

CHAPTER 2 – ALTERNATIVES SCREENING PROCESS OVERVIEW

2.1 Objective of Screening

The Circ-Williston Transportation Project EIS process is a multi-step process in which each step provides successively more detailed analysis and answers. The first step in the process is **Scoping**, where the public, communities, concerned organizations, and local/state/federal and other agencies help identify the major and important issues that should be considered in the Draft EIS (DEIS), including current and future transportation problems. Scoping also identifies possible options for addressing transportation problems, which should be studied in the DEIS. As noted in Chapter 1, the result of this step is a Scoping Memorandum that records and responds to all comments and helps inform the work plan for the DEIS.

Screening is Step 2 of the Circ-Williston EIS process, and is the beginning of the process of narrowing the array of potential transportation improvements identified through Scoping that could address the project's Purpose and Need. This array of potential improvements is called the "long-list of alternative transportation concepts." The primary objective of screening is to identify those alternatives, called the "short-list of alternatives," that are carried forward for detailed evaluation in the DEIS. As noted in Chapter 1, the short list of alternatives will be selected by VTrans and FHWA based on the technical analyses and information contained in this Report. Thus, this report does not identify the short list of alternatives; the identification of the short list of alternatives is documented in a separate memorandum that documents the entire screening process. The detailed analysis and comparison of the alternatives to each other and to a "do-nothing," or No Build, alternative will be documented in the project's DEIS, which comprises Steps 3 and 4 of the Circ-Williston EIS process. Ultimately, the EIS process will result in a preferred alternative selected by VTrans and FHWA.

This chapter describes the process in which the long list of alternative transportation concepts was reduced first to 15 preliminary alternatives. The identification of alternatives to be advanced for more detailed evaluation in the DEIS consists of comparing the respective transportation benefits, environmental impact, and cost of each alternative. Transportation screening is conducted to assess the extent to which the alternative meets the project's Purpose and Need (i.e., improving existing and projected transportation deficiencies in the project area). Environmental screening is performed with the objective of identifying potential impacts (commensurate with the conceptual level of mapping) and approximating the magnitude of such impacts that might occur under each alternative, and identifying issues that will need to be addressed in greater detail should the alternative advance to the DEIS. Similarly, order-of-magnitude construction cost estimates of each alternative are also derived commensurate with the conceptual level of alignment mapping. As noted above, the intent of screening is to identify a reasonable range of alternatives that are advanced for detailed evaluation in the DEIS.

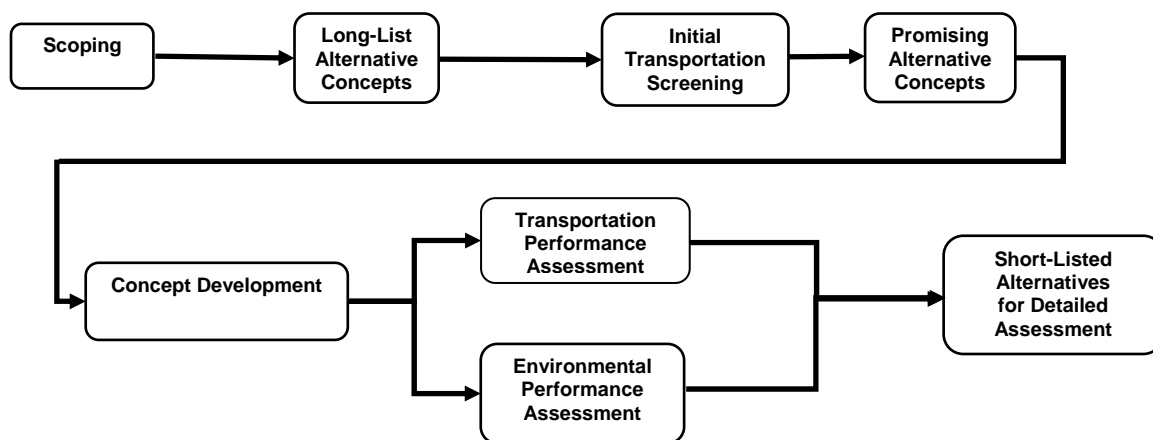
2.2 Overview of Alternatives Screening and Public Involvement

A broad list of alternative concepts was developed for the screening through the scoping process for the project. This section describes how the alternatives were developed for this screening report and provides a general overview of how the screening was performed. Detailed descriptions of the screening methodologies are found in subsequent chapters.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the overall approach to alternatives screening for the Circ-Williston Transportation Project. As shown, screening consists of the following steps:

- Identify a long list of promising concepts through agency and public scoping.
- Conduct initial transportation screening to identify if and how the concepts meet the project's Purpose and Need.
- Combine concepts into logical alternatives.
- Develop the concepts sufficiently to perform a comprehensive screening analysis.
- Perform screening-level transportation and environmental assessment.
- Compare results and identify short list of alternatives for detailed study in the DEIS.

Alternatives Screening Process Flow



The scoping process for the Circ-Williston Transportation Project began with an extensive outreach effort that included a series of scoping meetings, open houses, and interviews that included interaction between the public, community groups, public agencies, and the consultant team. Interviews were conducted with town and city officials, concerned businesses, environmental and transportation organizations; and individuals. Follow-up interviews were held with many local governments to obtain data on land use, planning, zoning, demographics, housing, employment and other topics. Federal, State, and County resource agencies were also part of the scoping process, including the following: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (New England District); Federal Transit Administration; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Natural Resource Conservation Service; Vermont Agency of Natural Resources; Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development; Vermont State Historic Preservation Officer; Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization; and Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. A complete description of the scoping process for this project can be found on the project website.

A long list of alternative concepts was created from the input received during the meetings, interviews, and open houses. The intent of these concepts was to address the transportation problems facing the project area both currently and in the future, as described in the project's Purpose and Need. The alternative concepts derived from the scoping process were divided into six major categories: 1) Transportation Demand Management (TDM), 2) Public Transportation, 3) Pedestrian/Bicycle, 4) Freight Movement, 5) Improve Existing Roadways, and 6) Construct New Roadways. The long list of alternative concepts was summarized in an initial

transportation screening matrix to evaluate how the individual concepts addressed the project's Purpose and Need. A description of the initial transportation screening step is provided in Chapter 3 of this report.

Public forums were held between June 28 and June 30, 2005 in Essex Junction, South Burlington and Richmond to present the initial transportation screening and gather comments on the alternative concepts before advancing to the comprehensive screening-level transportation and environmental assessments. Outreach to and coordination with federal, state and local agencies also continued during this period. Comments received through the public forums and agency outreach have been given careful consideration in the development of the screening documented in this report.

Based on the initial transportation screening and public and agency input, 15 alternatives, along with the No Build Alternative, were developed conceptually and advanced to the comprehensive screening step. After the first round of comprehensive screening, an additional eight alternatives, representing logical combinations of concepts and a wider range of alternatives intended to improve the potential to meet the Purpose and Need, were subjected to comprehensive screening. Thus, a total of 23 alternatives were advanced for comprehensive screening.