly Taft Corners, Industrial/Mountain View/VT 2A, and Five Corners which were mentioned by nearly all interviewees. Local officials in Essex, Essex Junction, and Underhill identified VT 128/VT 15, VT15/Brown's Trace Road, and River Road/VT 15 as major concentrations of congestion to the northeast. A number of individuals cited traffic in Colchester on Lake Shore Drive and Blakely, Severance, and Kellogg Roads.

There is a growing amount of traffic on alternate routes in Williston and Essex Junction as well as in the outlying towns, and these volumes are perceived as traffic impacts on roads intended to carry much lower volumes. Congestion has major negative effects on business and pedestrian travel in downtown Essex Junction, and concern was expressed about "boxing in" IBM with congested roads. Several persons interviewed said that VT 289 was a partial solution to the Five Corners congestion problem but that traffic has continued to grow and is now back to previous levels. Exit 12 on I-89 was identified as an interchange with a serious safety problem of back-ups onto I-89. Travel from the north on I-89 through South Burlington is less reliable owing to high volumes, particularly after snowfall. The area around I-89 Exit 11, including the US 2/VT 117 intersection and Governor Peck Road intersection, was also cited as congested during peak commuting hours.

Housing growth in towns in Franklin, Lamoille, and Addison counties, such as Georgia, St. Albans, Fairfax, Fletcher, Cambridge, Vergennes, Bristol and towns farther from Chittenden County was cited as a major source of trips to the project area. Officials and staff in Shelburne reported substantial commuting north from Vergennes and even Middlebury. VT 15 carries many trips from the northeast, while trips from the north use I-89 to Exit 12 or filter down via US 7 and VT 2A (to avoid congestion on I-89 at the Burlington exits) to the north end of VT 289.

Several interviewees noted that bus service in the project area is not well used, owing in their opinion to insufficient schedule frequency, lack of late evening service, and limited routes. Conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists were cited as poor or dangerous by several interviewees, particularly at the Five Corners in Essex Junction.

Most of those interviewed felt that the Circ and other improvements would at least partially solve the problems in the project area, although there are some fears that certain alternate routes, e.g., Mountain View Road and Susie Wilson Road would carry heavier volumes, and traffic routes in the outer tier of Chittenden County towns would not be improved. Some individuals expressed the view that additional roadway capacity would be only a short-term solution and roads would become congested again.

#### 4.2.2 *Alternatives*

There was general agreement that the list of categories of potential alternatives in the Notice of Intent is the right list for the EIS to consider. There was qualified support for transit solutions and ped/bike improvements, although most doubted that these would be sufficient by themselves; poor headways, trip time and lack of late service were cited as a limitation for bus transit (although it is used by shoppers at Wal-Mart and Taft Corners); many interviewees noted that the current CCTA funding system is a fundamental problem.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) was supported by most interviewees as a partial solution, and many noted that more Park and Ride facilities are needed. There was also support for Transportation Systems Management (TSM) measures such as computer coordinated signal timing. Many saw the need for some improvements on existing roads such as VT 2A and intersections like the Five Corners in Essex Junction, but there was also wariness that roadway widening or roundabouts could have impacts on community character and historic resources. Several interviewees expressed support for roundabout proposals, including those proposed by the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative; others cited right-of-way takings and expressed doubt about the feasibility and utility of roundabouts to improve the VT 2A corridor. Many people interviewed felt a combination of alternatives including TDM, transit, TSM, and improvements to local roads should be considered as part of a package.

Many favored a limited-access highway connection in Williston either as a principal alternative or part of a package of improvements; a number of interviewees opposed a limited-access highway connection joining I-89 and VT 289. There was some support for a new roadway connecting only to Mountain View Road from the north or south, either at-grade or as a limited-access highway but not a full connection between I-89 and VT 289. Some interviewees felt that any increase in roadway capacity, particularly in a new highway would be counterproductive and lead to more congestion.

Specific features to be considered included Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and signal pre-emption for buses. A variety of public transportation improvements was suggested including commuter rail from St. Albans, Burlington, Montpelier, and Middlebury. Shuttle bus service with flexible routes was also suggested by several people. Also suggested was a commuter boat from Charlotte to Burlington and Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) with feeder service.

Suggestions were also given as to the widening of the roads (especially at Taft Corners and Industrial Avenue), boulevard cross sections, center turning lanes, turning lanes at intersections, roundabouts, and truck lanes or truck routes. Some interviewees suggested an East-West Connector between VT 289 and Allen Martin Parkway should be included in a build alternative. Improvements at Susie Wilson Road and VT 15 were also suggested.

The Southern Connector to Burlington, a new exit/Airport Connector at I-89/VT 116 in South Burlington, improvements at I-89 Exit 13, and a new I-89 exit in Milton were also mentioned as features to consider.

Pedestrian and bicycle facilities were dismissed as transportation elements by some but cited as important parts of the overall system by others; a bike path next to the highway in the Circ corridor from Williston through Colchester was suggested and some interviewees recommended bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the VT 2A corridor.

#### *4.2.3 Issues to be Studied*

Virtually none of the issues listed in the questionnaire were cited as being not worth study and many interviewees said the full range of issues should be included in the analysis. The issues most often cited as important were traffic/access issues; some included VT 15, Saturday mid-day peak period congestion, cut-through traffic impacts on alternate routes, safety (Exit 12 on I-89) and traffic impacts at the north end of VT 289 and in Burlington and Richmond. Some interviewees emphasized mobility and choice as a more appropriate goal than focusing on traffic flow.

Indirect and cumulative land use effects were often cited as particularly important. Many felt that residential development in adjacent counties is a major issue. Several interviewees suggested that housing, particularly affordable housing, is an important or critical issue both for low income people and the county's workforce generally.

Energy (in the context of fuel expended while vehicles are delayed by congestion or stopped at traffic signals) was mentioned as important by many people interviewed.

Other issues cited as important were the economy (including job/housing imbalance), regional air quality, water quality, agricultural land conversion, regional and project area wildlife corridors/habitat fragmentation, historic/archeological resources, emergency access, and truck access, including access for IBM and the regional landfill. Traffic noise and visual impacts on abutters was cited as important by several people, including residents of the Brennan Woods and Southridge neighborhoods in Williston who attended a public neighborhood meeting to discuss the Circ-Williston EIS process.

#### *4.2.4 Communication*

Most felt that people committed for or against the Circ will turn out at public meetings regardless of location; most others will not turn out even to local venues. There were several comments that VTrans needs to overcome public fatigue with the issues and get beyond pre-set positions for or against. Evening meetings are preferred over Saturday mornings. Local newspapers and call-in shows on public access television and radio were cited several times as the best means of communication with the public. There were differing opinions about meeting format, some preferring workshops and others more traditional hearing-style meetings.

### **4.3 Open Houses**

Three open houses were held on March 15-17 in Jericho, Williston, and Burlington. The primary objectives were to inform the public about the project and to receive their suggestions on the issues to be analyzed in the EIS, and these objectives were achieved. The three sessions were well attended with 173 people signing-in, including State Representatives Gaye Symington, Jim McCullough, Mary Peterson, Jim Condon, and Bill Keogh and representatives from a number of state and federal agencies, as noted below.

Although many participants came expecting a conventional public hearing, the shared sense of the VTrans, FHWA, and consultant staff is that the open-house format encouraged many people to participate who normally would not have voiced their opinions in a conventional meeting. At all of the information tables, people appeared to be gratified to see their comments being recorded on the flip charts. The tone of the open houses was positive and energetic, and negative debate and posturing was largely avoided. People seemed to get the message that this is the beginning of a multi-step process.

The input received at the open houses included diverse opinions (listed in no particular order) on such issues 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.

Signed-in attendance was as follows (total attendance was greater than the number of signees):

- Jericho** 50, including agency representatives Mike Quinn, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (VACCD); and Susan Haitsma, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VANR). Media: Channel 5 and Burlington Free Press
- Williston** 86, Including agency representatives Beth Alafat, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Mike Adams, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Bill Neidermyer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services; Mike Quinn, VACCD; and Susan Haitsma, VANR. Media: Williston Observer
- Burlington** 37, including agency representative Mike Quinn, VACCD; Media: Channel 17.

4.3.1 *Format*

The open house format provided five information stations with exhibits on an orientation to the process, transportation issues, transportation alternatives, land use, and communities/environment. Members of the public were asked to sign in and were given a folder of handouts. Exhibits and handouts are reproduced in Appendix C.

At the Orientation Station, there was a briefing on the project definition and the five-step EIS Process. People were given colored dots to place on the Project Area map to indicate where they live. The overall results are shown in Table 1:

At each station, staff from LBG, VTrans, and CCMPO provided information and received comments and suggestions in informal discussions with the public. Public comments were recorded on flip charts.

A brief PowerPoint presentation reviewed the project definition, five-step EIS process, website, and how to submit comments. As was noted in the presentation, open house exhibits were soon afterward posted to the project website and provided in hard copy at the libraries in Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, and Williston. Several comments were received on paper forms provided in the handout folder or on a laptop with a comment entry form. A second laptop running the project website was also provided to introduce it and offer assistance to anyone needing it; several people took advantage of this demonstration.

**Table 1. Location of Residences of Open House Attendees**

Location of Residence	No. of Attendees Residing in Area
Jericho -	16
Points north/east of Jericho	11
Williston -	46
Essex Junction Village	9
Essex Town outside EJ	13
S. Burlington -	2
Burlington -	15
Points south/southeast of Williston	10
Points north/northwest of Burlington	12

Note: not all attendees participated in this exercise.

### 4.3.2 Highlights of Open House Comments and Suggestions

There were active conversations at all stations, and people were very interested in seeing their comments recorded on the flip charts.

#### Orientation

Many people expressed satisfaction at the multiple opportunities for public meetings provided at each step of the five-step process. A few comments were made that the project should not have “Circ” in its title.

#### Transportation Issues

There was general agreement about the level of congestion in the project area and need for improvements, although some people questioned the need and degree of congestion and delay compared to traffic congestion around other cities in the United States. Considerable detail about specific situations was offered by the public. There were many comments about conditions on VT 2A, particularly at US 2 in Williston and at the Five Corners in Essex Junction, and the difficulty of entering VT 2A and US 2 in peak periods.

Industrial Avenue, VT 15, Susie Wilson Road, and the VT 117/US 2 intersection near I-89 Exit 11 and roadways in Colchester were also mentioned frequently as being congested. Backups at I-89 Exit 12 were mentioned by many people as a major safety concern; pedestrian safety was also a concern, particularly at Five Corners. There were questions about the status of the ongoing studies of I-89 Exits 11 and 12 and a possible I-89 exit in South Burlington at Hinesburg Road (VT 116). The need for another crossing of the Winooski River was mentioned.

Emergency access was mentioned as an issue by some people. Other comments concerned the need for better public transportation services, including bus schedules, routes and frequencies. Pedestrian and bicycle conditions were frequently mentioned as needing improvement. Truck traffic was expressed as a concern, especially on local roads. One comment questioned the growth trends in vehicle miles traveled on which the future year analysis would be based.

#### Transportation Alternatives

Many people expressed support for a Circ A/B limited-access highway connection (some included the Colchester section); there were also many opponents of a Circ Highway; station facilitators tried to limit debate and focus comments on specifics. Some people raised questions about whether a Circ Highway alternative should have two or four lanes or be designed as a parkway; another question raised by a few people was whether it should run from I-89 to VT 289 or connect only to Mountain View Road, either from the north or from the south. Cost was a concern expressed by some people.

There were many positive and negative comments about roundabouts, and questions about the differences between roundabouts and traffic rotaries. Comments about roundabouts tended to focus on their right-of-way requirements, whether they would solve congestion, access implications along VT 2A if traffic has fewer gaps, suitability for pedestrians and bicycles, and whether roundabouts will be difficult to drive through.

Other specific suggestions for improvements to existing roadways were made, such as improving VT 117 or North Williston Road as an alternative to a Circ highway connection, providing alternate routes to/around VT 2A to remove through traffic, and providing a connector from VT 289 to Allen Martin Parkway. Tolling was suggested by one person. One person suggested a single-point diamond interchange at I-89 Exit 12. Public transportation improvement were supported by many people, including better bus service in the project area and rail or light rail connections to Burlington, St Albans and Montpelier. More park-and-ride

facilities were suggested by many people, and there was support for other demand and system management methods such as flexible work schedules and Intelligent Transportation Systems approaches.

Pedestrian/bicycle accommodation was mentioned as necessary or desirable by many people. Both on-road bicycle accommodation and separated paths were suggested. Crossing a highway corridor was identified as an issue by some people.

### Land Use

There was active discussion about the maps showing commuting patterns and many comments about access to jobs, the economy, and the need for affordable housing. A greenway on both sides of the Circ corridor was suggested by some people. There was also much discussion about sprawl; many people who support a Circ Highway are also in favor of land-use policies to promote compact development. People tended to be realistic in their expectations about the effectiveness of land use controls. Some people commented that the transportation system should be designed to support a desirable land use pattern. The opinion was expressed that current land conversion trends are due primarily or in part to population growth and likely to continue with or without a Circ Highway; others disagreed and felt that a Circ highway would promote sprawl and or development around interchanges. Some people were concerned about a loss of jobs and businesses in Burlington's downtown and its Old North End, as well as other in-town center business districts. IBM's need for better access was also mentioned. Many people expressed the need for better planning and land use controls and a long-term perspective.

### Communities and the Environment

There was discussion of sprawl as a community character/quality of life issue. Loss of agricultural land and development out of character with Vermont was expressed as a quality of life concern by several people. There was much discussion of transportation problems as a quality of life issue, including spill-over traffic on secondary roads. Some specific observations about studying and preserving wildlife habitat and avoiding habitat fragmentation were made. Air quality, water quality, noise, headlight glare, and visual impacts were frequently mentioned as important issues, particularly for the neighborhoods and school along the previous Circ highway alignment; access to recreation and effect on property values was also mentioned. Air quality was also cited several times in connection with congestion. Potential historic district impacts were a concern for improvements to VT 2A and Essex Junction's Five Corners.

Several commenters described the characteristics of their towns which they valued as important contributions to community character; these included quiet residential areas, a rural nature and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. Many people were concerned that these characteristics would suffer from the increased congestion they are experiencing, and believed the project would reduce such congestion.

### Other Comments

Several people expressed frustration with the time and cost of studies and hoped that something will be done soon; these comments were often in favor of a Circ highway. Several people expressed the opinion that new highways will be inadequate in the long term, are not sustainable, and would promote undesirable development patterns. One person commented that the project name should not refer to "Circ-Williston", but others felt this title would help people to better understand the project location.

## **4.4 Interagency Coordination**

### **4.4.1 Regional, State, and Federal Agencies**

VTrans and FHWA are committed to working with federal, state, and regional transportation, planning, regulatory, and resource agencies to effectively and efficiently collaborate in the development and review of the Circ-Williston EIS. This is particularly important because Circ-Williston has been identified as a priority transportation infrastructure project under Executive Order 13274 (Environmental Stewardship and Transportation Infrastructure Project Reviews), which directs agencies to promote environmental stewardship and expedite environmental reviews through a collaborative process. The following agencies are involved in addition to VTrans and FHWA:

#### Regional

Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

#### State

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Farm and Markets  
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources  
Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development  
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

#### Federal

Federal Transit Authority  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

### **4.4.2 Pre-Scoping Meeting**

A Pre-Scoping meeting of these agencies was held in Essex on August 19, 2004, facilitated by Wayne Kober from the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence. The meeting was conducted in a workshop format. Key input included the need for proactive public involvement and well-defined agency coordination, a fresh look at all potential alternatives and issues, and adherence to previous mitigation commitments as applicable. Agenda, attendance list and full meeting notes are included in Appendix E.

### **4.4.3 Scoping Meeting**

An Agency Scoping Meeting was held on February 10, 2005 in Essex. The USEPA participated by telephone. A full set of agenda, meeting notes, attendance list, and exhibits provided to attendees is included in Appendix E. At the meeting, Louis Berger Group Project Manager Larry Pesesky provided a briefing on the Five-Step EIS Process and led a discussion of each exhibit and agency concerns. Much of the discussion centered on sources of data and agency comments and suggestions relevant to each aspect of the EIS. Topics of discussion included the project purpose and need, transportation analysis methodology, the assessment of indirect and cumulative impacts, and individual resource areas, including agency concerns, regulatory rule-making in progress, and contacts for more information.

The following resource areas were discussed:

- Land use
- Air quality
- Water Quality and Storm Water Management
- Noise
- Wetlands and River Corridors
- Floodplains
- Groundwater
- Fish and Wildlife
- Agricultural Land Conversion
- Hazardous Materials
- Historic and Archeological Resources
- Public Lands
- Community and Neighborhood Issues
- Energy
- Earth Resources
- Forest Resources

Next steps and collaborative review procedures were also discussed and all attendees agreed to provide materials for review and plan meeting dates well in advance, and to turn around reviews without delay.

## 5 PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENTS

Scoping comments from local governments were received from Colchester, Essex, and Essex Junction. Comments from organizations were submitted by Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative, National Wildlife Federation, and Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce/GBIC. A total of 249 comments was also received from individuals.

The purpose of receiving scoping comments is not to hold a referendum on the Circ Highway, roundabouts, or any other potential transportation improvement; rather, comments identify issues of concern and opinions that will be addressed in the subsequent steps of the EIS process, where disputed issues can be resolved.

The comments are briefly summarized below. All comments received are reproduced in full in Appendix D.

### **Essex Junction Village and Essex Town**

The Essex Selectboard and Village of Essex Junction Trustees submitted as a formal comment an adopted resolution citing both the Circ-Williston EIS and the alternative proposed by the Vermont Smart Growth Coalition. The resolution supports a Circumferential Highway and requests that alternatives to the highway should provide an alternative route for non-destination traffic and emergency vehicles around Five Corners and Essex Junction Village, improve pedestrian and bicycle safety, not reduce permit capacity for future development, and not substantially widen existing roads or diminish parking or adversely affect Village character, historic resources, or Veterans Memorial Park. The resolution specifically supports sections A/B of the Circumferential Highway.

### **Essex Town Manager and Economic Development Commission**

The Town of Essex submitted extensive comments from both the Town Manager and the Chair of the Economic Development Commission and provided detailed answers to the interview questionnaire. The comments note that Essex has long history of planning, zoning, and providing infrastructure to support and promote compact growth centers, support its role as a sub-regional center, and preserve the Town's

resources. It has supported a Circumferential Highway since 1967 and assumed its existence in the Town's planning. The Town experiences problems related to non-destination traffic which utilizes local roads as well as the state highways that pass through the town and intersect at Five Corners. The Town supports transportation improvements which would support its planning objectives, alleviate traffic congestion, remove through traffic from local roads, provide emergency vehicle access, and provide multiple transportation modes while preserving the Town's character and natural, historic, and open space resources. It requests that its planning documents be considered by the Circ-Williston EIS. It also requests study of a specific set of alternatives that include combinations of Circ Highway segments A/B [from I-89 to VT 289] with and without a range of actions to improve demand management, public transportation, and existing roadways; Allen Martin Parkway connection to VT 289; and phased development of other Circumferential Highway segments, Southern Connector in Burlington, and other scenarios of regional transportation improvements. These comments also included an unsigned resolution similar to the one adopted by the Selectboard and Village Trustees, which also includes consideration of reducing truck traffic, accommodating rail and truck freight, and avoiding permanently blocking the existing right of way for a future crossing of the Winooski River.

### **Colchester Selectboard**

The Town Manager of Colchester submitted as a comment a resolution of the Town's Selectboard which is similar to the Essex and Essex Junction resolution but not limited to those communities in the consideration of benefits and impacts.

### **Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative**

The Collaborative's comment submission included its January 2005 Alternatives to the Chittenden County Circumferential Highway, which included two alternatives. One alternative involves improvements to VT 2A using roundabouts and cross-section modifications; a second alternative includes these proposals plus an at-grade "Circ Street" from I-89 to Mountain View Road. In addition, the comments suggested consideration of incremental improvements including these alternatives and full implementation of measures to manage transportation demand, public transportation including commuter rail and light rail service, and alternative land use strategies. It was also suggested that alternative land use forecasts based on different transportation investments should be evaluated. The Collaborative's comments also included a request to create a stakeholder advisory panel. They also suggested that the Purpose and Need statement should reflect state, regional, and local land use laws and regulations, that all alternatives be evaluated in terms of achieving the "concentrated land use scenario" in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and in terms of their relative costs. A comprehensive long-range approach to addressing traffic in the VT 2A corridor is suggested.

### **Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce/GBIC**

The Chamber/GBIC's comment supports the Circumferential Highway as a means to redistribute traffic away from local roadways and community centers and to accommodate trucks, including "Super Loads". They suggest that a Circ alternative would support improving other transportation modes and appropriately managed land use patterns supporting planned growth centers. They raise a number of questions about roundabouts, including their functioning with regard to trucks, trains, and emergency vehicles, and their effects on community character. The comments also suggest the need to remove non-destination traffic from community centers and local streets and to avoid widening existing roads, removing parking, or moving congestion elsewhere in the roadway system. The Chamber/GBIC comments support completion of the full Circumferential Highway.

## **National Wildlife Federation**

The Federation suggests a planning perspective for addressing the relationship between transportation improvements and their consequences for land use, habitat, and communities. They raise the question of whether measures to address congestion in the project area would increase growth in surrounding areas and thereby have adverse consequences on the regional network of habitats such as isolated wetlands, low and mid-elevation forests, and large continuous habitat areas that provide connectivity for wildlife. They also express concern on the effect of such growth patterns on economic disinvestment in older communities and the ability of the smaller outlying communities to accommodate new development. The Federation suggests that the definition of purpose and need should include addressing project area congestion and connecting the commercial centers of Essex Junction and Williston to the Interstate, but not increasing access to Colchester and towns to the northeast. They support further public involvement in the development of performance measures to evaluate Circ-Williston alternatives.

## **Individual Commenters**

A total of 249 comments was received from individuals via mail, email, project website, and submission of written comments at open houses. A large portion of the comments focused on specific issues and did not take a position on the Circumferential Highway; those that did take a position for or against a highway alternative were roughly evenly divided. Because the EIS process focuses on facts and issues, not positions, the summary does not report how many comments of each type were received but uses terms like “many” and “several” to indicate issues that appeared multiple times.

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; a few comments stated that congestion was not a serious issue in the project area.

A number of comments suggested a regional transportation perspective. Several comments supported consideration of park-and-ride and demand management or public transportation improvements including bus and rail as alternatives to a new highway. Some comments stated that there would be insufficient ridership of public transportation to solve the problem. A number of comments called for bicycle accommodation on existing roadways, on trails, or in a Circ greenway corridor. Several comments mentioned hazards for bicyclists on project area roads or for pedestrians at Five Corners.

Many comments addressed improvements in the VT 2A corridor including Exit 12 improvements, changes in the cross-section, and improvements at the intersections. Most of the comments on intersection improvements focused on roundabouts. Many of these comments raised issues that the commenter felt would make roundabouts ineffective or would cause impacts due to the land they would occupy; many other comments supported roundabouts. (These issues will be addressed in detail in the subsequent steps of the EIS.)

A number of comments suggested that improvements to existing roadways would not solve the problem and that traffic should be diverted around the VT 2A corridor with a new highway link; other comments took the position that improvements using roundabouts would be effective in solving the problem and diverting traffic would be unnecessary or inappropriate. Reasons given for supporting a new highway link included reducing congestion and improving safety, relieving VT 15 and VT 117, removing trucks and other through-traffic from local roads, serving IBM, and providing infrastructure to support growth. Reasons given for opposing a new highway link included sprawl and induced traffic, safety, habitat impacts, impacts on the adjacent neighborhoods and school, sustainable transportation policy, and spending priorities considering public transportation and other transportation needs. Among the comments supporting a limited access highway link, suggestions included a 4-lane Circ with median, 2-lane Circ, and highway links from either the north or south stopping at Mountain View Road. Some comments suggested a full Circumferential Highway to Route 127 in Colchester, Southern Connector in Burlington, or additional exits on I-89; (these proposals are outside the project area but will be considered in the cumulative impacts

analysis). New at-grade roadways were also suggested, including support for the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative “Circ Street” proposal and a suggestion for an access road from US 2 to Redmond Road. Connecting Allen Martin Parkway to VT 289 was also suggested.

Air quality and fuel usage were cited both in support of a new highway link and in opposition. Induced land use change (“sprawl”) was a concern expressed in many comments, although some comments suggested that land use changes would occur with or without transportation changes. Several comments suggested a greenbelt to limit or mitigate these land use impacts. Others comments focused on the adequacy or inadequacy of planning and zoning. Many comments supported the need for more infrastructure to support the economy; some questioned whether a new highway would only move employment out of established centers.

Several of those who commented expressed concerns about deer wintering habitat, wildlife crossings, or indirect impacts to regional habitat, and some comments expressed concern about protecting sand plain forest (which is not located in the Circ-Williston project area but would have been part of the Colchester section of the originally proposed Circ Highway). There were also several comments on neighborhood impacts including noise, light pollution, aesthetics, and disrupted pedestrian access. Impacts to community character were cited as a concern by several comments in relation to a new highway, roundabouts, or traffic on local roadways. A number of comments expressed concern about water quality impacts due to stormwater runoff, visual impacts, and impacts to historic resources.

Many comments suggested features of transportation alternatives that would mitigate impact or provide additional benefits. A large portion of these suggested a “greenbelt” in the Circ highway corridor; some explicitly called for a greenbelt preserving habitat, agricultural, and recreational land, with cycling and walking paths instead of a highway; others suggested it in addition to a highway; and many others were not specific about this question. Other measures called for were landscaped berms or other landscaping along a new highway, and providing animal crossings where a new roadway crosses habitat. Mitigation of construction period impacts and maintenance of traffic were also called for.

Many comments focused on the cost of a new highway and alternative spending priorities, and several suggested that cost issues be explored in the EIS. Several comments were critical of delay and its associated costs or questioned the need for a new EIS.

## **6 NEXT STEPS**

The next step in the EIS process is Step 2, Screening of the Long List of Alternatives. VTrans will schedule public workshops to develop input on the screening-level evaluation of a long list of alternatives, including suggestions of any alternatives not previously identified and the appropriate evaluation criteria for screening. Additional open houses will be held on the recommended shortlist to be advanced to Step 3 for detailed development and analysis. Step 2 is anticipated to take place in May through July 2005. Step 3 will conclude in Fall 2005, and Step 4, including publication of a Draft EIS is anticipated to conclude late in 2005.

## **APPENDICES**

### ***A. Notice of Intent***

### ***B. Interviews***

List of Interviews Conducted  
Interview Questionnaire  
Notes of Each Interview

### ***C. Open House***

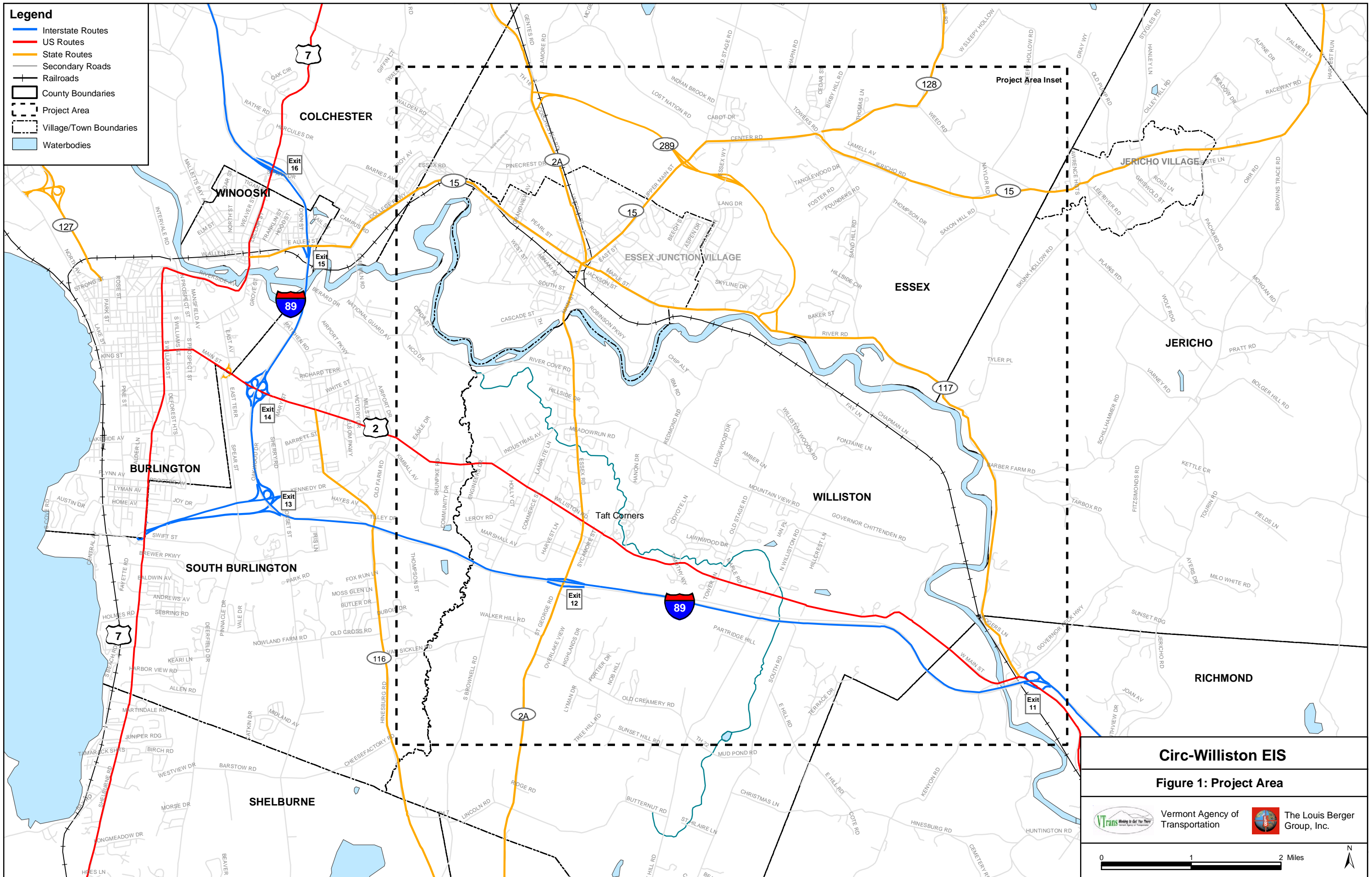
Notice and Ads  
Exhibits  
Comments and Suggestions Received

### ***D. Scoping Comments***

Comments Received and Responses to Comments  
    Local Governments  
    Organizations  
    Individuals

### ***E. State and Federal Resource Agency Coordination***

Materials from February 10, 2005 Scoping Meeting  
Full Notes of Feb 10, 2005 Scoping Meeting



**Circ-Williston EIS**

**Figure 1: Project Area**

Vermont Agency of Transportation

The Louis Berger Group, Inc.

0 1 2 Miles

N

Source: Draft 2025 Chittenden County Metropolitan Transportation Plan, CCMPO.

## Figure 2: Circ-Williston Environmental Impact Statement

**LEGEND:**  
Public Involvement Activities in EIS Process

**INTERVIEWS**

- Stakeholders
- Elected Officials
- Interest Groups
- Businesses
- Residents

**PUBLIC FORUMS**

- 3 Locations
- 1 Round per Step
- Public Hearing

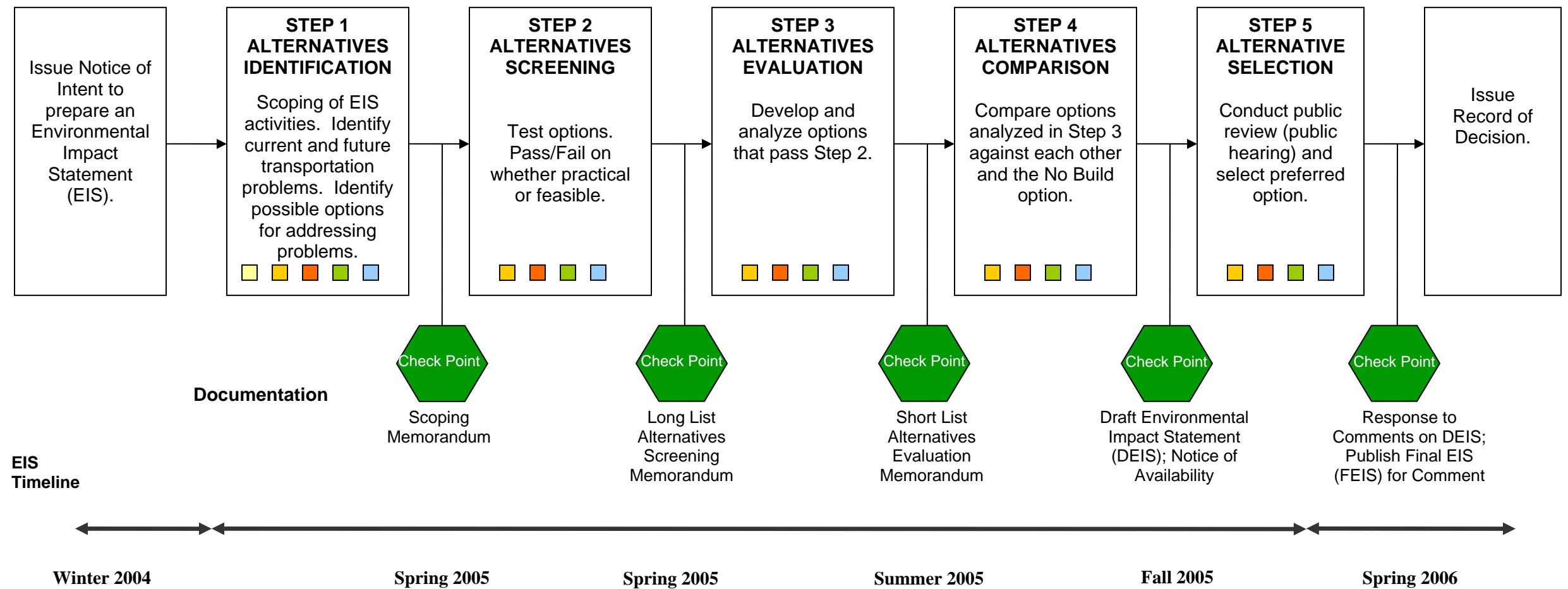
**MEETINGS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS**

**AGENCY MEETINGS**

- CCMPO
- CCRPC
- State and Federal Agencies

**GENERAL**

- Mailing List
- Website
- Newsletters
- Press Releases
- Exhibits/Presentations



*Note: Impact avoidance, minimization, and compensation will be considerations in all steps, as appropriate.*