



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #2

**Brooks Memorial Library
Conference Room
224 Main Street
Brattleboro, VT 05301**

MINUTES

June 18, 2018

Subcommittee Attendees: Patrick Moreland, *Co-Chair, Town of Brattleboro*; Steve Barrett, *Brattleboro Public Works*; Mark Carignan, *Brattleboro Police Department*; Jason Cooper, *Friends of the West River Trail*; Steve Diorio, *Hinsdale Board of Selectmen*; Todd Faulkner, *Hinsdale Police Department*; Prudence MacKinney, *Vermont Department of Health*; Frank Podlenski, *Hinsdale Highway Department*; Ed Smith, *Hinsdale Economic Development Representative*; Sharon Smith, *Hinsdale Historical Society*.

Staff and Technical Assistance: Chris Baker, *Representative of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans)*; Bob Landry, *New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)*; Don Lyford, *NHDOT*; J. B. Mack, *Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC)*; Erica Roper, *Windham Regional Commission*; Henry Underwood, *SWRPC*; Trent Zanes, *NHDOT*.

Guests: Michael Abbott, *NH House of Representatives*; Lew Sorenson, *Hinsdale-Brattleboro Project Advisory Committee*.

I. Meeting Minutes of May 22, 2018

The meeting began at 1:01 p.m. Patrick Moreland called for a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 22, 2018. The meeting minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

II. Discussion: Scenario Planning

J. B. Mack gave a Powerpoint presentation about how scenario planning could be used as a method for evaluating alternatives for the existing bridges and Hinsdale island. He noted that the Subcommittee have already discussed some of the potential futures for the two existing bridges and island, including different physical changes, management considerations, and roles for each town and state. He described scenario planning as a decisionmaking process, often involving diverse professionals, the public, and other stakeholders. It identifies various “alternative futures” based on the current reality and driving forces of change. A “desired future” can be selected from the alternatives, which then sets a specific end goal for direction setting. Identifying conditions or driving forces can help determine scenarios. Scenario planning allows decisionmakers to assess benefits, drawbacks, opportunities and threats for various futures or options. The outcomes would also be useful in communicating various alternatives’ tradeoffs to the public.

J. B. Mack added that there are different variations of scenario planning. “Normative scenarios” for example are what can be expected in the present day. For example, the island as a destination to bike and

walk to as a park. There can also be “exploratory scenarios” which address potential future uses such as developing the area with a hotel or public/private partnership. He encouraged the group to think about both types of scenarios. He mentioned a number of potential outcomes of scenario planning such as creating awareness about the interconnectivity of issues and unintended consequences. J. B. Mack described the bridge project’s Environmental Assessment (EA) alternatives evaluation as an example of scenario planning and showed several tables from the EA on the screen. The EA evaluated various alternatives based on purpose and need criteria as well as design criteria.

He said a goal of today’s meeting was to get consensus if scenario planning is a good approach or if the Subcommittee is already truly focused on future for the bridges and island. From his perspective, there were a lot of different concepts being talked about for the bridges and island, some of which had not been explored much detail.

Patrick Moreland commented that there was not a universally-accepted vision for the bridges and island but did say there is agreement on some aspects for future use. For example, the Brattleboro Select Board voted in favor of the preferred alternative, which includes bicycle and pedestrian access to the island via the existing bridges.

Ownership of the existing bridges was discussed. Don Lyford commented that he believed the road is likely to be reclassified as a local road, but said there was no official answer from the Department of Transportation. The willingness for the Town to accept the road may be related to the amount of rehabilitation that takes place. Erica Roper commented that it was important to not examine maintenance and ownership by itself, but as part of a scenario with certain activities, uses, physical changes, etc. J. B. Mack agreed and said the regional planning commissions are recommending that each different scenario be evaluated relative to activities, physical changes, management, maintenance, impacts, and stakeholder input. This type of planning would allow the subcommittee to understand, for example, the level of rehab that would be needed to achieve a certain vision. The Subcommittee reviewed a simplified sample matrix, which would be completed as a group.

J. B. Mack discussed the need to consider “driving forces” with the Subcommittee – the trends and current activities that will influence various scenarios. Funding, nearby development, island ownership, bridge ownership, and bridge maintenance were provided as examples of driving forces that can influence the feasibility of a specific scenario.

J. B. Mack advised the Subcommittee that they will not meet during the summer but will provide opportunities for input via a homework assignment. Two questions were posed: 1) What scenarios should be considered (in broad terms), and 2) What driving forces should be considered?

Erica Roper reviewed the “Framing Issues with Scenarios Worksheet” with attendees and provided instructions. She said responses will be used by staff to come up with list of scenarios. Next, the group reviewed the “Getting Organized Worksheet” to aid in compiling a larger list of potential stakeholders. Finally, the group reviewed a third handout entitled “Project Data Needs List” Subcommittee members can utilize to share data about or direct J. B. Mack and Erica Roper to various categories of information.

J. B. Mack asked for input on the approach, the homework assignments, and suggested the Subcommittee start brainstorming responses. He asked specifically about driving forces and data that was time-sensitive and would need to be collected over the summer. Prudence MacKinney commented that the proposed scenario planning approach would provide structure and support to reach a conclusion.

To help start discussion, J. B. Mack displayed the chart of the EA scenarios. He summarized that one possible scenario could be meeting the commitments made by New Hampshire and Vermont as written in the EA: which states the existing bridges would be preserved for bicycle and pedestrian access and that minor bridge rehabilitation would need to be performed to make them available for these uses. Ed Smith asked if the Subcommittee should review the EA. J. B. Mack responded that the document was available online, and he would send a link via e-mail. Patrick Moreland asked if staff could highlight pertinent sections and J. B. Mack agreed to the request. Don Lyford commented the [Hinsdale-Brattleboro project website](#) hosts the EA as well as contains information about the Subcommittee.

III. Existing Conditions Analysis

J. B. Mack said among the driving forces, staff still need to determine if the island is buildable. He added that completing the handouts will help staff find answers to these questions. Sharon Smith asked if the EA addressed erosion along the river and commented that the north end of island appears to be disappearing. J. B. Mack commented that the Vernon Dam has affected what island is today, and staff may need to talk to one or more State agencies to learn more. Erica Roper encouraged attendees to identify and talk about data topics not on the list.

Michael Abbott commented on the need to research maintenance information, including plowing and lighting. Steve Barrett expressed difficulty in determining a purpose and need because of questions about ownership and responsibility to pay for maintenance. Consideration of parking, security, access by public safety vehicles, wastewater, and power were listed as data needs and aspects of the island to research. The issues of split ownership, which was mentioned as 7% Vermont and 93% New Hampshire, would also need to be addressed as part of scenario planning.

Lew Sorenson suggested the Subcommittee review the previous recommendation from the 1999 committee that addressed the existing bridges as a minor part of its finding relative to the proposed new bridge location and future. He added that this recommendation was presented and accepted by both towns and departments of transportation.

Patrick Moreland reminded attendees that identifying impacts, recognizing challenges were not problems that the Subcommittee would “own.” He referred to J. B. Mack’s previous instructions and said it is a responsibility of the Subcommittee to advise Project Advisory Committee (PAC), and by extension the towns and elected officials. This included the ability to “flag” things like high costs.

Patrick Moreland reinforced earlier comments about ownership as being important because it would influence whether or not a vision is realistic. J. B. Mack commented that currently the Subcommittee is discussing ideas without knowing costs and staff intends to work with the NHDOT and others to obtain numbers in order to have informed discussions. Patrick Moreland commented that identifying visions would be a starting point, followed by information about costs. Erica Roper noted that outside funding such as through the U.S. Department of Transportation Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grants Program, a replacement for the Department’s Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grants Program, could be an option for implementation. Bob Landry commented that NHDOT intends to apply for funding through the BUILD program.

Todd Faulkner brought up public safety as a discussion item. He said that his concerns about public safety were shared by Mark Carignan. Several statistics were shared. Within the last 18 months, Hinsdale Police responded 300 times to the existing bridges. Of those, 140 were motor vehicle related (crashes, lockouts, and motorist assists). The 160 remaining calls included 46 suspicious activities, 3 drug activities generated from other assists, assaults, armed robberies, suicide threat, and animal complaints (like unleashed dogs

biting a dog or another person). He expected preserving the existing bridges for bicycle and pedestrian use as well as access to the island would increase safety risks significantly because there will no longer be constant motor vehicle traffic monitoring behavior. Drugs, and specifically heroin was brought up as a specific concern that affected both Hinsdale and for Brattleboro. He said that Brattleboro is consistently relied upon to take calls related to the bridge due to their proximity.

Steve Barret left the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

Todd Faulkner said he expected the number of incidents like armed robberies and “purse snatchings” to go up with bicycle and pedestrian use of the existing bridges. Mark Carignan added that the design of the area will be important to various visions as a way to enhance safety. Desirable designs would reduce the ability for individuals to do things outside of public eye. He added that this consideration would contribute to economic development aspects of the area as well as use of trails. He also recognized the inherent burden on Brattleboro to address calls and activities because downtown Brattleboro is so much closer than population centers in Hinsdale. Todd Faulkner suggested contacting NH Fish and Game as a stakeholder as they provide marine-based patrols of the area.

Patrick Moreland asked about how the bridges would be patrolled if the bridges remained. Todd Faulkner commented that this would be accomplished with a foot patrol consisting of a minimum of two people. Prudence MacKinney hoped for a positive public safety impact of there being more people walking and biking as “eyes on street.” Todd Faulkner added that effective patrols as well as engaged citizens and potentially cameras would all contribute to mitigating safety concerns. The West River Trail in Vermont was provided as an example how improvements led to a reduction in safety-related complaints. It was also noted its close proximity will draw many people from downtown.

IV. Next Steps

J. B. Mack thanked attendees for the discussion and confirmed with the Subcommittee to continue with the scenario planning approach. He said he and Erica will follow up with everyone with specific questions about data, stakeholders, and their thoughts on scenarios. Erica Roper reminded attendees to share information about driving forces and any specific questions that would assist the Subcommittee in assessing the feasibility of a particular vision.

V. Next Meeting

J. B. Mack said the timing of the next meeting would be sometime in September and would be held in Hinsdale. Erica Roper added that it would be a good time to establish a standing meeting day and time.

VI. Public Comment

Lew Sorenson commented on the earlier discussion about the issues of ownership ultimately driving a particular vision. He suggested the Subcommittee consider these items in the reverse order: that a particular vision determine appropriate ownership.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Underwood
GIS Specialist/Planner