

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: File

FROM: Christopher R. Bean, P.E.

DATE: January 11, 2001

RE: VTrans
Pittsford and Brandon
US Route 7 Bypass Scoping Studies
CLD Reference Nos. 00-0215 and 00-0216

SUBJECT: Public Informational Meeting

LOCATION: Otter Valley Union High School, Brandon, VT

ATTENDEES: 93 people signed in to the meeting. A number of the Town, Regional and State officials/representatives that were in attendance are listed below:

Lynn Saunders	Brandon Selectboard	USC; BBSC; PBSC
Peg Flory	Pittsford Selectboard	USC; BBSC; PBSC
Richard Baker	Brandon Selectboard	USC; BBSC
Michael Balch	Brandon Town Manager	USC; BBSC
James O’Gorman	Pittsford Town Manager	USC; PBSC
Dolores Furnari	Brandon	BBSC
Senator Gerry Gossens	State Senator	
Mark Blucher	Rutland Reg. Plan. Comm.(RRPC)	
Susie Leonard	RRPC	
Judith Kmileck	RRPC	
Dan Peterson	VTrans	USC
Scott Newman	VTrans	
Chris Bean	CLD	USC; BBSC; PBSC
Jason Stone	CLD	
Jameson Paine	CLD	

USC **Member, Rt. 7 Upgrade Steering Committee**
BBSC **Member, Brandon Bypass Steering Committee**
PBSC **Member, Pittsford Bypass Steering Committee**

1. **Introductions**

Chris Bean, CLD Project Manager, made general introductions to those present.

2. **Highlight Purpose of Meeting**

Chris explained the purpose of the meeting was to update the public on the status of the US Route 7 Upgrade Projects, explain the Pittsford and Brandon US Route 7 Bypass Scoping Studies, and obtain input on the purpose and need for bypasses around each village.

3. **Update of Us Route 7 Upgrade Projects**

Chris stated that the overall US Route 7 Upgrade project has been segmented into six individual projects. Conceptual Plans for 4 out of 6 projects will be submitted to VTrans for review by the end of this month. Plans for the remaining two projects will be submitted by the end of February while the review is taking place. Once comments are received and incorporated, the environmental and permitting documents will be developed and a formal Section 502 Public Hearing will be scheduled. The next step will involve Preliminary Plans, followed by Utility Relocation Plans and Property Owner Meetings. This step will signify the beginning of the Right-of-Way Process. See attached schedule for approximate timetable.

4. **Bypass Scoping Study Description**

Jason Stone, CLD Environmental Specialist, described the elements and purpose of a Scoping Study.

A Scoping Study is an early resource identification and coordination effort to identify natural, social, and cultural resource constraints. Coordination with State and Federal resource and permitting agencies is initiated, and public input is sought to ensure that important considerations are not overlooked. As this project is a Federal undertaking, the coordination process will be in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, as well as other Federal and State regulations.

The purpose of this Scoping Study is to determine whether there is justification to continue, through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, with more detailed environmental and design studies for a bypass around the Villages of Pittsford and/or Brandon, Vermont. Stated another way, this scoping study is being conducted to determine whether there are Bypass Alternative Alignments that would be likely to be selected as the preferred alternative during the formal EIS process. The magnitude of natural and cultural resource impacts and the level of public support for the potential bypasses will be important factors in this determination.

5. **Bypass Scoping Study Schedule**

Chris described the anticipated schedule (see attached schedule) for completing the Pittsford and Brandon Bypass Scoping Studies.

6. **Origin/Destination Study**

Chris explained that an Origin/Destination (O-D) Study was initiated by CLD in October 2000 in order to determine where traffic was coming from and going to, along the US Route 7 Corridor. Between 20% and 30% of northbound and southbound vehicles were randomly stopped and asked to participate in the survey. The survey was conducted just north of the Otter Valley Union High School in Brandon and lasted approximately 12 hours.

The results of the O-D Study have been summarized. A general summary of the survey follows, although some of these results may change slightly depending on the exact alignment of each Bypass Alternative:

- More than 3/4 of the vehicles surveyed would potentially use a Pittsford bypass; nearly 2/3 would potentially use a Brandon Bypass; and more than half would potentially use both;
- Similarly, more than 80% of trucks would potentially use a Pittsford Bypass; more than 60% of trucks would potentially use a Brandon bypass; and nearly 50% of trucks would potentially use both;
- Pittsford Bypass Opinion: 13% Opposed, 65% In Favor, 22% Did Not Know;
- Brandon Bypass Opinion: 12% Opposed, 68% In Favor, 20% Did Not Know;
- Percent Trucks Surveyed: 11% Northbound, 9% Southbound;
- Nearly 2/3 of all trips were business/work related.

7. **Tasks Completed to Date – Ongoing Bypass Studies**

Jason updated the audience on several of the CLD team efforts that have been completed or are ongoing:

• **Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) Socio-Economic Assessment**

The RRPC has been hired by CLD to complete a review of socio-economic resources in the project area and to determine the effects of a bypass on the economic condition of the area. The RRPC is currently obtaining baseline data for both Pittsford and Brandon. At this point, their report is approximately 75% complete.

• **Environmental Resource Identification/Constraints Mapping**

CLD has obtained mapping and natural resource information from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Inc. (VCGI) and the RRPC. This information will help identify constraints or areas of limitations that will be considered in the development of conceptual bypass corridors.

Resources that will be reviewed include:

- Cultural Resources - Individual Historic Properties - Historic Districts centered on the villages

- Social Resources - Businesses, Recreational Properties
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Farmland Soils
- Forested Areas
- Hazardous Materials
- Archeological Resources – To be provided by VTrans, using a Predictive Model
- Deer Yards and other Habitats of Concern
- Wetlands and Surface Waters - Class II and III wetlands, Otter Creek, Neshobe River, Furnace Brook, Sugar Hollow Brook, Jones Mill Pond and Jones Mill Brook,

- **Resource Agency Coordination**

CLD has begun initial correspondence with the US Army Corps of Engineers and several departments of the VT Agency of Natural Resources to identify known resource concerns in the project area.

8. **Bypass Purpose and Need Statement Discussion Items**

- **Functional Characteristics of US Route 7**

Chris explained that the Functional Classification of a roadway defines its purpose within the local, regional, and national highway network. US Route 7 is part of the National Highway System and is classified as a Rural Principal Arterial Highway. The primary purpose of this class of roadway is to move people and goods over long distances between larger centers of population, as opposed to providing access to local land uses, which are typically served by local roads.

Within the project area, and especially in the Villages of Pittsford and Brandon, US Route 7 currently serves dual purposes. The highway accommodates local access needs, as evidenced by the availability of on-street parking, numerous local intersections, and pedestrian activity, and provides its intended rural principal arterial function of moving people and goods. These uses are in conflict; local access needs in the villages impede the mobility function of US Route 7 as part of the regional and national network.

A 1996 VTrans study was conducted to assess the sufficiency of this section of US Route 7. Sufficiency ratings consider a highway's structural condition, safety, and quality of service. This section of US Route 7 was rated at or below 60, out of a best score of 100 points, indicative of a poor or bad section of highway. This is unacceptable for a portion of the National Highway System. The proposed upgrade projects will alleviate the problem, but since these projects primarily address operational and safety issues, they will not improve long-term level of service performance within the villages. Additional highway capacity is necessary to achieve this goal.

In order for US Route 7 to provide acceptable levels of safety and efficiency for all modes of transportation, including bicycles and pedestrians, it is necessary to expand, or otherwise improve the existing highway facility, and reduce or eliminate the conflicts that arise from the conflicting uses. CLD Consulting Engineers, Inc. prepared a Scoping Report (April 2000) for VTrans, for proposed improvements to the existing highway within the project area. A conclusion of the Scoping Report is that traditional highway widening and intersection improvements could conceivably be implemented on the existing highway alignment in the "corridor area" between the villages. However, substantial environmental (natural and social) resource constraints and regulatory permitting issues were identified in the villages that would preclude any proposal to significantly widen the highway through the villages from being selected as the preferred alternative. Therefore, it is necessary to separate the local access uses from the mobility function of the highway by providing a bypass roadway around the villages. This view is supported by a 1994 Wilbur Smith Study, as well as a CLD Traffic Origin/Destination Study conducted in 2000. These studies concluded that at least 50% of passenger vehicle traffic and truck traffic would use a bypass, depending in part on its exact location. Such high levels of traffic diversion emphasize the conflicts inherent in the current uses of US Route 7 through the villages, and stress that a bypass is the best long-term solution to satisfy the functional and operational needs of the local, regional, and National Highway System in this part of Vermont.

The purpose of this project is twofold. First, it is to preserve and improve the Rural Principal Arterial Highway function of US Route 7 within the project area, through the construction of a bypass(es). Shifting through traffic from the villages to a bypass(es) will achieve the secondary project purpose, which is to enhance the highway's ability to serve local community needs.

- **Quality of Life Issues**

Both Pittsford and Brandon Officials desire to increase pedestrian activity and encourage pedestrian dependant businesses in order to preserve and enhance the feeling of community within the village settings. Other related goals are to improve the ability to access or cross US Route 7, to increase the ease of motorists accessing intersecting roadways and business and residential drives, to maintain or improve on-street parking, to improve opportunities for street fairs, parades, etc. The project will also reduce problems associated with noise and dust, such as the inability for neighbors to socialize outside of their residences, and the need for residents to frequently repaint their homes.

Chris presented a graphic that helped to illustrate public comfort levels in relation to traffic volumes along US Route 7. The graphic was developed based on a comfort level rating system created by the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Planning Commission. As traffic volumes increase along US Route 7, the comfort level of persons within the area steadily decreases from "Happiness," "Discomfort," "Pain," to "Severe Pain" (see attached graphic). With the introduction of a bypass, the traffic volumes on US Route 7 would decrease, thereby increasing a person's comfort level.

- **Other Benefits Derived from a Bypass**

- Constructing a bypass around the villages would dramatically increase the design life of any of the US Route 7 Upgrade Projects within the village areas.
- Air quality, noise, and dust levels would be reduced in the villages.

9. **Open Discussion**

1. ***A large number of OMYA trucks bring raw materials from the south of Pittsford. These trucks also return to southerly destinations. These vehicles would only use a westerly bypass. They would not use any other bypass.***

In the development of conceptual bypass corridors, linkage of state highways and critical local roads such as Kendall Hill Road , a.k.a. the truck route, via interchanges or stubs will be considered where feasible, to ensure that such vehicles, as well as other large, through vehicles would divert to the bypass.

2. ***The National Forest is located in the northeast corner of the project study area. Will you show this on the constraint mapping?***

CLD has the bounds of the National Forest in its GIS system and will display it on future mapping efforts.

3. ***What is the commitment from VTrans for funding a bypass project? What is the priority of these projects?***

Dan Peterson, VTrans: The bypass projects are in the planning process at VTrans. Final costs are not known at this time (depends on number of bridges, etc.). The process right now is to determine the viability of bypasses in this area so recommendations can be made to the Legislature.

4. ***Is there any type of master plan that has been developed for the US Route 7 Corridor?***

Dan Peterson, VTrans: Not aware of any US Route 7 Master Plan that has been developed.

5. ***How will the bypasses affect plans to bring commuter trains from Burlington to Rutland?***

Dan Peterson, VTrans: Not sure whether the bypasses will affect these plans.

Peg Flory: The State is putting together a master plan for commuter and rail lines. Once this report is complete, we'll have a better idea of whether commuter rails will be used between Burlington and Rutland.

6. ***Tourists are important to this area. The upgrade of US Route 7 is a band-aid fix. A bypass is needed.***

The Steering Committees have made it clear that US Route 7 upgrade work is necessary whether or not the bypass is constructed. The improvements are intended to help address existing deficiencies within the current US Route 7 Corridor.

7. ***It is inconceivable that people still need to state the need for a bypass. The \$25 million is unnecessary for the upgrade projects. If that money is used for the upgrades, then no money will be left for the bypass projects.***

Dan Peterson, VTrans: The upgrade projects are scheduled to be constructed in the next 5 to 10 years. The bypass projects would probably be built a minimum of 10 to 15 years from now. Funding may not be as much of an issue as it would seem, due to the different timeframes.

8. ***Improvements along US Route 7 would increase traffic speed in the villages.***

The proposed roadway improvements actually narrow roadways and formalize traffic lanes in some areas, potentially reducing traffic speed.

9. ***I've talked to Scott Newman (VTrans) about proposed truck climbing lanes on the US Route 7 upgrade project near VT Route 3. Concerned about the yellow house that would be torn down.***

Impacts to this property are associated with the upgrade of US Route 7. The plans are being developed with minimization of impacts to historic structures as a priority. The property and residence will be treated in accordance with the regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act, and measures to minimize harm, including appropriate historical recordation and other mitigation, will be undertaken.

10. ***Worried about existing disruptions to businesses that are being caused by increased traffic on US Route 7. When do we accept the information that has been compiled and start constructing a bypass?***

As stated previously, the bypass projects are in the early stages of study. Assuming the projects advance to construction, work would not begin for at least 10 years. Traffic control plans will be developed as part of the upgrade projects to minimize disruptions to businesses.

11. ***Lives out in the country. Does not want a bypass near her property.***
12. ***Wants her town back. Bypasses are necessary to restore the character and feeling of community within the villages.***
13. ***Does not want bypass, because he moved to the country to get away from traffic.***
14. ***Many lives are threatened with the existing US Route 7. A bypass is needed.***
15. ***There has to be some way to expedite the process of building a bypass.***

At this time, all pertinent Federal and State environmental regulations have to be followed if a bypass is to be constructed. This includes completing the Bypass Scoping Studies to determine if a bypass is a viable option.

16. *Is it possible to put the upgrade money towards the bypasses first and then upgrade US Route 7 later?*

The upgrade money is for the entire US Route 7 corridor in this area. The bypasses would still have to tie into the upgrade segments of US Route 7.

17. *Should put people before wetlands. The Governor has said that he doesn't favor bypasses.*

Peg Flory: Need to tell the Governor that we want the bypasses.

18. *Scared to cross the street in Brandon Village. The only vehicles that seem to stop are the OMYA trucks.*

19. *Would the existing US Route 7 be renamed (to US Route 7A, 7B, etc.) through the villages if bypasses were built? They wouldn't get maintained as well by the towns.*

Dan Peterson, VTrans: It would take an act of the Legislature to rename the routes, not VTrans.

20. *What do you need to get the project going?*

Input like we are receiving tonight that clearly states the public wants the bypasses.

21. *We need to watch the zoning of specific areas to act responsibly as a community.*

22. *Traffic has gotten so bad that choice is made to drive rather than walk, feel unsafe walking.*

23. *The fact that OMYA truck trips were limited during the Act 250 process is evidence supporting the need for a bypass.*

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

CRB:JAS:cww

Attachments

cc: US Rt. 7 Upgrade Steering Committee
Brandon Bypass Steering Committee
Pittsford Bypass Steering Committee

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Pittsford and Brandon Bypass Scoping Studies

<u>Events/Milestones</u>	<u>Target Date</u>	<u>Actual Date</u>
<u>Phase I</u>		
Project Scoping, Data Collection, Issue Identification		
• Perform Origin-Destination Studies	10/2000	10/2000
• Begin Resource Agency Coordination	10/2000	10/2000
• Begin Individual Town Steering Committee Meetings (SCMs)	11/2000	11/2000
• Develop Draft Purpose and Need Statement	12/2000	1/2001
• Joint Public Informational Meeting - Local Concerns and Purpose and Need	12/2000	1/2001
• Finalize Purpose and Need Statement	01/2001	1/2001
• Individual Town SCMs - Present Constraints Maps	01/2001	
<u>Phase II</u>		
Conceptual Corridors		
• Individual Town SCMs - Alternatives Discussions	02/2001	
• Resource Agency Meeting - Alternatives Discussions	02/2001	
• Individual Town SCMs – Alternatives, Issues Discussions	03/2001	
• Joint Public Informational Meeting - Alternatives Discussions	04/2001	
• Draft Bypass Scoping Study Submittal	05/2001	
• Individual Town SCMs - Review Bypass Scoping Study	03/2001	
• Joint Public Informational Meeting – Present Study Conclusions	06/2001	
• Publish Bypass Scoping Study	07/2001	

Revised 1/2001

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Pittsford-Brandon US Route 7 Upgrades

Approximate Timetable - to be expedited if possible

<u>Events/Milestones</u>	<u>Target Date</u>	<u>Actual Date</u>
Conceptual Plans submitted to VTrans	January - February, 2001	
Categorical Exclusion Documentation	Summer 2001	
502 Public Hearing	Summer 2001	
Preliminary Plans	Fall - Winter 2001	
Property Owner Meetings	Summer 2002	
Semi-Final plans	Fall 2002	
Right-of-Way Process	Fall 2002 - Spring 2003	
Necessity Hearing	Spring 2004	
Compensation Hearing	Winter 2004	
Final Plans	Spring 2005	
Advertise for Construction	Spring - Summer 2005	

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