

CHAPTER 1 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1 Introduction

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing transportation improvements to the transportation system to, from, and within an area known as the Circ-Williston corridor from I-89 to the Towns of Williston and Essex and the Village of Essex Junction in Chittenden County, a distance of about four miles. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared to evaluate various alternatives that can accomplish the needed transportation improvements. A Scoping Memorandum, documenting the first step of the EIS process, was completed in May 2005 and is available on the project website - www.circeis.org.

This Alternatives Screening Technical Report documents the technical analyses performed as part of Step 2 of the EIS process (Alternatives Screening) and includes the conceptual development and screening of the alternatives identified in the Scoping Memorandum and subsequent agency and public workshops. This Report includes an overview of the alternatives screening process, a description of the conceptual alternatives, and an evaluation of the alternatives based on transportation, environmental, and cost screening methods. From the analysis and information contained in this Report, the short list of alternatives will be identified and carried forward for detailed analysis in the EIS (Steps 3 and 4 of the EIS process).

The results presented in the text, tables, and figures of this report are preliminary and based on screening-level analyses and definitions of the alternatives. Initial transportation screening used a rational or intuitive approach to screen transportation concepts. Comprehensive screening used quantitative traffic modeling techniques and geographic information systems (GIS) analysis of alternatives defined to test a broad range of possible transportation benefits and reduce impacts, and may involve combinations or hybrids of screening-level alternatives. The short-listed alternatives will be subjected to more detailed and extensive analysis techniques than is possible in screening, as well as supplementary data collection. Results of the detailed analysis of the short-listed alternatives are not, therefore, directly comparable to the results of comprehensive screening and will supersede the screening results.

1.2 Purpose of and Need for the Project

The purpose of the Circ-Williston Transportation Project is to improve access to, from and within the project area, and remedy existing and projected deficiencies including congestion, safety, and mobility issues (including movement of both people and goods).

Chittenden County has experienced a period of rapid population and employment growth. Williston was the fastest growing town in the County during the 1990s. Williston, Essex and Essex Junction are expected to add 26,300 residents and 25,000 jobs between 2000 and 2030. Traffic volumes on roads connecting the three communities have also generally grown and are expected to continue to grow. Additionally, commutes to work are becoming more dispersed as jobs have moved from Burlington to other towns in the employment core of Chittenden County, including the project area.

The traffic growth has led to congestion, safety, and mobility problems in the project area, specifically on VT 2A between I-89 Exit 12 in Williston and the intersection known as Five Corners in Essex Junction. The Purpose and Need are more fully described in a separate document available on the project website.

1.3 Project Area

The project area is shown in Figure 1. As noted above, the Circ-Williston Transportation Project is intended to improve transportation in the area between I-89 and the towns of Williston and Essex and Essex Junction Village. The project area comprises the area within which transportation needs and problems will be addressed and where potential transportation improvements will primarily occur.

