

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 #6 Summary**

Wednesday, September 17th, 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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sixth community and resource member Stakeholder Team Meeting of the Eco-Logical Pilot/Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project took place on Wednesday, September 17, 2014 at the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) Water Street Center. In this meeting Wood Hudson of TJPDC presented the results of analysis for each of seven alternatives, analyzed using four elements: Cost, Engineering Feasibility, Regional Ecological Framework (REF) scoring, and Potential Congestion Relief. Team members reviewed each of the alternatives based on the model results, suggested improvements for clarity of presentation of information to the public, and discussed the efficacy of the tool for this particular project.

The final meeting of the Stakeholder Team will be held on November 19 at 4 p.m. Prior to that, a public meeting will allow a space for the public to see the work the stakeholder group has done and comment on various elements of the proposed alternatives.

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.

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

INTRODUCTIONS AND ORIENTATION

Frank Dukes of the Institute for Environmental Negotiation, University of Virginia began the meeting with introductions and orientation to where the team is in the process. The Stakeholder Team was reminded that the engineering firm has completed their work so no more engineering changes would be done at this point. They were reminded that they were at the point where they could discard any alternative they did not deem feasible, and that the next step would be getting feedback on the process to be shared with FHA. It was noted that Kelly Wilder (IEN) and Sarah Rhodes (TJPDC), who had been a part of the facilitation and leadership of the project, have moved to other cities and are no longer with the project. Wood Hudson, Will Cockrell and Chip Boyles can be contacted in place of Sarah.

The meeting's agenda was distributed and proceeded as follows:

- 1. Introductions, and orientation (10 minutes)**
- 2. Presentation: Eco-Logical modeling results and impacts (20 minutes)**
 - TJPDC will give a presentation on the results of the Eco-Logical modeling process and the results of the REF tool
- 3. Questions (15 minutes)**
 - Stakeholder will have the opportunity to ask questions about the REF modeling
- 4. Presentation on project alternatives ranking matrix (15 minutes)**
- 5. Questions (15 minutes)**
 - Stakeholders will have the opportunity to ask questions about the ranking matrix.
- 6. Break: 10 Minutes**
- 7. Facilitated group discussion of alternatives (60 minutes)**
 - Stakeholders will be led through a collaborative discussion of alternatives and have the opportunity to comment and suggest minor changes to alternatives
 - Stakeholders will also have an opportunity to select among alternative(s) any that they would like to see removed from further analyses.
- 8. Overview of next steps (10 minutes)**
- 9. Public comments (10 minutes)**
 - *Each speaker has 2 minutes to speak.*

ECO-LOGICAL MODELING RESULTS AND IMPACTS

Wood presented the REF model of ecological impacts for each of the proposed alternatives, explaining the results. He reviewed the objective for the process and described the REF

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

tool, reemphasizing that this modeling is a decision support tool, not to replace other elements of a decision making process, but to help add other information. Wood highlighted one change to the engineering plans from the last meeting, which was moving the bike trail to the river side of the railroad.

Table 1: REF tool score for each alternative

Alternative	Project Score
D-2	10.5
A-1	9.5
G	9.0
F	9.0
B	6.5
I	4.5
A-2	3.5

Question and Answers

Q. Do any of these numbers demonstrate impact on air quality or water quality? It would be nice to have air quality information.

A. Water run-off would be addressed through the stormwater management process, but we can

probably provide those numbers in the future. We cannot do air quality tests or evaluations due to lack of access to those technologies

Q. Can we have someone review or supplement the model results adding other information?

A. This is basically a cursory review of the alternatives; the ones we choose to move forward with will then undergo further analysis.

Q. Are there other maps that don't show this specific data that could also be used? How does this compare with a land cover map?

A. With a land cover map you're not getting certain values coming through. Land cover

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

will not show bald eagle presence. This map combines resources and values attached to those resources. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA's) Ecoplan tool can be added to using local data, but that only shows you what is there and does not provide any calculation of value. There is a newer tool called the Natural Heritage Data Explorer, which has more data for endangered species. You can overlay your projects onto this map and submit it for DCR for further review; however, this as well only shows you what is present in that area and DCR does the analyzing and sends it back. There is no attempt of ranking or scoring anything.

Further Discussion

500-Foot Buffer

There was a fair amount of discussion around the 500-foot buffer used as part of the REF model. This buffer length was structured on the figures that TJPDC has used in the past for transportation planning projects. There was the concern of wanting to maintain uniform standards for potential environmental impact across the alternatives; however stakeholders felt that some alternatives would not have an environmental impact up to 500 feet. Stakeholders identified that the construction for the bike path might not take up as large an environmental impact area as that for road widening, and this should be considered in the model. One stakeholder suggested inputting the actual construction profile area rather than the 500-foot buffer, and suggested running the model with a 6-foot buffer zone for the bike path to see how the REF would change. The model program's smallest units are 30 m by 30 m pixels, which limits the minimum buffer size.

It was also pointed out that some of the projects, such as the intersection improvements, consist of work done on existing roads rather than creation of a new road, and yet the 500-foot buffer was used in these areas as well. The general feeling among the group was that this is an element of the model that needs further investigation and may not be accurately reflecting the real environmental impact of each alternative. They would be interested in seeing an REF result of the construction footprint of each project to compare with the REF with the 500-foot buffer. One stakeholder pointed out the incongruity of the Bike Path having an REF score of 10 (high) while the Parkway had a score of 3 (lower), illustrating that the model is not credible. A further critique of the model was that it takes into account only negative environmental impacts, but should include positive impacts of each of the projects as well.

Datasets

One stakeholder asked if there is opportunity to incorporate local knowledge and datasets into the model. Wood responded that they chose federal agency datasets because those are the ones that many organizations are using. TJPDC were hesitant to use data that would

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

only exist for one county, as that would skew the tool. The respondent pointed out that for such a limited geographic area as Free Bridge, local information could be really important, more relevant, and rich. To include local knowledge, it would require rebuilding the entire tool to incorporate the datasets/data. It could be possible to supplement the model review with local data as a further step of analysis after running the model.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVE RANKING MATRIX

Wood then presented the final ranking for each alternative, which takes into account the Cost, Engineering Feasibility, Traffic Alleviation, and Environmental Impact.

Table 2: Rankings of each element for each alternative, with final scores

Alternative	Estimated Cost	Traffic reduction	Construction Feasibility	REF Impacts	Overall Rank
D-2	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High
A-1	High	High	Low	Low	High
G	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Mod/High
F	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Mod/High
B	LOW	n/a	Moderate	High	Moderate
I	Low	n/a	High	Low	Low
A-2	LOW	n/a	High	Low	Low

Question and Answers

Traffic Alleviation Data

There was general agreement among stakeholders that the main thing people are going to want to know is whether they are going to be able to get through the study area in less time. If this information cannot be provided, they felt there is no point in presenting to the public. Too many of the alternatives in the model had an “N/A” in the traffic column because the model program was unable to calculate effects on traffic.

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

Table for Presentation of Data

The stakeholders felt that the table was not very clear. It was confusing that in some columns “High” was good and in others bad. The use of color coordinating helped demonstrate this, but the team still felt that it was confusing. They also felt it would be helpful to have some sort of context or reference point showing which numbers are good (For example, the REF scores of Manhattan versus Charlottesville.)

Ranking Numbers

The stakeholders felt that the ranking numbers 1-3 were not a good representation of the relation of each number to one another. For example, under project cost, one project is \$141 million and another \$67 million, yet they receive the same rank number. One stakeholder suggested shifting to a 1-6 tiered ranking system, to incorporate the 1-3 for other elements, but allow a wider span for cost.

Traffic versus Congestion

It was pointed out that it is more accurate to say “Congestion Alleviation” or “Congestion Reduction,” than “Traffic Reduction” because these alternatives are not going to reduce the number of cars moving through the study area, but are aiming to increase the flow of cars moving through the study area. The models that were available for TJPDC are only able to analyze volume of cars, however, not congestion, so this is an area of challenge between the model and needs of the stakeholders and public. Stakeholders agreed that the verbiage should change to “Congestion Reduction” for the table presenting numbers or that an additional column should be added for congestion relief to incorporate those numbers.

EVALUATION OF THE ECO-LOGICAL TOOL

Wood asked the Stakeholder Team if they felt this type of tool is helpful for each member and their sector. He explained that at the end of the process, the model of the study area will be available for further use.

Helpfulness of the Tool

Stakeholders felt that the REF tool was helpful in generating discussion about some of these issues, yet it is limiting and needs to incorporate other information and databases to be useful. Suggested data included: biodiversity, riparian communities, natural heritage communities, economic information, cultural information, and locally sourced data. It was also suggested that it would be helpful if there were a way to communicate to other localities how to incorporate their own specific data into it, even if it is manually.

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

Appropriateness of the Tool

The stakeholders felt that this particular tool might be very useful when analyzing something on a much larger regional scale (e.g. a road from Charlottesville to Virginia Beach), but is likely not an appropriate tool for doing something on as small a scale as Free Bridge. One stakeholder articulated that this is an intersection study, and what is needed is models to analyze that.

Other Comments from the Stakeholder Team

- At some point we need to advocate the solution that makes the most sense for us. We are the experts and we should make a concrete decision.
- Some stakeholders are interested to know how they could make more nuanced recommendations, such as “This alternative might be good but we need to know x, y, and z about traffic analysis.”
- Similarly, stakeholders were interested in knowing how to say to the public, “This could be a good choice for the future, not now.”

Further comments on each alternative and modifications

- A-1 – Free Bridge overpass/expressway (Two lane deck over the existing bridge)
 - This one is costly but it does address the problem.
- A-2 – Jug Handle/left turn elimination at US250 W and High Street (Relieve left turn onto high street, this will remove the left turn backup and reroute traffic up along the river road)
 - The traffic modeler doesn’t understand intersections and so cannot compute this alternative’s effect on traffic.
 - It could feel like less waiting because people are moving, even though the distance is greater.
 - It could end up being worse and taking up more time to go through two intersections then taking the one left turn.
 - Traffic could build up on Locust Avenue.
 - A more sophisticated analysis is needed.
- B – Park and Ride, Bike/Pedestrian Connections
 - Surprisingly, this alternative had a very high negative environmental impact, due to its long length and the 500-foot buffer in the model.
 - It could be interesting to look at the effect of the bridge alone, rather than the entire path and park and ride, because that might alleviate some of the pressure with people traveling to Martha Jefferson and State Farm, and would have lower cost and environmental impacts.
- D-1 Rivanna River Parkway

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

- One stakeholder expressed confusion that they thought this alternative had already been removed. Others noted that while the group had agreed that it was not an alternative they were pursuing, they felt it could be valuable to have the information from the modeling, to demonstrate why it was rejected.
- F – Increased lane capacity on Free Bridge
 - This has the potential to actually increase traffic because over time it will encourage more people to pass through the area.
 - The question is, does it affect traffic speed?
 - This alternative would cause the loss of the car wash business.
- G – South Pantops Drive connector bridge
 - The model showed a “0” in congestion decrease, so it is not giving the information needed. It did not assign a single trip to the model.
 - The thrift store, a tire shop and a restaurant would be lost.
 - This route gives a better and safer way to the hospital from the city.
 - There is potential for redeveloping Pantops Shopping area to make it more attractive to people and so this alternative could be appealing.
- I – Intersection improvements at US250/Route 20
 - On the presentation slide for this alternative, it would be helpful not to have two split photos showing each intersection and to display direction and where CVS and McDonalds are.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR PRESENTATION TO THE PUBLIC

- Include clear features on maps for better quick orientation, especially those maps which are not in the same north-south delineation.
- Include clear, large labels for each alternative, with names other than A-1 or D-2.
- Include more color on the maps.
- In the final table contrasting scores for each of the alternatives, there is one Traffic Reduction “High” that should be changed from red to green.
- Make sure that the public knows that this was an exploratory process and does not expect something to be built as a result, as there is no money for it currently.
- Assign some value of congestion. Figure out a way to say “It decreases” or “It increases” for the congestion for each alternative, and if people want greater detail you can give them the data.
- Remove the last column from the table, letting people look at each of the element columns, and not worrying about adding them up.
- Part of this project was testing a model; however we should not present the model process to the public. What should be presented are the solutions that we have worked on as a group.

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

- There should be a way for the public to comment online if they are unable to attend the open house.
- *Weight of Scores in the Matrix*
After discussion about the weight of elements in the model, including suggestions to place a higher weight on the REF score, stakeholders concluded that it would be better not to weigh any one element of the model and to present the general scores, numbers, or dollars, letting the public deduce the relation of each to each other.
- *Narrative*
One stakeholder suggested that it would be clearer to present a narrative next to each map, explaining what is in the table. After discussion, stakeholders agreed to have the map of each alternative, the table with the numbers for each element in the model, and a narrative explaining the alternative and table.
- *Combinations of Solutions*
It was articulated that is important to communicate to the public that there is the option to choose more than one alternative. It could be helpful to be able to run a model showing the effects of combinations of alternatives. It would be great if it were possible to give these combination numbers to the public as well.
- *Presenting Unrecommended Alternatives to the Public*
The Stakeholder team was given a chance to test for consensus about whether there were any alternatives that they would choose not to present to the public during the open house. Some of them were happy to do that with the Parkway; others felt it would be better to present them all equally, in an effort to demonstrate that they had considered all the proposed alternatives. Consensus was not reached. Some stakeholders felt that if an alternative is discarded, (i.e. the Parkway), it is important to retain the smaller part of it (connecting road from Olympia drive) for consideration.

Overview of Next Steps

Stakeholders felt that there is not adequate information (traffic relief results), and not the appropriate format, to present to the public yet. It was suggested to move the public open house to November or later in October. Wood will work on editing the presentation based on feedback from this meeting and will share it with the stakeholders before the public meeting.

Meeting Evaluation (+/Δ)

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

- It is important to be talking to potentially affected businesses to find out their opinion on the situation.
- It is important for planners to be talking to landowners well in advance of a proposed project, if it could be a potential years down the road. A benefit of this is possibly being able to buy a right of way cheaper than waiting until the project is imminent.
- There should be more parallel conversations with other people, developers, etc.

Meeting Participants

Stephen Bach	City of Charlottesville - Citizen Representative
Kirk Bowers	Sierra Club
Ken Boyd	Albemarle County BOS
Missy Creasy	City of Charlottesville Planning
Elaine Echols	County Staff
Bill Emory	City of Charlottesville - Citizen Representative
Chris Gensic	City Parks and Rec
Satyendra Huja	City of Charlottesville CC
Lucas Lyons	JAUNT
David Mitchell	Albemarle County - Citizen Representative
Cal Morris	County Planning Commission
Chuck Proctor	VDOT, Culpeper District
Stanley Rose	Albemarle County - Citizen Representative
John Santoski	City Planning Commission
Jeff Werner	Piedmont Environmental Council
Clara Belle Wheeler	Albemarle County - Citizen Representative

Non Stakeholder Attendees:

Will Cockrell TJPDC
Chip Boyles TJPDC
Sean Tubbs Charlottesville Tomorrow
Rachel Goldberg, visiting professor from DePaul University

TJPDC:

Wood Hudson

Facilitators:

Frank Dukes, with support of Elizabeth Moore, from IEN, University of Virginia
Abigail Sandberg, graduate intern