

Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) Eco-Logical Pilot –  
Free Bridge Congestion Relief Project Stakeholder Team

**Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project DRAFT  
Stakeholder Team Meeting #5 Summary**

Wednesday, May 21st, 2014, 4 – 7 p.m.

TJPDC's Water Street Center, 407 East Water Street, Charlottesville, Virginia

Facilitated by:

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission and  
The Institute for Environmental Negotiation, University of Virginia

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**Executive Summary:**

The fifth community and resource member Stakeholder Team Meeting of the Eco-Logical Pilot/Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project took place on Wednesday, July 16, 2013 at the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) Water Street Center. In this meeting Rinker Design Associates presented the updated alternatives and gave a summary of their cost estimation process. Team members discussed the revised project feasibility assessments and detailed cost estimations.

The next meeting will be held on September 17 at 4 p.m. In this second to last Stakeholder Team meeting, comparisons of analyses of travel demand model results and anticipated environmental impacts will be discussed.

**Goals of Stakeholder Team:**

- Develop a viable project option for improving congestion issues at US 250 Free Bridge.
- Enhance and improve the existing Regional Ecological Framework (REF) Tool.

**Goals of Eco-Logical Program Grant:**

- Test the Eco-Logical approach for infrastructure planning and development on a local scale.
  - Increase awareness of Eco-Logical approach among federal, state, and local transportation and resources agencies.
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**Introduction and Orientation**

Frank Dukes and Tanya Denckla Cobb of the Institute for Environmental Negotiation (IEN) at the University of Virginia facilitated the meeting, with support from Wood Hudson and, later, Sarah Rhodes of the TJPDC. John Giometti and Matthew Beales from transportation engineering firm RDA were also in attendance, to present the updated Alternatives and the cost estimates of each proposed alternative.

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Wood Hudson of TJPDC opened the meeting and briefly refreshed the attendees on its scope and purpose. Frank briefly restated the protocols for working together (documented in original meeting summaries), noting that the Stakeholder Team has listened to one another well, and clarified IEN's role as facilitator. The meeting's agenda was distributed and proceeded as follows:

- **Introductions and orientation (10 minutes)**
- **Review of alternatives and modifications (20 minutes)**
  - RDA will provide an overview of alternatives
  - Overview of changes and modification made based on last meeting suggestions
- **Question Period (15 minutes)**
  - Stakeholder will have the opportunity to ask questions about existing alternatives
- **Presentation of cost estimates (30 minutes)**
- **Question Period (15 minutes)**
  - Stakeholders will have a chance to ask questions about the costs and methodology
- **Facilitated group discussion of alternatives (60 minutes)**
  - Stakeholders will be led through a collaborative discussion of alternatives and have the opportunity to suggest modifications to the existing alternatives.
  - Stakeholders will also select among alternatives any that they would like to see removed from further analysis
- **Overview of next steps (10 minutes)**

Frank reminded the group that their comments and questions would be welcome during the two periods for questions following RDA's presentations and during the 60 minute facilitated discussion, when a straw poll would be taken to indicate the level of support for various options at this time.

### **Review of Alternatives and Modifications**

John Giometti began his presentation by reminding Team members that their input had been collected since the last meeting and, along with the concept drawings and Feasibility Analysis, informed the refined alternatives that would be presented that evening.

### **Alternative A-1: Free Bridge Overpass/ Expressway**

After the May meeting, Alternative A was split into A-1 and A-2. The A-1 Alternative involves construction of a freeway overpass that would route two lanes of US 250 east- and west-bound traffic over the intersections of US 250/20 and US 250/High Street, with the current structure remaining in use. The benefits to this option include that there are no trail impacts and previous issues with interference with flood walls along the Rivanna have been rectified.

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### **Alternative A-2: Jug Handle/ Left turn elimination at US250 W and High Street Intersection**

This refined version of the original Alternative A does away with the overpass, eliminates the left turn lane from 250 onto High Street, and no longer proceeds under the bridge. Instead, traffic that wishes to enter High Street headed on 250 West will proceed through the light just after the bridge and be routed into a right turn onto Ledonia and continuing right onto River Road- thus a jug handle.

The downsides of these modifications are that this Alternative involves moderate property impacts, moderate access impact and moderate utility impacts, as it would require retrofitting streets to become one way and adding a traffic signal.

**Q:** Are you doing away with the light at the 250 intersections?

- **A:** No, the light would stay

**Q:** What does that buy you?

- **A:** Right now, that left turn phase is very long and the benefit is that it's reallocated to the jug handle
- It is a small improvement in operational efficiency

**Q:** Won't transitioning back from 3 to 2 (lanes?) be problematic? Shouldn't this be extended all the way to St. James?

- **A:** Yes, it will be extended that far.

### **Alternative B: Park and Ride, and Bike/Pedestrian Connections**

This alternative involves a Park and Ride parking lot (capacity from 50-100 vehicles), which would be located at the VDOT property on the north side of Richmond Road (250) and a hard surface or stone-dust trail. This is a modification from the original Alternative B, when the parking lot was located at the Quarry. Little has been modified except that this Alternative now requires minimal takings for land acquisitions.

**Q:** How would pedestrians cross 250?

- We would suggest the use of a HAWK signal (High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk Beacon)-It is a high visibility pedestrian crossing system

### **Alternative D-1: Rivanna River Parkway**

Alternative D has been refined and divided into two parts. D-1 remains largely unchanged from the original design, which involves a new road with two vehicle traffic lanes and two bike lanes, modeled after the John Warner Parkway in Charlottesville. This alternative

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would connect Route 20 to Rio Road and widen Rio Road to 4 lanes from Pen Park Lane to the John Warner Parkway.

### **Alternative D-2: Rivanna River Parkway**

The D-2 version follows the same route as D-1 but includes improvements to Elk River Drive, through Darden Towe Park. This alternative would have a greater impact on park property than D1 option (1.65 acres for D1 vs. 2.6 acres for D2).

**Q:** Is that because of bridge alignment?

- **A:** No, the extension would move through Darden Towe Park

### **Alternative F: Increased Lane Capacity on Free Bridge**

This is the alternative that has changed most since last meeting. Alternative F increases the capacity of vehicles traveling between Route 20 and High Street, by adding two additional lanes to the existing bridge. The initial concept included a reversible HOV lane, but this feature was eliminated given concerns over safety. This alternative requires removing of existing sidewalk and bike lane infrastructure and relocating them to a separate bike and foot bridge adjacent to the bridge. This alternative involves high property impact, increased utility impact and increased construction costs, but it is expected to provide high congestion relief at Free Bridge.

### **Alternative G: South Pantops Drive Connector Bridge**

Alternative G has been slightly refined in response to comments from May's meeting. The urban style bridge from the original concept will now connect to the west side of the Rivanna on Willow Drive, as opposed to Grace Street. Other features have been slightly modified as well, including the addition of two new intersections (one at High Street aligned with Willow Drive and a second at New House Drive/South Pantops Drive) and improvements to the proposed design for South Pantops Drive, which now runs through the shopping center. This alternative has high property impacts and would require more maintenance of traffic impact, but has low impact otherwise and high construction feasibility.

### **Alternative I: Intersection Improvements at US 250/Route 20**

This final alternative involves few alterations from the original concept. The primary feature of this alternative is the addition of side-street lanes to the Route 20 and High street intersections, which will work in conjunction with split phase light timing to improve intersection efficiency.

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<b>Summary of Costs and Benefits for each Alternative:</b>			
	Construction Feasibility	Congestion Relief	Cost
Alternative A-1	LOW	HIGH	HIGH
Alternative A-2	HIGH	LOW	LOW
Alternative B	MOD	LOW	LOW
Alternative D	MOD	LOW/MOD	HIGH
Alternative F	MOD	MOD/HIGH	MOD
Alternative G	HIGH	LOW	MOD
Alternative I	HIGH	LOW	LOW

**Question and Answer Period**

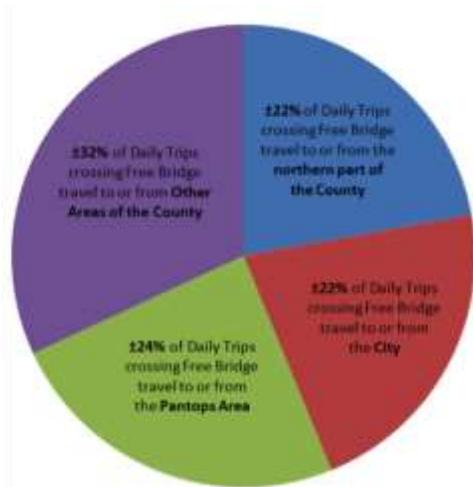
- **Q:** Have you done traffic modeling to test any of these options.
  - **A:** No, none yet- that will occur in September, before the next meeting.
  
- **Q:** Alternative to river-side trail (Alternative B) —is there an engineering reason that it exists in its current state? Could we locate the trail closer to the river so there is a view?
  - **A:** Getting across the rail road would require more construction, but there are no major obstacles to that option
  - Albemarle County has a plan for that now—we need to go 100 meters past (and under) the railroad trestle
    - Parks and rec are currently looking at a trail head near Milton and the Clifton Inn
  
- **Q:** Alternative B-- Transit relief is not a strong feature of this alternative, but what about the 'zoo trolley' option? We have talked to VDOT about bringing these in, perhaps on an hourly basis.
  - **A:** Crozet has been considering something similar
  - This can be considered as part of this option.
  
- **Q:** How many people does this trolley carry?
  - **A:** About 15 people with a driver
  - Reference Key West, Florida System in use currently
  
- **Q:** On the widening of 250 (Alternative F) -- does that include removing median strips?
  - **A:** Yes, we would remove the median to widen High Street

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- **Q:** In reference to creating ‘a congestion relief area’, do we have any definition of what ‘congestion’ is? Is it backed up traffic? People waiting through two light signals? Wouldn’t that make the cost/benefit analysis easier?
  - **A:** We will look into that with the traffic evaluation in September
    - We will use a metric defined by FHA , which is a set of standards that correspond to a letter grade
    - We can model how an overpass, or other changes might impact traffic but we have to take into consideration the constraints of the grant and time
  
- **Q:** Alternative B – It sounds like the point is to take people off of Free Bridge—do we know that there is any guarantee of this happening with this alternative?
  - **A:** No, we can’t predict how many people will use the park and ride
  - **Comment:** I question whether cost of this project is going to have a great enough impact to justify going ahead with this alternative
  
- **Comment:** I question whether the Letter rating system will be sufficient to represent impact on traffic and fluctuations in volume of traffic depending on time of day – we might need a more specific, localized grading system
  - **A:** I’ll have to get back to you with more details on what is available in terms of a more specified metric. The FHWA metric referred to as the Volume to Capacity ratio looks at the total number of vehicles using a section of roadway divided by the roadway design capacity (roadway design and speed limit). The result is expressed as a ratio and a letter grade
  - **Q-** Is it time sensitive though? How do we know that the over all measure is sufficiently reporting on specific times of day and isn’t skewed by data collected at times of day when there are only a few vehicles in an hour?
    - **A:** That was just an example – the metric compares volume on road to the capacity number
    - **Comment:** I’d rather see a comparison of volume, given time of day
  
- **A:** If you have congestion from 7 am to 9 am and 4 pm - 6 or 7 pm at night, how long does it take to get through the bypass? I think you need hourly counts for your traffic study. Are you going to have a multi million-dollar project just to address a problem that only exists at a certain time of day?
  - **A:** We are looking at the necessary capacity we think we’ll need in the future, not just today
    - Models that take into account commercial and residential developments in the area show that it’s going to get worse over time
  
- **Q:** So what are your predictions?
  - **A:** Conclusive data from past studies show that volume will increase

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- **Q:** Do we have a way of knowing where the traffic originates?
  - **A:** Research already done shows that most of the congestion is local traffic traveling to and from Pantops, the City, and 29 North



2040 Travel Demand Model Origin and Destination of Areas of Trips crossing Free Bridge

Frank noted that the gist of these questions is, to what extent is the problem of congestion going to improve at the times when we need improvement most?

- **Q:** I would be curious to know if the model reflects (my prediction that) the density we're seeing is related to secondary highways?
  - **A:** Part of the development of the model and its purpose is to define socio-economic data, that is business sensitive
    - The researchers looked at a forecast model, to understand the building density we'll face in the future – that's where the volume comes from
- **Q:** Does housing generally create more traffic than commercial development?
  - **A:** Commercial development is the generator of traffic, housing is the source
- **Q:** These alternatives involving Darden Towe and Pen Parks (Alternatives D1 and D2): has the impact of that been weighted?
  - **A:** That's coming up, with the environmental impact study
    - Technical development: development on the new site just off of Rt. 20 will increase the amount of park land – Wood is following up on this currently

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**Presentation of Cost Estimates**

Estimated as a percentage of the Construction Cost using a sliding scale from 20% for a \$5 million project to 10% for a \$400 million project:

<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Preliminary Engineering</td> <td>\$13,791,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Right of Way</td> <td>\$7,000,344</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction</td> <td>\$120,453,482</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>\$141,244,826</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>Alternative A-1: Free Bridge Overpass/ Expressway</b></p>	Preliminary Engineering	\$13,791,000	Right of Way	\$7,000,344	Construction	\$120,453,482	Total	\$141,244,826	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Preliminary Engineering</td> <td>\$823,855</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Right of Way</td> <td>\$4,508,527</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction</td> <td>\$3,744,793</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>\$9,077,175</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>Alternative A-2: Jug Handle/Left turn elimination at US250 W and High Street</b></p>	Preliminary Engineering	\$823,855	Right of Way	\$4,508,527	Construction	\$3,744,793	Total	\$9,077,175
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Preliminary Engineering	\$1,063,712	
Right of Way	\$942,437	
Construction	\$5,414,294	
Total	\$7,420,443	
<b>Alternative I: Intersection Improvements at US 250/Route 20</b>		

<b>Cost Summary</b>				
	PE	RW	CN	TOTAL
Alternative A-1	\$13,791,000	\$7,000,344	\$120,453,482	\$141,244,826
Alternative D-1	\$6,950,000	\$9,646,828	\$53,424,076	\$70,020,904
Alternative D-2	\$6,750,000	\$9,386,604	\$51,905,393	\$68,041,997
Alternative G	\$2,740,000	\$6,098,514	\$18,267,565	\$27,106,079
Alternative F	\$1,850,000	\$7,820,216	\$10,874,119	\$20,544,335
Alternative B - Paved	\$1,461,401	\$487,226	\$8,265,033	\$10,213,660
Alternative B- Stone Dust	\$1,337,635	\$487,226	\$7,565,070	\$9,389,931
Alternative A-2	\$823,855	\$4,508,527	\$3,744,793	\$9,077,175
Alternative I	\$1,063,712	\$942,437	\$5,414,294	\$7,420,443

**Question and Answer Period (Two)**

- **Q:** We need a cost/benefit ratio of existing options and consider secondary road funds
  - **A:** 250 is not a secondary road
- **Q:** Alternatives F and I – they strike me as being complementary to one another. If we were to do both, would there be some reduction in cost?

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- **A:** There wouldn't be any overlapping construction, but combining would have some savings, in synergy. You could add them together and it would still be a little less than some of the other alternatives, yes.
- **Q:** Isn't Option I a necessity no matter what?
  - **Comment:** There was general assent from a number of Team members
- **Q:** Option F- When you look at the cost of F, did you consider a standard pedestrian/bike path in addition, or did you consider another bike and pedestrian bridge as well?
  - **A:** I imagined it (the bridge) standing alone, so no
- **Q:** Back to the congestion issue: combining Alternatives F and I still comes back to wanting to understand which is going to most efficiently relieve congestions, based on cost vs. benefits
  - **A:** Each option is compounded, so if you combine scenarios, you don't necessarily combine relief
    - You can't eliminate one and achieve corridor-wide efficiency
    - Most of these can be mixed- but I and A2 would conflict and cannot go together well
- **Q:** I hear people on Proffit Road saying they can't get out of their homes in the morning because of State Farm traffic, and that in effect this is an Eastern Bypass. Are we taking that into consideration? Alternative I could address this problem.
  - Proffit road is outside of the project's immediate study area.
  - **Comment:** You're missing a lot of the traffic, if you're not looking at Route 20 and other highways feeding in
  - **Comment:** Since the signalization improvement of a few years ago, traffic that used to back up all the way to I64 is improved, except on route 20
- **Q:** Alternative A-2: Did you consider a jug handle coming the other way (headed east, to turn onto 20 North)?
  - **A:** No, we weren't asked to do that- it would impact too many businesses and residences.
- **Q:** Have you looked at technology changes that could improve our ability to decrease congestion (different/more specialized traffic signals)?
  - **A:** We're considering including that as part of these measures

**Comment from Wood:** Going into the next meeting, we're going to take the cost and traffic demand into consideration to calculate cost per improvement unit—that is coming and we hear your concerns about not using a blanket standard.

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## **Facilitated Group Discussion of Alternatives**

The Stakeholder Team reviewed each of the options with the possibility of adding minor adjustments. The facilitators took a straw poll for each option to allow members to see where others stood at this time, with “3” meaning fully support, “2” meaning can support but have some questions or reservations, and “1” meaning cannot support this option as currently designed.

### **Alternative A-1: Free Bridge Overpass/ Expressway**

Comments:

- Our goal is congestion relief, and your evaluation metrics say this is the higher costing ones BUT there isn't enough proof that this will have a significant impact on congestion.
- Seconded – This is “a huge run for a teeny slide”—“Thumbs down to this one”

Straw Poll: The majority were “1” at this time.

### **Alternative A-2: Jug Handle/ Left turn elimination at US250 W and High Street Intersection**

Comments:

- Is there a sound wall in this design? Answer: No.
- What would happen if it was one way all the way ALL the way around, River Road included, with two lanes?
  - Concept is to eliminate the left movement
  - Advantage—two lanes of traffic on jug handle, more efficiency
  - C: Wouldn't that overcomplicate getting to E High? Is there a net gain?

Straw Poll: Many were in favor but support was mixed at this time.

### **Alternative B: Park and Ride, and Bike/Pedestrian Connections**

Comments:

- That's not a lot of people who are going to park and ride a bike that far, but the tram might improve the number of people diverted from the road
- I don't think this is going to improve traffic congestion- I understand that it's attractive, but I don't see it as a traffic improvement
- I like the idea, but 50 parking spaces makes it difficult to justify expense
- Can't see it as “taking 50 cars off the road” but a quality of life standard, and from that perspective dollar for dollar it does as much as many other alternative
- The County is probably going to build this trail anyhow—the parking lot is the only thing that isn't in the works
  - Already have proffers for 90-95% of segment (of land)

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- Additionally- we want the trail to be near the water
  - Areas that flood periodically would need to be paved
  - This is along a heritage trail and part of the proffer for the right of way (which is a majority of the trail), in the conditions of use, says stone-dust rather than paving must be used

Straw Poll: This had strong support but no consensus at this time.

### **Alternative D-1: Rivanna River Parkway**

Comments:

- This option is politically dead already, as currently configured
- Have we considered realigning it along Pen Park Road, through a neighborhood?
- Based on John Warner parkway, the speed limit would be 35 mph
- This would require several at-grade crossings considering park and residential areas
  - Want to preserve access to park as much as possible and embrace the natural value of the river
- Concerned with the alignment along the Darden Tower area and river
  - Floodplain limits of the Rivanna are the biggest concerns
- Concern that this option will create more congestion on Route 20
- The impact on Pen Park is a concern - would include new access to the Park
  - We're already having trouble managing the amount of people who come to use Park facilities
  - No additional access on B2, maybe on B1

Straw Poll: The question was first whether to remove this from further analysis. There was no consensus yet, even though the group realizes that it is politically, economically, and socially not viable. But the argument was made that it could possibly be realigned to have less of an impact and that it is the most effective option for congestion relief problem.

- This Alternative will be run through the model, but realignment almost certainly would not be included in the final set of consensus options
- For the sake of the grant and value of research that may result this will be useful to keep as an alternative.

### **Alternative D-2: Rivanna River Parkway**

Comments:

- I would like to see this eliminated totally
- Is the alternative road really going to be used?
  - Improvements to Olympia drive and 250 would be necessary to make this a viable option for people, logistically (and therefore, to have an impact on congestion)

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Straw Poll: The group agreed to drop further analysis of D2 as infeasible.

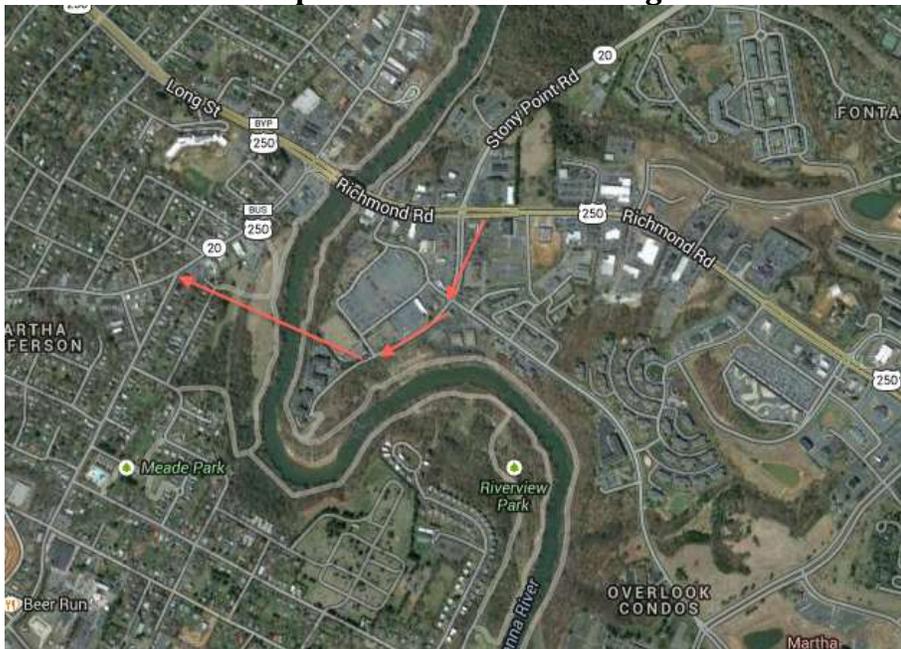
### **Alternative F: Increased Lane Capacity on Free Bridge**

Comments:

- What type of bridge is being considered? Could the pedestrian bridge be attached to the vehicle bridge, would we save money?
  - A: There is insufficient information to make that judgment at this point
  - A: Based on input methodology, it would not change much in price, however

Straw Poll: This option received considerable support at this time.

### **Alternative G: South Pantops Drive Connector Bridge**



The group spent considerable time discussing this option. One member asked if an analysis could be made about routing the road around the back of the shopping center. There would be potentially more impact from an environmental standpoint; this might be too late to include in this study, but could be considered in future.

There was concern about a lot going on in a small commercial space. It may be beneficial in the long run, considering what kind of development we can predict occurring in the area, to have access along this area. It was noted that this concept is part of Pantops Master Plan already and the owners may be amenable to changing the current use in the future.

Straw Poll: There was no consensus for this option at this time.

### **Alternative I: Intersection Improvements at US 250/Route 20**

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Comments: Overwhelmingly positive

Straw Poll: The group strongly supported this option.

## **Overview of Next Steps**

The next meeting will be held on September 17, after the traffic congestion relief models have been run and the modifications/revisions for the alternatives have been applied and run through the ecological impact tool. These results will be presented at a public meeting. The MPO committees will be briefed on the Stakeholder Team's suggestions. The final meeting will be in November.

## **Meeting Evaluation (+ / Δ)**

### **Things we liked:**

- Agenda was flexible and worked beautifully!
- Seconded all around!

**No negative feedback!**

## **Meeting Participants**

### **Stakeholder Team Representatives**

Dave Benish, substituting for Elaine Echols, Albemarle County  
Stephen Bach, Citizen Representative  
Kirk Bowers, Sierra Club  
Ken Boyd, Albemarle County Board of Supervisors  
John Conover, Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center  
Dennis Duttere, Albemarle County-Citizen Representative  
Bill Emory, Citizen Representative  
Chris Gensic, Parks and Greenway Planner for City of Charlottesville  
Dan Mahon, Albemarle County Parks and Recreation  
Cal Morris, Albemarle County Planning Commission  
Stan Rose, Citizen Representative  
Donna Shaunesey, JAUNT  
Clara Belle Wheeler, Albemarle County, Citizen Representative  
Chuck Procter, VDOT Culpeper Office

### **TJPDC:**

Wood Hudson  
Sarah Rhodes  
Pat Groot, Grants Administrator

Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) Eco-Logical Pilot –  
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