



Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project

Existing Bridges Subcommittee Meeting #1

Hinsdale Police Department
10 Main Street
Hinsdale, NH 03451

MINUTES

May 22, 2018

Subcommittee Attendees: Steve Barrett, *Brattleboro Public Works*; Mark Carignan, *Brattleboro Police Department*; Jason Cooper, *Friends of the West River Trail*; Steve Diorio, *Hinsdale Selectmen*; Todd Faulkner, *Hinsdale Police Department*; Kathryn Lynch, *Community Development Coordinator, Town of Hinsdale*; Prudence MacKinney, *Vermont Department of Health*; Patrick Moreland, *Town of Brattleboro*; Frank Podlenski, *Hinsdale Highway Department*; Ed Smith, *Hinsdale Economic Development Representative*; Sharon Smith, *Hinsdale Historical Society*; Jennifer Stromsten for Adam Grinold, *Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation*.

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*; Jill Collins, *Town Administrator, Town of Hinsdale*; Fred Moriarty, *Brattleboro Museum*.

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began at 1:06 p.m. and J. B. Mack welcomed attendees. He introduced himself and Erica Roper and described the Existing Bridges Subcommittee as being formed by the Hinsdale, NH - Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project Advisory Committee (PAC), a group advising the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) on its project # 12210C to build a new bridge over the Connecticut River. He noted that the Subcommittee was formed to advise the PAC on the future use and management of the existing Charles Dana and Anna Hunt Marsh bridges and Hinsdale Island. He said in forming the Subcommittee, the Towns of Hinsdale and Brattleboro, as well as Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) and Windham Regional Commission (WRC) developed a draft purpose, work tasks, and roster. As part of that process, the Towns of Hinsdale and Brattleboro each nominated a Subcommittee Co-Chair. J. B. Mack introduced Kathryn Lynch, Hinsdale's Community Development Coordinator, and Patrick Moreland, Assistant Town Manager in Brattleboro as Co-Chairs. Patrick Moreland suggested alternating meetings as Co-Chair depending on the location of the meeting (Brattleboro or Hinsdale). Kathryn Lynch asked everyone at the meeting to introduce themselves. Patrick Moreland asked everyone to also identify if they were members of the Subcommittee.

II. Context of Overall Project

Trent Zanes of NHDOT provided an update on the new bridge project. He referred to the project as being at the “60% stage” of design, which involves finalizing drainage plans, among other things. He also mentioned that the NHDOT Bureau of Right of Way is in the process of creating plans involved with the purchase of easements related to the project on the NH side. He said that the project has been “on track” since the January 18, 2018 Public Hearing. Trent Zanes displayed the [project webpage](#) on the NHDOT website and [Public Hearing Plan](#) on a presentation screen. He pointed out the location of the new and existing bridges, the location of the new Runnings store property, and other features. He noted the route, which connects NH 119 to Route 142 in Vermont, will require raising the grade by about 12 feet on the Vermont side (to span over the railway). Trent Zanes said at the completion of the new bridge project, traffic will be removed from the existing bridges. The plans currently depict some form of bicycle and pedestrian access from Mountain Road in Hinsdale across the two existing bridges and Hinsdale Island to Brattleboro. Don Lyford provided additional details, including the timeline of the project, planned to be advertised in September of 2019, with construction beginning in early 2020. Construction is estimated to take 3-4 years, ending in 2023 or 2024 when the existing bridges would be closed to traffic. Following the opening of the new bridge, the existing bridges could be available for rehabilitation work.

Attendees discussed funding related to the project. Don Lyford noted that NHDOT intends to apply for the U.S. Department of Transportation Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development, or [BUILD Transportation Discretionary Grant program](#) as a way of obtaining funding for the project to accommodate an estimated \$8 million in costs to rehabilitate the existing bridges as well as raise funds for the construction of the new bridge which costs approximately \$40 million. J. B. Mack commented that there is currently no funding set aside for NHDOT to rehabilitate the existing bridges, but the current budget covers the costs of the new bridge’s construction. Don Lyford confirmed that there was adequate funding for the new bridge only. J. B. Mack asked if match funding is required to participate in the BUILD program in rural areas. Bob Landry confirmed that match funding is not a requirement for rural applications, however, applications without a match would not be as competitive. He said that discussion has begun on an application created jointly between NHDOT and VTrans.

Attendees discussed issues and questions related to the abandonment of the existing bridges. Erica Roper asked who would be responsible for the old bridges following abandonment. Don Lyford commented that he expected an answer to this question could come out of the work of the Subcommittee. He expected that rehabilitated bridges would be turned over to the two towns. Ed Smith asked who owns and maintains the NH 9 bridge over the Connecticut River in Chesterfield now closed to traffic. Don Lyford said the State of New Hampshire owns the structure and his understanding is that neither the State nor the Town of Chesterfield have programmed funds to maintain the bridge. He recalled that there was an earlier (2005) agreement between the two towns for maintenance.

Steve Barrett asked if there was a cost analysis to remove or replace the existing (Charles Dana and Anna Hunt Marsh) bridges with smaller structures. Don Lyford commented that there is a concern that the project’s National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document would have to be redone, setting back the date of advertising for the new bridge construction if this was investigated. He estimated that updating the NEPA document could take two years and would be dependent on the FHWA and State Historic Office. The current document determined that there would be no significant impacts to historical preservation if the existing bridges are left in place.

Steve Barrett asked what NHDOT anticipates doing to the bridges when they are converted to bicycle and pedestrian use. Don Lyford described that access to the existing bridges, following opening of the new

bridge, could be limited through the use of removable bollards as well as by removing the existing cantilevered sidewalks. He said the new bridge was designed with a sidewalk as well as paved shoulders on each side of the travel lane. Fred Moriarty commented that pedestrian use would probably be higher on the existing bridges compared to the new bridge. Prudence MacKinney asked if rehabilitation of the existing bridges would involve activities such as repairing and replacing deteriorating steel and painting. Erica Roper said that the PAC advocated for shoulder space for bicyclists as well as sidewalks without considering them as a replacement for bicycle and pedestrian access via the existing bridges. She also commented that it could be possible that removal of the existing bridges could potentially be more expensive than rehabilitation.

Mark Carignan commented that future use of Hinsdale Island could have significant impacts on both Hinsdale and Brattleboro. He asked if the island would be within the purview of the Subcommittee. J. B. Mack confirmed that the intent is to have the management and ownership of the island be part of the Subcommittee's purview and said that later on the agenda we will discuss this in more detail.

Jason Cooper advocated that the Subcommittee obtain a cost estimate to remove the existing bridges or maintain the existing bridges to make an informed judgement. Patrick Moreland added that it would also be important to clarify the extent of removing the existing bridges. For example, can bridge abutments be left in place? Bob Landry commented that not removing abutments could be a potential safety hazard. Attendees discussed concerns about coal tar contamination in the vicinity of the bridge abutments. Don Lyford said his understanding is that the coal tar contamination is limited to the Vermont side of the river. Jason Cooper commented that abutments could be used for a new bridge to better maintain connectivity to Wantastiquet Mountain and other recreational assets.

J. B. Mack noted that his sense from the PAC is that they do not want the project to be delayed anymore, and that it will be important for the Subcommittee to be aware of this as it begins its work supporting the PAC. Erica Roper agreed that the PAC would not likely support removing the existing bridges if it delayed the project. She also pointed out that it could be challenging to locate funding to construct new bridges as opposed to rehabilitating the existing ones. Representative Michael Abbott stated that he would be upset if the new bridge hinged on decisions made about the existing bridges.

III. Existing Bridges Subcommittee Overview

a. Roles of RPCs, NHDOT and VTrans

Erica Roper described the role of the two regional planning commissions as helping facilitate Subcommittee meetings and public outreach activities as well as conducting research on behalf of the Subcommittee. She said that the regional planning commissions will support the Subcommittee, but there are resource limits to what can be provided to the Subcommittee. J. B. Mack added that the regional planning commissions are setting aside resources out of their existing transportation planning work programs for this project because the project is seen as a priority by both commissions. Erica Roper said that NHDOT and VTrans are making themselves available to provide technical assistance as needed and attend meetings as well.

b. Purpose

J. B. Mack introduced a handout entitled "Existing Bridges Subcommittee: Overview" (attached) which describes the purpose of the Subcommittee, membership, and proposed processes. He reiterated that the creation of the Subcommittee is based on a directive from the PAC and said the current overview represents a starting point. He summarized the "Purpose" section of the document, which is to have the Subcommittee develop and recommend a vision for the existing bridges, Hinsdale Island, as well as the role the bridges

and island have on the surrounding area. He mentioned the West River Trail and Wantastiquet Mountain as two examples of assets that may have a connection to the bridges and island. He noted the purview of the Subcommittee will include physical changes, management and maintenance considerations, ownership, and public safety issues, among other things. J. B. Mack said a vision would include recreational opportunities like bicycle and pedestrian access, boat access, as well as economic development opportunities.

Steve Diorio commented that the Purpose and Membership sections looked good. Patrick Moreland agreed and added there would be a need to get input from the general public on the existing bridges, Hinsdale Island, as well as a responsibility of the Subcommittee to ask difficult questions about where money would come from. He also emphasized it was important to make clear that the Subcommittee should not assume local ownership is in the best interest of the Towns. He said he was sensitive to potential delay but expressed concern that even if the existing bridges were rehabilitated in the short term, they could become a burdensome responsibility in the future. J. B. Mack asked if the Purpose section adequately reflected Mr. Moreland's concern. Patrick Moreland responded that the Purpose portrays a view that adaptive reuse is a *likely* outcome and commented this should be considered a *possible* outcome. J. B. Mack asked attendees if part of the charge of the Subcommittee should include considering the removal of the existing bridges. Jason Cooper said he was not in favor of slowing the construction of the new bridge and asked if the fate of the existing bridges could be considered separate, due to the fact that funding sources were separate. Don Lyford commented that the Subcommittee should consider this carefully due to the existing determination of no impact as part of the NEPA process. Frank Podlenksi commented that the State should keep responsibility of the existing bridges going forward. Bob Landry said that if the bridges were not transferred to the municipalities, the communities may lose access to Hinsdale Island. Mike Carignan commented that the proposed Purpose addresses Mr. Moreland's view and other views expressed at the table.

J. B. Mack noted there was nothing wrong with investigating these questions and said that learning more would not impact the project timeline. Erica Roper said that the departments of transportation can't force a community to take full responsibility for a bridge and said there may be options for a compromised maintenance and ownership strategy. She mentioned splitting up winter maintenance and capital maintenance as an example. Patrick Moreland agreed with Mike Carignan that the Purpose is adequate as written. Chris Baker noted that the Vermont ownership of the bridge going into Brattleboro is the responsibility of the Town of Brattleboro and not the State of Vermont. He also mentioned a key finding of the Environmental Assessment that stated the historic bridges were considered an important aspect of downtown Brattleboro.

J. B. Mack asked if there was consensus that the Purpose section was acceptable as written and everyone agreed.

c. Membership

Erica Roper summarized the planned membership of the group, according to the handout. She commented that although there is not representation from both states in each area of expertise, the hope is that both communities can work as a team to resolve issues. For example, the public health representative is in Vermont, but is concerned with everyone's public health. She noted that the Towns and regional planning commissions recognize that there are a large number of additional stakeholders that will have an interest in the project and so an interested stakeholder list has been created to allow others to receive meeting information and add to conversations. She mentioned it may be possible to hold smaller discussion meetings on certain topics, which would then be reported back to the Subcommittee. J. B. Mack said the regional planning commissions were having difficulties connecting with some Subcommittee members,

such as the member from Rescue, Inc. Todd Faulker suggested adding the Hinsdale Fire Department as an interested stakeholder as they could be conducting rescue operations in the future as well as the Brattleboro Fire Department. Erica Roper said at a minimum they would be alerted about the Subcommittee meetings and would be contacted directly about agenda items most relevant to their purview. Sharon Smith asked if the relevant river or watershed commission or fish and game departments had been contacted. J. B. Mack responded that the Connecticut River Joint Commission is currently on the list of interested stakeholders. Todd Faulkner suggested including Great River Hydro, the owners of dams and rights of way along the Connecticut River. He mentioned that they offer community grants, maintain campsites, and manage a canoe trail. J. B. Mack said the regional planning commissions could share the draft list of interested stakeholders after the meeting as a way of finding out if anyone needs to be added. Fred Moriarty said the Brattleboro Museum should be considered an interested stakeholder and asked if they were on the list. He added that the Museum is in the early stages of a \$20 million project which would include a mixed-use development in the vicinity of the existing bridges that is planned to occur at approximately the same time as the construction of the new bridge. No other comments on the Membership section of the Overview document were made.

d. Process and Deliverables

J. B. Mack introduced and described the items appearing on the handout under the heading “Proposed Process & Deliverables”. He said the regional planning commissions see this process as having three major parts: an evaluation of existing conditions, a process for obtaining interested stakeholder and public feedback, and developing and recommending a vision for the bridges and island area. To evaluate existing conditions, existing data will need to be compiled and analyzed and perhaps some new data will have to be collected. He said the plan for the next meeting will include a focus on what existing conditions data or information will be needed by the Subcommittee to assess the future of the bridges and island. Erica Roper prompted attendees to think about what information they have available, for example public safety data, as well as data they would like to have. She encouraged individuals to share data with both regional planning commissions. J. B. Mack said staff at the regional planning commissions will be conducting much of the work related to data collection. Bob Landry said that NHDOT can compile existing plans, information on structural conditions, as well as create cost estimates to remove the existing bridge superstructures, remove existing superstructures and substructures, and maintain existing bridges (without de-icing salt in the winter). Jason Cooper asked if there was a critical time when rehabilitation would need to occur. Erica Roper commented that this was a good example of a question to pose to staff for people to follow-up on.

J. B. Mack went on to describe the general public outreach and engagement approach listed in the document. He noted that the plan is to have public forums and stakeholder interviews throughout the process as a way to collect feedback and guide Subcommittee work. Information may be collected in interviews as well as surveys. He pointed out that SWRPC and WRC would provide more ideas to the Subcommittee on specific public outreach strategies at a later date.

J. B. Mack said that the last component of the process is the development of a vision. He noted that the plan does not include direct access to engineers to perform detailed studies and should consider the results as a planning effort to determine a vision of use for the existing bridges. As part of this process, the Subcommittee would determine if there was political will and public support to carry out the vision. He added that the Subcommittee deliverable would serve as a way to guide and inspire others to move towards implementation. Erica Roper said that the Subcommittee also needs to coordinate with each Town, not just the public, especially as it relates to agreements and budgets.

Todd Faulkner said that according to town records, the current owner of the island is the State of New Hampshire. He said that we really need to understand who will be the future owner of the island at the

beginning of this process. He asked who has authority to make changes to the island? J. B. Mack responded that we could work with NHDOT to better learn about the State's interest in the island, but we could also look at different management and ownership scenarios. Jennifer Stromsten said that she agreed that having more information would be helpful. She suggested that it would be helpful to have case studies of how other States and towns have addressed similar circumstances and which approaches seemed to work the best.

e. Draft Timeline

Erica Roper passed out a handout which presented the Subcommittee's tasks and meeting schedule over a 24-month period (attached). She said that specific meeting times would be at the discretion of the Subcommittee through its Co-Chairs and that the proposed schedule is fairly high-level and subject to change. She summarized the roles of the regional planning commissions, including the development of case studies and performing an existing conditions evaluation.

Erica Roper said the next meeting would be focused on direction and approach as well as preparing for an assessment of existing conditions. She asked the Subcommittee to start to think about how this process might work. She said that the regional planning commissions want to create something that works for everyone. Fred Moriarty suggested adding examples of work products to the timeline. Erica Roper noted that they are currently noted in the Overview handout.

IV. Next Steps

J. B. Mack confirmed that staff will circulate the list of interested stakeholders as well as coordinate the next meeting of the Subcommittee. Following-up on Fred Moriarty's mention of deliverables, Erica Roper said that a discussion about deliverables would be a good topic for the next meeting. She also said that there were existing conditions maps that could be evaluated at the next meeting that were created several years ago. She said the deliverables could be a combination of PowerPoint and a short report. Kathryn Lynch said it would be important to get information from NHDES about wetlands and confirm what could be done on Hinsdale Island.

V. Next Meeting

J. B. Mack said he would send a poll for a June meeting (to be held at a location in Vermont). Following the June meeting, the next meeting would be in September. Attendees commented that a standing meeting time would be helpful.

VI. Public Comment

No comments were made.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Underwood
GIS Specialist/Planner