

**Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project**  
**DRAFT Stakeholder Team Meeting #1 Summary**  
Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 4 – 7 p.m.  
Burnley-Moran Elementary School, 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 first community and resource Stakeholder Team meeting of the Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project took place on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Burnley-Moran Elementary School in Charlottesville, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to begin the year-long process of testing the Regional Eco-Logical Framework (REF) tool and to recommend ways to reduce congestion in the Free Bridge area.

Frank Dukes and Kelly Wilder of the Institute for Environmental Negotiation (IEN) at the University of Virginia facilitated the meeting. During the meeting, Sarah Rhodes and Wood Hudson of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) presented information on the project's background and the Regional Ecological Framework (REF) tool. Members of the Stakeholder Team asked clarifying questions and made specific data requests. Team members also provided ideas for working together effectively and developed shared expectations for their participation in the process.

During the meeting, the following action items were noted:

- Action: Post information requested by Team members on the Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief website. Provide any such material in hard copy for anyone who requests it.
- Action: Develop a glossary of GIS terms to improve member understanding of the tool.
- Action: Create an online forum for members to collaborate and share information between meetings.

In addition, links to the following document were requested, and links are provided below:

- All meeting materials and presentations from the November 18<sup>th</sup> meeting:  
[http://www.tjpd.org/ecological/meetings/stakeholders\\_13\\_11\\_18.asp](http://www.tjpd.org/ecological/meetings/stakeholders_13_11_18.asp)
- Eastern Connector study:  
[www.tjpd.org/ecological/PDF/Eastern\\_Connector\\_Final\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](http://www.tjpd.org/ecological/PDF/Eastern_Connector_Final_Summary_Report.pdf)
- Pantops Master Plan update:  
[www.albemarle.org/departement.asp?department=cdd&relpage=3734](http://www.albemarle.org/departement.asp?department=cdd&relpage=3734)

The Stakeholder Team will hold meetings every other month on the third Wednesday of the month through November 2014. In addition, field trips may be scheduled in off months, and larger public meetings will be scheduled approximately quarterly.

Upcoming Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project meetings:

- Field trip #1: Darden Towe Park, Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 – 11 a.m.
- Stakeholder Team meeting #2: Wednesday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from 4 – 7 p.m. (location to be determined)
- Stakeholder Team meeting #3: Wednesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from 4 – 7 p.m.

## **Meeting Summary**

*Introductions, Stakeholder Team Member Participation, and Project Process*

Frank Dukes of the Institute for Environmental Negotiation (IEN) opened the meeting by giving an overview of the evening's agenda and asking Sarah Rhodes of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDCC) to explain the project's goals. Sarah explained that the project has two main sets of goals. The first goals apply specifically to the Stakeholder Team and are twofold:

- 1) To develop viable options for improving congestion issues at US 250 Free Bridge area.
- 2) To enhance and improve the Regional Eco-Logical Framework (REF) tool.

The goals for the overall grant are separate from the Stakeholder Team goals. These goals are also twofold:

- 3) To test the Eco-Logical approach for infrastructure planning and development on a local scale.
- 4) To increase awareness of Eco-Logical approach among federal, state, and local transportation and resources agencies.

This pilot project seeks a consensus-based solution to improve congestion issues in the Free Bridge area by testing the Eco-Logical approach for infrastructure planning and development. In addition, the REF tool will be tailored as members advise changes and additions to the tool to make it more effective.

After Sarah presented on the project goals, Frank offered a brief overview of the process and opened the floor to questions from Team members. Several asked for clarification about how this project will differ from previous studies, including especially the Eastern Connector study, and whether it will have any real impact on congestion in the Free Bridge area. Sarah explained that the Stakeholder Team does not have decision-making power and there can be no guarantee that any consensus would be implemented. She noted that this project is different from previous studies because of its additional goal of testing the REF tool. This

project further differs from past efforts because members will assess various alternatives and the impacts of mitigation at the same time, in order to ascertain the option with greatest likelihood of success.

One member asked about the origin of the grant funding and how this project was chosen. Sarah explained that the funding is from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), clarifying that federal tax expenditures are being used for this grant. She also reassured the Stakeholder Team that nothing in the grant that is funding this process requires a built solution. This project is an opportunity to develop a solution using collaboration, consensus building, and transparent communication. But from the grantor's perspective, it would be an acceptable outcome if the Stakeholder Team did not reach consensus about any particular solution to the congestion issue.

Sarah explained that TJPDC is hoping that Team members come into this project with an open mind, be willing to utilize and test the REF tool, and work toward a consensus solution. There can be multiple solutions offered as a result of this project, and nothing is considered "off the table." Frank further emphasized that a consensus solution does not mean giving up individual goals. Rather, it requires listening and understanding in order to develop solutions that seek to meet all member needs and that are based on the highest quality information possible.

Before continuing, members were asked about possible future meeting times. IEN offered either the third Wednesday or the third Thursday of alternate months. One member is unable to attend the third Thursdays. It was therefore decided that the third Wednesday of every other month will be the designated meeting time. In addition, off-months may be used for field trips, including a first field trip in December.

Team members, TJPDC staff, and IEN facilitators then introduced themselves to one another.

### *Stakeholder Team Requests and Guidelines*

Following introductions, members developed a list of recommendations for working together effectively. These include the following:

- Keep an accurate record of meeting events that is faithful to the speaker's expressed opinion.
- Respect others' ideas by actively listening, not interrupting, and offering constructive criticism to build upon.

- Ensure that members are well-prepared for meetings by having access to relevant data prior to meetings, receiving sufficient background information on relevant projects, and dispelling potential rumors or myths from facts early in the process.
- Encourage open dialogue to promote a positive group dynamic and relationship among members.
- Vary the structure of meetings for different communication styles by using small and large group activities so that members who are comfortable in different settings can express ideas and opinions.
- Members should be willing to move on to other subjects after expressing an opinion and being acknowledged by others.
- Be willing to share the floor with other members and refrain from dominating the meeting.
- Avoid put-downs of other people or of their opinions.

### *Free Bridge History: Presentation and Questions*

Following introductions and the discussion of expectations, Sarah presented on the history of the Free Bridge area and projects that have been previously studied or proposed. For this project, congestion analysis data are based on the volume to capacity ratio of the bridge. The data used in the presentation are from the MPO's 2040 Travel Demand Model. This is a travel forecasting tool that the MPO uses to estimate future travel demand and issues arising from that demand. The travel demand model is based on 2010 Census data for population and was calibrated using 2009 traffic counts from VDOT. The model's validation and calibration was approved in 2010. (Note: the presentation is available on the TJPDC-MPO website at [www.tjpd.org/ecological](http://www.tjpd.org/ecological).)

The data used in Sarah's presentation represent the estimated vehicular traffic on the bridge in 2040 based on the MPO's daily traffic model.<sup>1</sup> Population growth is included based on census data, anticipated forecasts, and future land use plans. The average traffic count data show that the bridge's volume is already over its designed capacity and that congestion will become worse in the future. Since the traffic estimates provided are based on a 24-hour average, the traffic flow is actually higher during peak congestion periods and lower during non-peak periods than the given number.

Several members expressed interest in having additional data and background information available to everyone prior to meetings, including access to the Eastern Connector study that

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<sup>1</sup> *post-meeting correction*: At the meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup> Sarah noted that this model is a 12-hour model. While the transit component runs in a 12-hour fashion, it is more accurate to refer to this model as a 24-hour model.

was previously completed. (For the study's final report, see: [www.tjpd.org/ecological/PDF/Eastern Connector Final Summary Report.pdf](http://www.tjpd.org/ecological/PDF/Eastern_Connector_Final_Summary_Report.pdf).)

There were also several requests for data related to travel times (in addition to volume) across the bridge. Sarah stated that the MPO's regional travel demand model is unable to break out traffic into peak-hour. Sarah explained that peak-hour traffic information requires a considerable amount of data, specifically hourly traffic counts, which are not available for the region and are expensive to gather. Sarah did acknowledge that the peak-hour breakdown would be valuable and said she would work with the MPO's Travel Demand Modeler, as well as VDOT, to try and gather that data. Sarah also noted that there is some funding available through the grant to pursue other data needs. Members requested several additional items relevant to the project study area, including the following:

- Bi-directional traffic data to determine a better breakdown of where congestion is occurring.
- An analysis on where traffic would divert if Free Bridge did not exist.
- Traffic crash data in the area for safety analysis.
- Information from previous projects completed in the area such as a project from the University of Virginia School of Architecture.

One specific question was asked about changed traffic patterns with the future Meadow Creek Parkway and how much traffic will be moved from Free Bridge with the Parkway's completion. Sarah responded that the MPO has not specifically looked at that traffic movement using the travel demand model, but that it was possible to do so.

- Action: Post available information requested by Team members on the Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief website. Provide any such material in hard copy for anyone who requests it.

#### *Regional Eco-Logical Framework Tool: Presentation and Questions*

Wood Hudson of the TJPDC presented on the REF tool and responded to member questions. He indicated that this project is a means of testing and of expanding the model. He hopes to include other elements of interest to Team members in the analysis, such as cultural and historical elements. More specifically, the next Stakeholder Team meeting in January will identify gaps and other relevant data layers to use in the tool.

There will be opportunities to reevaluate the tool and adjust the rankings of ecological assets for specific areas. The REF map will change as different resources are added or removed. Layers such as viewshed can be added as a part of the analysis. Ultimately, the goals of the project for the REF tool are the following:

- Build social, cultural, historical, and socio-economic interests into the tool.

- Use Stakeholder Team feedback to analyze and improve the tool's utility.

The REF tool is data heavy, but it is a central part of the project. In response to a question, Wood noted that the smallest area examined in the data set is a 30x30 meter (98x98 foot) square.

- Action: Develop a glossary of GIS terms to improve member understanding of the tool.

### *Meeting Wrap-Up and Next Steps*

After the presentations by Sarah and Wood, IEN asked Team members to share their goals for the project. Members' goals include the following:

- Improve pedestrian/cyclist access and safety in the Free Bridge area.
- Incorporate the results of this project into the Pantops Master Plan update (see [www.albemarle.org/departments.asp?department=cdd&relpage=3734](http://www.albemarle.org/departments.asp?department=cdd&relpage=3734)), emphasizing that this project is larger in scope than just Free Bridge itself.
- Include a discussion of public transportation options.
- Offer multiple solutions to congestion.
- Embrace the Rivanna River/riverscape and create an opportunity to focus on the future of this resource.
- Enhance the natural resources of the area by going beyond what is legally required.
- Improve coordination and connectivity of transportation between Charlottesville and Albemarle County.
  - Use the Rivanna River as a way to unite the two jurisdictions.
- Consider all options as a solution, including those rejected in the past.
- Ensure that the group considers the regional impacts and represents the views of everyone potentially affected by decisions.

Members were invited to offer additional suggestions and questions about the project. One member asked about the study area and how it was selected. Sarah explained that it was selected based on previous study areas, and specifically census blocks, the smallest geographic unit of measurement used by the U.S. Census Bureau. The study area is the geographic area immediately affected by Free Bridge congestion, where something could potentially be built to alleviate the congestion.

Members expressed a desire for a way to communicate with each other between meetings and to be able to post ideas.

- Action: Create an online forum for members to collaborate and share information between meetings.

The meeting concluded with a “Plus/Delta” activity facilitated by IEN to share positive qualities (+) and things that could be changed for future meetings ( $\Delta$ ). These included the following:

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- The meeting was civil and well-organized.
- The membership of the Stakeholder Team was “impressive.”
- The meeting kept to a schedule and the timing was good.

$\Delta$

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- All materials online should be accessible from the same webpage.
- The location and time of the meeting needs to be better announced, and a new location should be used next time.
- More information about the role of IEN can be provided.

## Meeting Attendees

<b>NAME</b>	<b>REPRESENTING</b>
Stephen Bach	City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
Kirk Bowers	Sierra Club
Ken Boyd	Albemarle Couty BOS
Donovan Branche	City of Charlottesville Staff
Morgan Butler	Southern Environmental Law Center
Blake Caravati	City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
Dave Davis	Department of Environmental Quality
Victoria Dunham	City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
Dennis Dutterer	Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
Bill Emory	City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
Mack Frost	FHWA
Chris Gensic	City Parks and Recreation
John Hacket	Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
David Hannah	Streamwatch
Anne Hemenway	Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center
John Jones	Charlottesville Area Transit
Michael Koslow	Charlottesville Bike and Pedestrian Safety Committee
Lucas Lyons	JAUNT
Dan Mahon	County Parks and Recreation
David Mitchell	Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
Cal Morris	County Planning Commission
Nina O’Malley	Department of Environmental Quality
Chuck Proctor	VDOT, Culpeper District
Mary Roberts	City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
Stanley Rose	Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
John Santoski	City Planning Commission
Mike Smith	City of Charlottesville Staff
Andy Sorrell	Albemarle County Staff
Jeff Werner	Piedmont Environmental Council
Clara Belle Wheeler	Albemarle County – Citizen Representative

Sarah Rhodes	Metropolitan Planning Organization
Wood Hudson	Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission
Frank Dukes	Institute for Environmental Negotiation, UVa
Kelly Wilder	Institute for Environmental Negotiation, UVa
Danny Newman	Institute for Environmental Negotiation, UVa