Bennington Roundabout Project – Bennington STP 1000(23)

DATE	Wednesday, November 13, 2024
VENUE	Bennington College CAPA Symposium and Zoom
MEETING	Bennington Roundabout Project Construction Public Meeting
TIME	6 PM – 8 PM
PROJECT TEAM ATTENDEES	Michael LaCroix (VTrans), Demetrio Koloseus-Gagnon (VTrans), Elaine Ezerins (WSP), Megan Savage (WSP), Annabelle Dally (WSP), Dennis Vertiyev (Green), Stephen Sacco (Green)
VIRTUAL ATTENDEES (Names appear as noted in the Zoom post meeting attendee report)	Mike McKamey, Bob Madeiros, Angel Kwasniak (Bennington College), Ann Gammell (VTrans), Meagan, Dave and Marsha, Lesley Jacobson, Tammy, Lorraine Atwood (Bennington College), Robert Ridley, Stephanie, Kim Likakis, Steven DeTeso, Spencer Sweet, CLD, Jennifer Fels, Bobbi McKamey, Naomi Bindman, Mark Anders, Barry Mayer, Caitlin, Cindy, iPad
IN-PERSON ATTENDEES	Bruce R. Weinfurt, Mary Weinfurt, Paul Baker Poranski, Dan Monks, Mick Goldsworth, Cate and Mark Branca, Linda Bermudez, KJ Brown, Jim Sullivan, Jim Gooding, William Greer, Eric Postel, Wayn Goodman, Bob Tecart, Philip Dewey, Lexey Covell, Jonathan Staples, additional attendees in the room that did not sign in, approximately 25 in total

Meeting Minutes

A recording of the construction public meeting is available online here.

Project Team Presentation

Michael LaCroix, VTrans Project Manager, welcomed everyone, provided an overview of the project milestones, and introduced the project team, including:

- Dennis Vertiyev, Project Manager with Green International Affiliates, Inc., overseeing the design of the project
- Stephen Sacco, Project Engineer, Green International Affiliates, Inc.
- Elaine Ezerins, the Public Information Consultant with WSP, who will handle communications between the public and the project

Elaine Ezerins reviewed the format of the meeting and zoom technology, asking for questions to be held until the Q&A portion of the meeting.

Dennis Vertiyev outlined the agenda, including project purpose and needs, existing conditions, post construction conditions, construction schedule, traffic impacts including detours, and ways the public can stay informed throughout construction. Dennis explained the purpose and need is to improve the overall safety of the VT Route 67A (VT 67A) intersection at College Drive, Matteson Road, and Silk Road, reduce speeds along VT 67A, improve sight distances along the intersecting side roads to allow for safe maneuvers within the intersection, and improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations and safety within the project area. Dennis showed a graphic of the existing conditions, noting each road at the intersections.

Dennis turned it over to Stephen Sacco to discuss the post construction conditions. Stephen explained the intersection will be replaced with a peanut shaped roundabout, including reconstructing approximately 300 feet of each roadway as it approaches the roundabout. He said VT 67A will be widened to have 5-foot shoulders to accommodate bicycles, and Silk Road and Matteson Road will be widened to have 3-foot shoulders. He added that the project will reconstruct the Ninja Path, install a second pedestrian crossing with rectangular rapid flashing beacons across Silk Road, and improve the lighting particularly near the pedestrian crossings. He explained some of the islands will be mountable (for trucks) and some will be concrete splitter islands (not mountable).

Stephen said work will be completed on weekdays during daytime hours, utilizing one-lane alternating traffic patterns on VT 67A controlled by flaggers or uniformed traffic officers. He said the public should expect delays during this work. He added there will be roadway closures as well, divvied up into separate phases. He said one phase would be a Silk Road closure and detour, and a second phase would entail Matteson Road and College Drive closures and detour. He said pedestrian accommodations would be maintained throughout construction. Stephen showed maps of both detour routes, explaining the detours will add 5-10 minutes of extra travel time.

Stephen outlined the construction schedule, saying the construction contract was awarded this fall and utility relocations are underway and anticipated to conclude this fall. He said crews are anticipated to mobilize in March 2025, with construction continuing throughout 2025 and 2026. He said the substantial completion date is summer 2026, and contract completion is fall 2026.

Stephen turned it over to Elaine Ezerins, who explained the team would issue project updates to an email project stakeholder list. This includes project announcements throughout the life of the project to share important milestones, and weekly Construction Updates and Traffic Alerts during active construction. She noted the QR codes that attendees could scan to sign up for project updates or view the project factsheet which also included a folder with additional project materials. Elaine reiterated her role as the public information consultant for the project and invited attendees to contact her directly via phone or email with any questions about the project or construction in the future.

Public Q&A
Q = Question
C = Comment
A = Answer

Q: Is the historic brick house going to be demolished?
A: Michael LaCroix - The brick house is owned by Bennington College, and it is not going to be demolished as part of this project.
Q: Is there anyone here from Bennington College that can comment on the future use of that building?
A: Angel Kwasniak (Bennington College) – We don't have any plans to tear down the Silk Road house and we're having conversations currently to figure out next steps for the use of the house.
Q: Has there been any consideration to relocating that house or how much indirect damage the house will receive from all the construction traffic?

A: Michael LaCroix - I can answer the second part of that question. The construction activity for the roundabout will not have any sort of impact to the house. The college wanted to keep it intact, so we stayed of clear of it in our designs.
A: Angel Kwasniak (Bennington College) – I've been at the college for almost 30 years and know that there's history around this house. I know that a lot of people wanted to tear down the house, and that there were a lot of people who were against tearing down the house. There is no talk about moving the house. We probably 10 years ago, had somebody come in and look at the house, and it needed extensive work at that time, and we really have not done a lot with the house at all, so the house is in pretty rough shape.

Q: Will Silk Road be closed all the time, or just during the weekly construction?
A: Michael LaCroix - We don't know for certain yet. The contractor still needs to submit their traffic control plan for approval, which should happen shortly. I think any sort of closures and any sort of detours that we showed you tonight are only going to be in place long enough for the contractor to perform the work that would affect those roads. Otherwise, VTrans would want to try to keep the main roads open as long as possible. I would say stay tuned and sign up for the project updates, because we're going to be putting those out weekly, and we'll give people as much notice as possible for road closures.

C: I'm particularly interested in the duration of the Silk Road closures because that's a heavily used route between North Bennington and the center of Bennington. I would emphasize that minimizing the amount of time that the road is fully closed is really critical to a lot of people.
A: Michael LaCroix - Absolutely, we're going to do what we can to keep them to a minimum.

C: In other roundabout construction projects I've seen, you build one side of the roundabout and keep traffic going on the other side, and then you switch it around so that through traffic is maintained. I know it's complicated with the side roads, but I've seen roundabouts work pretty well without a lot of traffic disruption when you can do that.
A: Michael LaCroix - Yes, I've seen probably at least a dozen roundabouts constructed in Vermont, and I've seen them constructed in all different ways. I've seen them built inside out, outside in, and in quadrants and halves. Once the contractor submits their plan, we'll be able to get a better sense of how they want to tackle this.

Q: I want to thank VTrans, because you have a thankless job, never enough money, never enough time. I appreciate what you guys do. As a driver, it seems reasonable. I hope you're considering the steepness of Austin Hill Road in the winter, when it's slick and visibility is poor. As a cyclist who rides thousands of miles each year, I've navigated this intersection hundreds of times. You mentioned five-foot shoulders, which is great. Do these shoulders extend all the way around the peanut? What's the plan for that? I've noticed some dangerous issues at the Walmart roundabout.
A: Dennis Vertiyev – No, the shoulders were reduced because cyclists can exit the roundabout onto the shared-use path. As you approach the roundabout, the five-foot shoulders narrow to one or two feet. Cyclists can leave the road, use the ramp, and follow the path around the roundabout instead of going through it. Alternatively, cyclists can enter the travel lane, as it's safer to be in front of or behind vehicles rather than alongside them.

C: I understand that for the south side, but the north side lacks that option. From my experience, the safest way for cyclists to navigate the Walmart roundabout is to merge into the flow of traffic and position themselves in the center of the lane. I have two suggestions: First, a sign explaining that cyclists will be in the middle of the lane could help drivers understand and reduce frustration. Second, the entrance to the roundabout from the roads becomes very narrow, forcing cyclists to move to the side. It seems like you're doing a great job considering these factors, but a design review could enhance safety significantly.
A: Dennis Vertiyev – Thank you for your feedback, absolutely, and we do look at that very carefully. The lane width is intentionally designed to encourage vehicles to slow down, as signs alone aren't always effective. We create a narrow entrance to the roundabout to help reduce speeds as vehicles approach.

Q: Which and how many trees will be removed? They see new trees on the diagram and wondering if they'll be replaced with the same number or more trees.
A: Michael LaCroix - We don't have an exact count of the trees, but a group on the south side near Silk Road will be removed. We plan to build stormwater infrastructure in that area to treat stormwater. After that, we'll plant new trees and enhance the landscaping throughout the project. We collaborated with the college to select specific tree species for the project area, so any existing scrub trees will be replaced with more defined and aesthetically pleasing varieties.

Q: Have you considered putting up signs to encourage drivers to use their directionals? T In Bennington, many drivers don't use them. Directionals are courteous and can help with the traffic flow.
A: Dennis Vertiyev – One important consideration for design engineers at intersections and roundabouts is minimizing sign clutter. We aim to maximize the visibility of essential signs while recognizing that drivers have limited attention. When designing a roundabout, we adhere to federal and state requirements for minimal sign packages and include necessary wayfinding signage for visitors. Yield signs are also crucial to ensure drivers yield to the roundabout traffic. However, we often find that many people don't read signs. Therefore, when we do install them, we strive to make them effective without overwhelming drivers, which could become a distraction.
C: It's the law to use your blinkers, and nobody does it, and there's no sign.
A: Michael LaCroix - It becomes an enforcement issue at that point. In fairness, we don't have, usually blinker signs at a regular stoplight intersection too. It's a fair point, right? I mean, people need to follow the law, but unfortunately, you can't put signs everywhere too.

Q: When do you expect the contractor to submit their plans?
A: Michael LaCroix - So this is Demetrio Koloseus-Gagnon. He works with VTrans and is going to be the Resident Engineer on the project. He will be the boots on the ground, working with the contractor directly.
A: Demetrio Koloseus-Gagnon - The contractor plans to submit their schedule, traffic control plan, and erosion plan next week or during the week of Thanksgiving. Once these are approved, they will receive a notice to proceed. However, construction season in Vermont ends on December 2, so even with the notice, the chances of starting any work this winter are very slim. They will begin in the spring.
A: Michael LaCroix - We wanted to hold this meeting to inform you about the possibility of them being on site this year, so you wouldn't be left wondering about the status. Unfortunately, time is running out, and you can expect to see them in the spring.

A: Demetrio Koloseus-Gagnon - We will send out notices over the winter before the contractor begins work.

Q: How will traffic will be moved east to west on VT 67A if the intersection is closed?
A: Dennis Vertiyev – VT 67A is the primary route through this area, so we designed the roundabout construction to maintain two-way traffic. There will be temporary one-way alternating traffic during the day when we need to rebuild sections of VT 67A, but the road will not be closed beyond daily activities. This is primarily because VT 67A is the main route and has the highest volume of vehicles. For the reconstruction of Silk Road, College Drive, Rice Lane, and Matteson Road, we will need to implement closures due to the roundabout's impact. There isn't enough width to keep those roads open while we reconstruct them at the same time. As soon as we can shift traffic onto the roundabout, those roads will reopen. However, VT 67A will remain open throughout all phases of construction.

Q: During a closure of Silk Road, will they still be able to access VT 67A and not to the south?
A: Dennis Vertiyev – This is the detour for when Silk Road is closed. If you can't turn left from VT 67A onto Silk Road at this intersection, you'll need to go straight through the intersection, then take Murphy Road, Austin Hill Road, and Vail Road to reach the other end of Silk Road. This detour will take approximately five to ten minutes.

Q: We have a wood chip truck that delivers to our biomass facility twice a day on most days. Will the truck be able to navigate the one-lane closure and turn into the Bennington College entrance? Or should we consider opening the north gate entrance to facilitate these deliveries?
A: Dennis Vertiyev – We discussed the biofuel deliveries. One-way alternating traffic will be in place along the approaches to VT 67A on both the east and west sides of the intersection, but the intersection itself will remain open during construction. We have considered the turning movements to make sure that trucks can get in and out of the facility. It will be important to coordinate with Demetrio during construction. It would be helpful for him to know the anticipated delivery times for the trucks to allow the contractor to adjust their traffic management plan as needed. This might involve moving some drums or making other minor adjustments to facilitate the larger trucks.

Q: What is the price tag of the project?
A: Michael LaCroix - I believe the estimate is $5 million, which is 100% fully funded by a federal safety improvement program.

Q: The work is scheduled for weekdays during the day. I thought you mentioned trying to schedule it for low-traffic times, but weekdays during the day seem to be peak traffic hours in that area. Is there a plan in place for the timing?
A: Michael LaCroix - The contractor hasn't submitted their final schedule yet, but we typically restrict work to daytime hours. While VT 67A is busy, it's not so congested that we need to consider nighttime or weekend work. We've successfully constructed similar roundabouts in busier areas during the day, so we don't anticipate any issues. Our construction staff will monitor the situation closely and make adjustments as necessary, but we believe daytime work hours will be manageable.

Q: Who's the contractor?

A: Michael LaCroix - The contractor is Casella Construction. They're from the Pittsford/Rutland area and they've constructed several roadway projects for us in the past. We've had good success with them.

Q: Would it be possible for some of the project work to be done at night?
A: Michael LaCroix - We don't anticipate needing nighttime work. However, if an emergency arises or if a task needs to extend beyond regular hours, it may be necessary. Nighttime work presents several challenges, including the need for work zone lighting and safety considerations for the workers. While there are only one or two nearby residents, we want to be respectful of their living situation, so we will aim to avoid night work whenever possible.

Q: Does the current design include a retaining wall along the east side of Matteson Road? If so, how high will it be?
A: Dennis Vertiyev – What you see is a stone-lined swale for drainage, not a wall. The grading in this project is low, so there are no walls or drop-offs. Everything is graded to either match existing grades or slope down to them.

Q: I'm particularly concerned about the residents on Silk Road near the VT 67A intersection during the detour. They're going to be severely inconvenienced. Have you discussed with the contractor the possibility of adding a lane that connects VT 67A to Silk Road? Can we stay in touch about this? There seems to be space available, but I'm unsure about any state regulations regarding proximity to the river.
A: Michael LaCroix - Yes, there are several permitting requirements to consider, along with a whole set of impacts that we didn't believe were necessary for this. While any roadwork can be disruptive, we think the residents on Silk Road are far enough away not to be significantly affected. We've been in close contact with the resident on the northeast corner, who has been supportive of the project. If anyone might be affected by noise, it would be him, but he seems easy going about the project. Everyone else is far enough away.
C: I think he may have been asking more about the detour's impact than the construction traffic itself. The detour doesn't fully reflect how it will affect those who need to travel the entire length of Silk Road in addition to the detour. My point is to minimize the duration of the Silk Road closure, as the detour adds a five to ten-minute delay for everyone, but it is even longer for those residents.

Q: When will that part of Silk Road be closed?
A: Michael LaCroix - We don't know the exact timing yet. It depends on the contractor's schedule. We are going to do what we can to keep the closure to a minimum. Unfortunately, residents on Silk Road will need to take a longer route. Hopefully, we're only talking days. Certainly not months.

Q: Is the aforementioned $5 million in federal funding secured, or are we dependent on any further federal funds beyond January 2025?
A: Michael LaCroix - The funding is secured and locked in. It is available in the bank and ready to be disbursed to the contractor as the project progresses.

The project team played a visualization video of the peanut roundabout, which is available for viewing online via the project factsheet.

Q: You mentioned widening Silk Road and Matteson Road. Is that for the entire length of Silk Road or just a part of it?
A: Michael LaCroix - It's just at the intersection where the roads meet the new roundabout, a hundred to a couple hundred of feet at most.
C: Seeing this now, the house doesn't seem to fit there, and someone mentioned it's in a flood zone. If it's not going to be used, it just doesn't work there.
A: Michael LaCroix - I don't believe the house is in a flood zone. However, the house belongs to the school, and it's up to them to decide what to do with it. It doesn't impact this project, nor does the project affect the house.

Q: I have a question about the five roads leading into the roundabout with those gray-colored triangles. Are they going to be painted onto the roadway? What are they?
A: Dennis Vertiyev – Those are raised concrete islands.
Q: How will bicyclists get across them?
A: Dennis Vertiyev – Similar to sidewalks, there will be ramps that allow access. The islands are raised six inches, which is a standard curb height. This design is based on truck geometry to accommodate large trucks while keeping the roundabout as tight as possible. The different angles of the roads approaching the roundabout result in varying island shapes.
C: I've noticed that at the Walmart roundabout, many trucks run right over the islands.
A: Michael LaCroix - The design allows for that to some extent. While we don't want trucks to drive straight over them, the design takes it into account that if they do, it won't cause damage to the vehicles or the islands.
A: Dennis Vertiyev – For our roundabout design, the islands on VT 67A and Silk Road are not mountable. We'll have signage to prevent trucks from driving over them, and they have a vertical curb. The islands on College Drive and Rice Lane/Matteson Road are mountable. These are designed with an angled curb to allow larger trucks to navigate, while regular passenger vehicles will find it uncomfortable to drive over them. This design accommodates the needs of large interstate trucks.

Michael LaCroix thanked everyone for attending and encouraged community members to sign up for project updates and to contact the project team if they have questions or concerns in the future.