Route 123 and 124 Bridge ("Highbridge") Replacement Over Souhegan River – New Ipswich, NH
Project #14465
Public Involvement Plan

Southwest Regional Planning Commission
New Hampshire Department of Transportation
Town of New Ipswich, New Hampshire

Adopted:
Revised:

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1.0 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Purpose of Public Involvement Plan

The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to communicate information about a wide range of activities that are involved in the New Ipswich 14465 NH Route 123 and 124 Bridge replacement project. This PIP will:

- Communicate the principles of the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process that will be incorporated on the New Ipswich 14465 project;
- Communicate information about the project team;
- Communicate upcoming meeting dates; and
- Describe the communication methods that will be implemented to inform the community.

The Public Involvement Plan will be updated periodically to reflect updates to schedule and other items that change over the course of the project, and will not be considered a completed document until the end of the project's design.

1.2 Principles of Context Sensitive Solutions

The New Ipswich 14465 project will incorporate the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS). This is a process endorsed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and is defined by FHWA as "a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility." A stakeholder is defined as a person or group affected by and/or with an interest in the outcome of the project. Stakeholders in the New Ipswich 14465 project include:

- *Citizens who live, work and/or travel along NH Routes 123 and 124, and other ancillary roads connected to either NH Route 123 or 124 in New Ipswich;*
- *Municipal, regional, and state government elected and appointed officials;*
- *Groups with environmental, economic, or other concerns;*
- *Local utility companies;*
- *Resource agencies such as the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and NH Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR);*
- *NH Department of Safety;*
- *Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); and the*
- *NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT).*

The CSS process has 15 guiding principles that have been divided into two groups: 1) Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design and 2) Characteristics of the Process Contributing to Excellence (http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/qualities.htm). The 15 principles are listed below:

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Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design

1. The project satisfies the purpose and needs as agreed to by a full range of stakeholders. This agreement is forged in the earliest phase of the project and amended, as warranted, as the project develops.
2. The project is a safe facility for both the user and the community.
3. The project is in harmony with the community, and it preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resource values of the area.
4. The project exceeds the expectations of both designers and stakeholders and achieves a level of excellence in people's minds.
5. The project involves efficient and effective use of the resources (time, budget, community) of all involved parties.
6. The project is designed and built with minimal disruption to the community.
7. 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 established early, with disciplines based on the needs of the specific project, and with the inclusion of the public.
3. A full range of stakeholders is involved with transportation officials in the scoping phase. The purposes of the project are clearly defined, and consensus on the scope is forged before proceeding.
4. The highway development process is tailored to meet the circumstances. This process should examine multiple alternatives that will result in a consensus of approach methods.
5. A commitment to the process from top agency officials and local leaders is secured.
6. The public involvement process, which includes informal meetings, is tailored to the project.
7. The landscape, the community, and valued resources are understood before engineering design is started.
8. A full range of tools for communication about project alternatives is used (e.g., visualization).

1.3 Project Overview

The project is located in the Town of New Ipswich about 1.5 miles southeast of New Ipswich Center and seeks to address safety concerns of the red-listed Route 123 and 124 bridge that crosses the Souhegan River. This bridge is commonly referred to as “Highbridge”. The project was initiated through state bridge inspection findings, and is assigned priority #21 among the bridges included in the State’s Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Plan (2009-2018). Currently, the project is funded for construction beginning in 2012-13 at a cost of approximately $3.2M.

1.4 Project Team

The project team consists of:

- The Project Lead Team (PLT);

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- The Project Advisory Committee (PAC).

The Project Lead Team (PLT) consists of NHDOT staff representing the anticipated disciplines that will likely be required and SWRPC staff to facilitate the CSS process*. The PAC members are comprised of citizens, who live in New Ipswich near the Bridge, along with appointed and elected town officials representing the Town of New Ipswich. The Committee also includes a representative of Warwick Mills, a large business and employer in Town, which is located adjacent to Highbridge. Finally, a representative of the Mascenic Regional Schools, which includes the towns of Greenville, Mason and New Ipswich, has been included on the PAC.* Also the NHDOT and SWRPC staff represents state and regional transportation interests. The PAC serves in an advisory role (tasked with making recommendations to the NHDOT) and is anticipated to be involved with the project from the project planning phase through the end of the project's design.

PROJECT LEAD TEAM			
NAME	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE	BUREAU, POSITION
Don Lyford	7 Hazen Drive, Concord	271-2165	Bureau of Highway Design, Project Manager
Michael Dugas	7 Hazen Drive, Concord	271-2604	Bureau of Highway Design, Chief of Preliminary Design
David Scott	7 Hazen Drive, Concord	271-2731	Bureau of Bridge Design, In House Design Chief
Eric R. Smith	20 Central Square, Keene	357-0557	SWRPC, Planner

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE	
Name	Representing
Bob Boynton	New Ipswich Conservation Commission
David Leel	New Ipswich Fire Chief
Ed Rogers	New Ipswich Resident
Garrett Chamberlain	New Ipswich Police Chief
Gary Somero	School Representative
George Lawrence	New Ipswich Selectman
Marie Knowlton	New Ipswich Town Administrator
Peter Goewey	New Ipswich Road Agent
Woody Houston	Warwick Mills
Susan Williams	New Ipswich Historical Society

2.0 PROJECT PROCESS

2.1 NHDOT Project Development Process

All NHDOT projects, including the New Ipswich 14465 project, are developed through a seven-step project development process illustrated below.

- Project Scoping / Data Collection / Coordination
- Preliminary Engineering Studies / Environmental Evaluation
- Identification of Preferred Alternative / Draft Environmental Documentation
- Formal Public Hearing Process

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- Selected Alternative / Final Environmental Documentation
- Final Design (Project Construction Plan Development) / Right-of-Way Acquisition
- Project Construction

This process is described in more detail in the '*Project Development - Making Transportation Projects a Reality'* guide that is available on the Department's website at the following link: http://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/plans.htm under the Citizens Guide to Transportation Series section. The CSS process seeks to gather critical community-level input into the first three phases of the project development process prior to identifying a "Preferred Alternative" for presentation, as well as requesting layout approval at the formal Public Hearing.

Currently, the project is in the Project Scoping, Data Collection, and Coordination Phase. The project team through the PAC, will develop a problem statement, vision statement, and alternative screening criteria. The aforementioned will be used in the development of project alternatives and identification of the preferred alternative, as well as in the environmental documentation for the project.

Once the "Preferred Alternative" has been identified and draft environmental document completed, a formal Public Hearing will be held to procure approval for the project's layout. The Hearing will be overseen by a Hearing Commission that is comprised of three members appointed by the Governor and Executive Council, who are tasked with making a decision on the layout of the preferred alternative that has been identified for the project. At the Public Hearing, the Department will make a formal presentation and public testimony will be taken, recorded, and transcribed for the Hearing Commission to determine the occasion for the layout as presented. All issues and/or comments raised at the Public Hearing or during the hearing comment period will be documented and addressed in a report entitled the *Report of the Commissioner* (ROTC). The project team will coordinate with the PAC to help address each issue raised at the Hearing prior to the finalization of the ROTC. Should the Hearing Commission vote in favor of the project's layout, then the project will advance to the Final Design / Right-of-Way Acquisition stage. The Public Hearing and subsequent layout approval represents a major milestone in the project development phase as it solidifies the major aspects and right of way requirements of the project's design.

2.2 Project Meetings

Several types of meetings are planned over the course of this project. They are described in the sections below.

2.2.1 Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meetings

The purpose of the PAC meetings is to obtain input from the team and to facilitate the flow of information and ideas between the team, community, and public at-large. Presently, 6-8 PAC meetings are planned over the next 12 – 18 months.

Anticipated topics of discussion for Project Advisory Committee meetings:

PAC Meeting 1 –

- Discuss Context Sensitive Solutions Approach and Process

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- Discuss Project Advisory Committee Roles and Responsibilities
- Discuss Draft Public Involvement Plan
- Begin Development of Problem Statement

PAC Meeting 2 –
- Discuss Draft Problem Statement
- Call for Consensus on Problem Statement
- Overview of Vision Statements

PAC Meeting 3 –
- Develop Project Vision Statement
- Call for Consensus on Vision Statement
- Overview of Alternative Rating Criteria

PAC Meeting 4 –
- Discuss Alternative Rating Criteria
- Consensus on Rating Criteria
- Discuss Conceptual Alternatives

PAC Meeting 5-
- Review Alternatives
- Rate Alternatives

Public Informational Meeting-
- Present and Receive Public Feedback on Design Alternatives

PAC Meeting 6-:
- Discuss Preferred Alternative
- Call for Consensus on Preferred Alternative

Public Hearing-
- Formal Presentation of Project Design to the Public and Abutters

2.2.2 Guidelines and Procedures

The PAC has an important and challenging task of providing public input to the New Hampshire Department of Transportation in several important areas for the New Ipswich 14465 NH Route 123 and 124 Bridge reconstruction: developing a statement of problems and needs, drafting a project vision statement, developing concepts to address the problems and needs to meet the vision, and advising the Department on selecting a preferred alternative for the project design.

Because of the significance and complexity of the issues with which the Project Advisory Committee will be dealing, it is important to make the most effective use of our meeting times. Therefore, as a group, we commit to the following guidelines and procedures:

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A. How we treat each other:

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

B. How we make decisions:

- The Project Advisory Committee 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."
- In the absence of consensus, a super majority of three-quarters (75%) of the Project Advisory Committee members present is required for approval of an action.
- Participation in the decision-making of the Project Advisory Committee shall be limited to its members.
- 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 Project Advisory Committee in his or her absence.
- 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:

- As it is NHDOT's intent that the members of the Project Advisory Committee 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.
- It will be helpful if Project Advisory Committee members explain to others the process being used to develop the project concepts so they better understand how the project is progressing.

We believe that following these guidelines and procedures will help us to develop advice that is fully considered and will be well received by the Department, the public, and the appropriate Federal, State, and local government leaders and agencies whose support is essential for carrying out our recommendations.

2.2.3 Public Informational Meeting

The objective of the public informational meeting is to review the problem and vision statements, review the rating criteria, and receive feedback on the project alternatives that are acceptable to the community and public at-large. The meeting will be widely advertised within the community with notices posted in

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prominent public places and on the Town of New Ipswich website. Advertisements of the meeting will also be included in several local and regional newspapers. Meeting notices will also be mailed to the abutters within the project limits, and local, regional, and state Officials. The public informational meetings are intended to be an afternoon / evening session 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.

2.2.4 *Public Hearing*

Once a Preferred Alternative has been identified for the project and the environmental documentation completed, a formal Public Hearing to secure layout approval for the project will be scheduled. The Public Hearing will be held within the Town of New Ipswich. The Hearing will be widely advertised within the community with notices posted in prominent public places and on the Town's website. Hearing notices will also be advertised in several local and regional newspapers. Invitations will be sent by certified mail to all abutting property owners potentially directly impacted by the project. Invitations will also be sent to local, regional, and state Officials, as well as to environmental and other interest groups. The Public Hearing and subsequent layout approval represents 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 conclusion of a successful Public Hearing phase, which represents the project at a 30% completion stage, allows the project to proceed to final design and right-of-way procurement.

2.3 Project Schedule

The proposed project meeting schedule is attached. The schedule is approximate and subject to change. Additional interim meetings may be necessary to reach consensus on certain items prior to proceeding to the next step.

2.3.1 Design Schedule

- Preliminary Design (CSS Process)
- Public Hearing
- Layout Approval
- Final Design & ROW Procurement
- Construction

2.3.2 Meeting Schedule

The purpose of the PAC meetings is to obtain input from the Project Lead Team and to facilitate the flow of information and ideas between the Team, community, and public at-large. Presently, six PAC meetings are planned over the next 12 – 18 months.

The first PAC meeting will be held on May 20, 2009. This meeting will serve as an orientation session as well as a project kick-off meeting. At the meeting, members of the PAC will be provided a brief history of the project, an overview of CSS, an explanation of how the CSS process would be implemented for the project and developing a problem statement. Other meetings will focus on developing consensus on a problem statement, meeting to reach consensus on a vision statement, meeting to develop and concur on screening criteria, meeting to brainstorm and screen alternatives, and meeting to reach consensus on a Preferred

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Alternative. Once a preferred alternative has been identified a formal Public Hearing to procure approval for the project layout would be held.

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 NHDOT Website

A web page for the New Ipswich 14465 project has been created on the NHDOT website and will be used to post pertinent project information, meeting agendas, and meeting summaries or notes. The web page can be accessed at the NHDOT's Project Information Center at http://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/specifics.htm. 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. For questions or comments on the material posted on the website, please contact the NHDOT Project Manager:

- Don Lyford, NHDOT Project Manager, at dlyford@dot.state.nh.us or (603) 271-2165.

3.2 Town Website

A link from the Town of New Ipswich's website to the project's web page on the NHDOT website will be provided.

3.3 E-mail

A primary method of communication for the Project Advisory Committee will be via e-mail. Individual e-mail addresses for the PAC members are contained within the project files. Meeting agendas, meeting notes, and other pertinent project information will be disseminated to the Project Advisory Committee via this method of communication.

3.4 Meetings

Project Advisory Committee meetings, Public Informational meetings, and Workshops will be used as different avenues to disseminate and discuss pertinent project related information.

3.5 Media

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

- Keene Sentinel
  - Publication Frequency: daily
  - Distribution: Southwest New Hampshire

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- Address: 60 West Street, Keene, NH 03431
- Phone: (603) 352-1234
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