

Public Involvement Plan

NH Route 125 – Epping, NH

Capacity Improvement Project

Epping 29608



NH Route 125 facing north from the NH Park and Ride



NH Route 125 facing south looking towards Fresh River Road

Last Updated: September 3, 2020

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1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Purpose of the Public Involvement Plan

The Public Involvement Plan (Plan) is developed to describe the anticipated public outreach activities that will be implemented for the NH Route 125 Improvement Project (State project No. 29608). This Plan will:

- Provide contact information for the Project Team;
- Provide a list of members of the Public Advisory Committee (PAC);
- Provide a list project of stakeholders;
- Explain the New Hampshire Department of Transportation's (NHDOT) Project Development Process;
- Communicate upcoming meeting dates and overall project schedule;
- Provide a list of anticipated communication products and methods;
- Keep all interested stakeholders and the public-at-large well informed of the project status and activities; and
- Provide timely, useful, current information through a variety of targeted means and methods.

This Plan will be revised periodically to reflect updates to the public outreach activities, the list of stakeholders, project meeting dates and locations, project schedule, and other pertinent information that may change over the course of this multi-year project. This Plan will be considered a living document throughout the project. The latest information will also be provided via the project website: <https://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/epping29608/index.htm>.

1.2 Guiding Principles

The Epping 29608 project will incorporate guiding principles that ensure an inclusive and transparent project development process that is accessible to all stakeholders. The Project Team and Project Advisory Committee have adopted guiding principles that will drive the public involvement process. These guiding principles have been divided into two groups: 1) Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design and 2) Characteristics of the Process Contributing to Excellence, and are presented below:

Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design

1. The project satisfies the purpose and need that will be defined for the project.
2. The project involves efficient and effective use of the resources (time, budget, community) of all involved parties.
3. The project is seen as having added lasting value to the community.

Characteristics of the Process Contributing to Excellence

1. Communication with all stakeholders is open, honest, early, and continuous.
2. A multidisciplinary team is available throughout the process, with disciplines representing the needs of the specific project, and with the inclusion of the public.
3. A commitment to the process from top agency officials and local leaders is secured.
4. The public involvement process, which includes formal and informal meetings, is tailored to the project.
5. A range of tools for communication about the project development is used (e.g., project fact sheets).

1.3 Project Background and Description

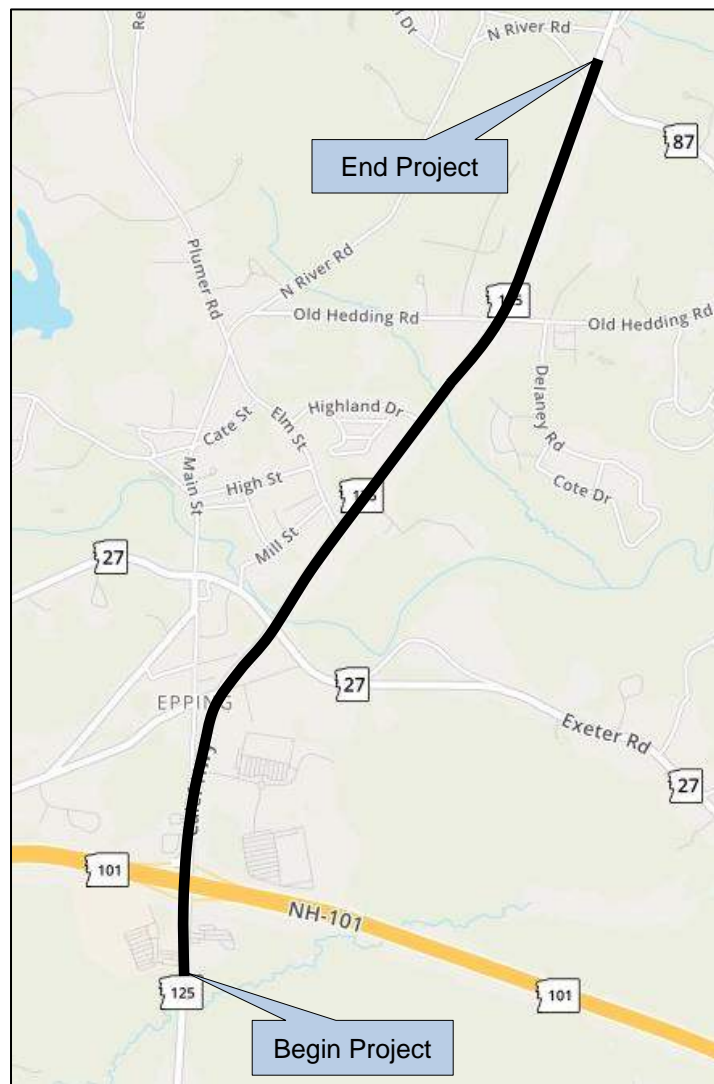
Carrying upwards of 19,000 vehicles per day, NH Route 125 in the vicinity of Exit 7 of NH Route 101 plays a key link in the transportation network. This corridor is the main access for commuters to NH Route 101 and also serves the major commercial development in the area. The intermixing of retail/commercial traffic with through traffic results in congestion and delays that greatly impede traffic flow. The Epping 29608, X-A004(196) project was developed to address these concerns. The project begins south of NH Route 101 at Brickyard Square Plaza and ends just north of the NH Route 87 intersection. This 2.8-mile portion of NH Route 125 includes many intersections (signalized and un-signalized) and is abutted by residential and commercial properties. The southern section in the immediate vicinity of NH Route 101 is mostly a 5-lane sections with two lanes north and southbound with left turning lanes at the intersections. Farther north, the roadway is one lane in each direction with a center turning lane. The northern 1.5 miles of the corridor is a standard 2-lane roadway with the occasional left turn lane at intersections.

The objective of the project is to develop an alternative that will improve the safety and mobility of all users by applying “Complete Streets Principles”. The goal is to achieve an appropriate balance between the needs of motorized, non-motorized, and transit users of the corridor. Various alternatives for the corridor will be evaluated and will undergo a thorough review and analysis of their impact to traffic flow, right-of-way, and environmental resources. The Public Advisory Committee (PAC), described in Sections 1.7 and 2.0 of this Plan, will help define the project’s purpose and need and assist in guiding the alternatives analysis as the project moves forward.

One of the main considerations of the design alternatives to be investigated will be to increase the operational efficiency and safety along the corridor. This may be accomplished through a variety of design options including the addition of lanes, development of a cross sections along segments, intersection reconfigurations, and access management (i.e., consolidation or elimination of access points). The concepts developed will need to consider various water quality alternatives that will be necessary to address permitting requirements.

In conjunction with the overall corridor improvements that will be developed based upon the Traffic Study, specific intersections will be studied to determine appropriate safety and capacity improvements. These key intersections are listed below:

- NH Route 125 and Brickyard Square driveway
- NH Route 125, NHDOT Park-and-Ride Lot driveway, and Gas Station
- NH Route 125 and NH Route 101 eastbound ramps
- NH Route 125 and NH Route 101 westbound ramps
- NH Route 125 and McDonald's/Toyota driveway
- NH Route 125, Main Street, and Fresh River Road
- NH Route 125 and Rockingham Recreational Trail crossing
- NH Route 125 Water Street, and Exeter Road
- NH Route 125, Fogg Road, and Coffin Road
- NH Route 125, NH Route 87 (Hedding Road), and Old Nottingham Road



Project Location- Epping 29608

1.4 Public Involvement to Date

NHDOT has had preliminary contact with local officials during the development of the scope of work for this project. This Plan provides the outline for the anticipated public involvement for this project.

1.5 Major Project Components

There are several elements of the project that will be addressed throughout the duration of the project.

- From a planning and design perspective, major tasks will include, but are not limited to, the following: collection of data (traffic counts, environmental resources, etc.), gathering of public input, analysis of improvements option, selection of a preferred alternative, environmental permitting, conducting a Public Hearing, right-of-way acquisition, engineering design, project advertisement for construction.
- Relative to the potential improvements, major components of the project may include, but are not limited to, the following: roadway widening, construction of some pedestrian facilities, intersection reconfiguration, access management, and signal coordination. Improvements will be vetted through the Public Involvement Process.

1.6 Project Purpose and Need

One of the initial undertakings in the Environmental Documentation portion of the design process will be to develop the project’s Purpose and Need statement. This statement should explain the problem of the project and why the project should be implemented. The statement will be utilized as a guide by which the alternative designs will be evaluated.

1.7 Project Team and Stakeholders

The project objectives will be achieved through collaboration of several key groups, the Town of Epping, organizations, and private citizens. The project will be led by NHDOT. The NHDOT has retained a consultant, BETA Groups, Inc., to assist them. The Project Team is tasked with advancing the project through the Preliminary Design phase of the project.

The point of contact for all inquiries is the NHDOT Project Manager, Wendy Johnson.

NHDOT			
Name	Role	Phone	email
Wendy Johnson	Project Manager	(603) 271-2171	wendy.johnson@dot.nh.gov

The following are key members of the consultant team.

Consultant Team			
Name	Role	Phone	email
Tony Puntin	BETA – Project Manager	(603) 496-1784	apuntin@beta-inc.com
Jennifer Riordan	GM2 – Environmental Lead	(603) 856-7854	jriordan@GM2inc.com

Achieving the project’s goals and objectives will require significant coordination and communication with the community. To that end, a Public Advisory Committee (PAC) will be established to provide input to the Project Team. The PAC is comprised of local and regional officials as well as citizen stakeholders. The PAC will serve as an advisory role representative and is expected to be integrated into the project development process through Final Design. Refer to Sections 2.2 and the Appendix for additional details on the PAC.

Public Advisory Committee	
Name	Position/Organization
Greg Dodge	Epping Town Administrator
Jim Pouliot	Superintendent of Water and Sewer for the Town of Epping
Chief Mike Wallace	Epping Police Department
Brittany Howard	Epping Town Planner
Sandra Goodspeed	Epping Conservation Commission
Dave Walker	Rockingham Regional Planning Commission
Scott Bogle	Rockingham Regional Planning Commission Bike/Ped Coordinator
Joseph Foley	Lamprey River Advisory and Epping Planning Board
Jen Kimball	Regional Economic Development Center
Wendy Johnson	Project Manager NHDOT
Gerry Bedard	NHDOT
Tony Puntin	Project Manager BETA Group, Inc

2.0 PROJECT PROCESS

2.1 NHDOT Project Development Process

The design of the NH Route 125 Improvements will follow the standard NHDOT project development process. A detailed description can be found in the “Project Development - Making Transportation Projects a Reality” guide under the *Citizens Guide to Transportation Series* section on NHDOT’s website (<http://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/plans.htm>).

The Preliminary Design phase of the project will include collection of data (traffic, environmental constraints, crash, etc.) that will be utilized in the development and evaluation of design alternatives for the corridor and specific intersections. During the design development process, alternatives will be presented and discussed with the PAC and at the public at Public Informational meetings. Development of the draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document will occur based upon the alternative to be presented at the Public Hearing. The formal Public Hearing will be held to procure approval for the project’s layout and confirm that the alternative, as presented, is the preferred alternative. The Hearing will be overseen by a Hearing Commission that is tasked with deciding on the layout of the alternative that has been identified for the project. All issues and/or comments raised at the Public Hearing or during the hearing comment period will be documented and addressed. The project team will coordinate, as necessary, with the PAC to help address each issue raised. Should the Hearing Commission vote in favor of the project’s layout, then the project will advance to the Final Design stage. The Public Hearing and subsequent layout approval represent a major milestone in the project development phase as it solidifies the major aspects and right-of- way requirements of the project’s design.

The Final Design phase of the project commences at the completion of Preliminary Design. This phase entails development the final engineering plans, the permitting process, acquisitions of right-of-way/easements, and preparation of construction contract documents. Final Design is complete when the project is advertised for construction and is awarded to a contractor.

It is anticipated that the Preliminary Design will occur from Winter 2020 to Spring 2022; followed by Final Design from Spring 2022 to Fall 2024. Pending funding availability, the Project Advertisement is anticipated in October 2024 with construction to commence in Spring 2025.

Project Development Process	
Preliminary Design	1. Project Scoping / Data Collection / Coordination
	2. Preliminary Engineering Studies / Environmental Evaluation
	3. Identification of Preferred Alternative / Draft Environmental Documentation
	4. Formal Public Hearing Process
	5. Final Environmental Documentation
Final Design	6. Final Design / Right-of-Way Acquisition / Permitting
	7. Project Advertisement
Construction	8. Project Construction

2.2 Project Meetings

The Project Team will conduct several meetings of various types, including a formal Public Hearing, throughout the project's development. These meetings will include presentations and interaction with the public-at-large, local officials, public agencies, and other stakeholders. The overall purpose of these meetings will include:

- Introducing the project;
- Disseminating information and providing a setting for discussion and gathering feedback that will help form the alternatives and impacts;
- Complying with the NEPA process which calls for public involvement during the process of evaluating the environmental, social, economic and cultural resource impacts from the project;
- Presenting and describing the potential alternatives and associated impacts of each;
- Providing adequate opportunity for public comments and public involvement throughout the multi-year process; and
- Addressing concerns of the public, officials, agencies, and stakeholders.

The meetings to be held will be open to the public and are anticipated to consist of the following, in these general categories:

- **Project Advisory Committee Meetings:** The PAC serves in an advisory role and is anticipated to be involved with the project from the project planning phase through the end of the project's design. The focus of these meetings is to collect information, identify concerns and areas of interests, establish design controls, discuss detailed aspects of the project design solutions, and understand the specific needs of the Committee, Town, and the users of the corridor. It is anticipated that PAC meeting will be conducted approximately every 4 months (or as needed) beginning in July 2020. See also the Appendix for PAC Guidelines and Procedures.
- **Public Officials Meetings:** These meetings would be scheduled, as necessary, to inform the Town and State elected officials, municipal staff, the members of the Town boards, and other interested members of the public about the details of the project.
- **Public Information Meetings:** The objective of public informational meetings is to engage and inform the general public of the project status, review the Purpose and Need statements and receive feedback on the project alternatives that are acceptable to the community and public at-large. The public informational meetings are intended to discuss the various aspects of the project and gather input from the community regarding the alternatives that they feel will help to solve the project problems and needs and fit with the community's vision for the project. The meetings will be held during key project milestones.

- Public Hearing: Once a recommended design alternative has been identified for the project and the draft environmental documentation is completed, a formal Public Hearing to secure layout approval for the project will be scheduled. This hearing serves to meet the requirements of the NHDOT public information process, the NEPA process, and the necessity of the layout of the proposed action.

2.3 Project Schedule

The basic overall schedule for the project is outlined below. Please note that the schedule is approximate and subject to change. The meeting dates are provided in a general timeframe. This Plan will be updated as the project moves forward to reflect more specific dates.

Anticipated Date/Time	Location	Activity/Milestone
Summer 2020 to Fall 2024	TBD	PAC Meetings
Fall 2020	TBD	Public Officials Meeting
Winter 2020	TBD	Public Informational Meeting #1
Spring 2021	TBD	Public Informational Meeting #2
Winter 2020 to Summer 2021	N/A	Alternatives Development, Evaluation, and Preliminary Design, and Draft NEPA Documentation
Fall 2021	TBD	Public Hearing
Spring 2022	N/A	Final NEPA Documentation
Spring 2022 to Fall 2024	N/A	Final Design, Right of Way acquisition, and Permitting
October 2024	N/A	Project Advertisement for Construction Contractor
Spring 2025	N/A	Begin Construction

3.0 COMMUNICATION METHODS

Effective communication is essential to the ongoing success of the project. Below is a description of the communication methods that are planned for the project. As the project progresses, public involvement will be assessed periodically to determine if the methods of communication in use are effective or if adjustments are needed.

3.1 Project Webpage

A web page for the project has been created on the NHDOT website and will be used to post pertinent project information, project plans, materials presented at meetings, and meeting minutes. The purpose of the website is to keep the public informed about the project and provide another way for the public to provide input. The website content will be updated at project milestones and, as necessary, after project meetings. The web page can be accessed at: <https://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/Epping29608/index.htm>.

3.2 E-Mail

A primary method of communication will be via e-mail. Meeting agendas, meeting notes, and other pertinent project information will be disseminated to the stakeholders via e-mail. A project distribution list will be developed throughout the project duration and will be used to inform interested parties.

3.3 Meetings

Project Advisory Committee meetings, Public Informational meetings, Public Officials meetings, and a Public Hearing will be used as different avenues to disseminate and discuss pertinent project related information and to receive feedback.

3.4 Media Coverage

In order to help maximize the distribution of meeting notices for the Public Informational meetings and the Public Hearing, news releases and/or meeting notices will be provided to local and regional news agencies.

3.5 Project Fact Sheets

Project Fact Sheets will be prepared and updated as needed during the project's development. These documents provide information in a concise manner and will include the project status, key milestones, project objectives, and list opportunities for public involvement. This information will be distributed electronically via e-mail (to interested parties on the email distribution list) and on the project's website.

3.6 U.S. Postal Service Notice to Abutters

The NHDOT will provide advance notice to the project abutters through the U.S. Postal Service when the Public Hearing will occur. The location, time and other details of the Public Hearing will be included in the notice.

Appendix

Project Advisory Committee Guidelines and Procedures

The PAC has the important task of providing public input to the NHDOT for the project. The PAC has an advisory role in developing a statement of purpose and needs, developing concepts to address the purpose and needs, and assist in selecting an alternative for the project design. Because of the significance and complexity of the issues with which the PAC will be dealing, it is important to make the most effective use of meeting times. Therefore, the PAC commits to the following guidelines and procedures:

A. How we treat each other:

1. Each member has an equal right to speak and ask questions. There are no “dumb questions.”
2. Each member is encouraged to share individual viewpoints. Individual opinions are valid whether others agree with them or not.
3. We will listen to, respect and seek to understand the views of others, particularly those perspectives that differ from our own.
4. Disagreements will be explored, not suppressed. In some instances, however, disagreements may be discussed outside of the PAC meetings so that we are not distracted from achieving the purpose of the meetings.
5. We will be courteous when addressing other members, staff and consultants.
6. We will refrain from interrupting each other, staff or consultants.
7. We will keep our comments relevant to the topic under discussion.

B. How we make decisions:

1. The PAC will operate by consensus whenever possible. Consensus does not necessarily mean agreement or active support by each member. Those not objecting are not necessarily indicating that they favor, but merely that they can “live with it.”
2. In the absence of consensus, a super majority of three-quarters (75%) of the PAC members present is required for approval of an action.
3. Participation in the decision-making of the PAC shall be limited to its members.
4. In order to provide continuity in the group’s discussions, members are asked to make every effort to attend all meetings. However, if a member cannot attend, he or she may designate an alternate to attend and participate in discussions of the PAC in his or her absence.
5. Non-members shall attend as observers and may be invited to offer comments, if time allows.

C. How we communicate with those outside the Project Advisory Committee:

1. As it is NHDOT’s intent that the members of the PAC represent the interests of a wide cross section of citizens who live and work in the project area, PAC members are encouraged to report on project issues to others who live and work in this area, particularly to groups or organizations to which they belong, and to bring input to PAC meetings that reflects the interests of these individuals and groups.
2. It will be helpful if PAC members explain to others the process being used to develop the project concepts so they better understand how the project is progressing.

It is believed that following these guidelines and procedures will help the PAC develop advice that is fully considered and will be well received by the NHDOT, the public, and the appropriate Federal, State, and local government leaders and agencies whose support is essential for carrying out the recommendations.