

**Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project  
DRAFT Stakeholder Team Meeting #2 Summary**

Wednesday, January 15, 2014, 4 – 7 p.m.

Kessler Conference Room, Martha Jefferson Outpatient Center, Charlottesville, Virginia

Facilitated by:

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

**Goals of the Stakeholder Team**

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

**Goals of Eco-Logical Program Grant**

- To 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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**Executive Summary**

The second community and resource Stakeholder Team meeting of the Eco-Logical Pilot – Free Bridge Area Congestion Relief Project took place on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at the Kessler Conference Room in the Martha Jefferson Outpatient Center in Charlottesville, Virginia. The purpose of this meeting was to learn more about the Regional Eco-Logical Framework (REF) tool and to discuss modifying the REF to better address the goal of relieving Free Bridge congestion.

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 about the Regional Eco-Logical Framework (REF) tool and process updates. Members of the Stakeholder Team asked clarifying questions about the tool and worked in small groups to form suggestions for how to prioritize the importance of the datasets included in it.

The next meeting will be held on March 19, 4-7 p.m., at Charlottesville High School. Details will be provided later.

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**Introductions and Orientation**

Frank Dukes and Kelly Wilder of the Institute for Environmental Negotiation (IEN) welcomed everybody and opened the meeting. After a brief round of introductions, Frank followed up on

a request from the previous meeting to explain more about IEN. He asked members to note the document that explains IEN's role, mentioning specifically that IEN takes no position on any outcomes and is both independent and impartial. If desired, IEN can speak confidentially with any meeting participants about the process. He also explained that the IEN team works with the TJPDC to ensure that the meeting time is spent productively.

Kelly then gave a brief overview of the process thus far. She reviewed the guidelines and requests that were assembled by the stakeholder team at the last meeting to promote effective collaboration, which are as follows:

- 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 stakeholders 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 stakeholders.
- Vary the structure of meetings for different communication styles by using small and large group activities so that stakeholders 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 the group.
- Be willing to share the floor with others and refrain from dominating the meeting.
- Avoid put-downs of other people or their opinions.

Kelly asked if any member had any guidelines or requests to add to the list, but none were suggested. She also mentioned that she put one copy of the November 18 meeting summary on each table and that the document is available online at the TJPDC Eco-Logical Pilot Project website for those who want to look at it. If any meeting participants are absent from a meeting, it's important to keep up with the group by reading the summaries online. Kelly then presented this meeting's agenda, which included time for:

- Introductions and Orientation
- Regional Ecological Framework Refresher Presentation
- Small Group Breakout Discussion
- Report Findings Back to Stakeholder Group
- Discussion of Next Steps and Outcomes from the Small Group Discussions
- Public Comments
- Meeting Wrap-up

## Regional Ecological Framework Refresher Presentation

Before handing the floor to Wood Hudson, Sarah Rhodes thanked all meeting participants for coming to the meeting and for volunteering their time. Sarah talked briefly about the field trip to the Rivanna River Trail in December, mentioning that it went well. She also announced that, barring any unexpected developments, the process would stick to the bi-monthly Wednesday meetings.

Wood Hudson then began his presentation about the Regional Ecological Framework (REF) tool and about its application within this process. Both Wood and Sarah explained the importance of developing the REF as a tool that is well rounded and useful for this and future projects. The goal of the meeting, therefore, was to brainstorm as a group how to improve the tool for local use because it will help evaluate the alternatives that the stakeholder team can discuss later in the process. Wood's presentation slides can be viewed at the TJPDC Eco-Logical Pilot Project website in the "Meeting Archive" section (<http://www.tjpd.org/ecological/meetingarchive.asp>).

Wood welcomed questions or comments at any point during his presentation. The following questions and comments were offered:

*Question: In terms of the datasets, what do you mean by ranking?*

*Answer:* Each attribute of each dataset was awarded a score from 1-10 depending on the determined importance of that dataset's representative environmental quality. Then, where those quality areas overlap on the map, the data layers' scores are added together to develop a rank of importance at each point of the REF cost raster. Although a scale of between 1 and 10 was used no attribute received a score of less than 2.

*Question: What's the importance of this process? Remediating Free Bridge congestion or improving this tool?*

*Answer:* Both. The purpose of working on the REF model now is to provide the group with a tool to work with later when different options for remediating Free Bridge congestion are needed. The project has two overall purposes when it comes to the tool and Free Bridge congestion. The first is to further develop and refine the REF tool, while at the same time applying and testing the tool and FHWA's Eco-Logical process to real world transportation issues. The second is to use this pilot project as an opportunity to identify a possible workable transportation solution that would address the current and future congestion issues in and around Free Bridge.

*Question: What is this scoring? I don't understand these scores.*

*Answer:* These ten data sets were evaluated by the agencies that provided the data. The data generally has a number of attributes, either qualitative or quantitative. The agency determined the environmental/ecological value of the land areas represented in the datasets based on their expertise of what is in or not in the area. The scores represent the importance of each area of land for local environmental health, with higher scores indicating more important areas that would best be protected from development. The scores or ranks provide

a common language for comparing and combining different but related environmental datasets spatially.

*Question: If you look at the map, there is a high value of 52 in the northern areas. So those are the areas with the highest value environments, correct?*

*Answer:* Yes, that is correct. However, the bounded MPO area doesn't include that northern density area. There are also some high value areas in the center of the MPO. According to the REF the northwestern areas of the planning district have the largest areas with the highest concentration of environmental resource. However, high score areas do exist outside of this area. For example, high scoring areas existing within the MPO and can be attributed to high concentrations of environmental resource present at sites such as Ivy Creek and Ragged Mountain.

*Question: How is the urban ecology weighted? How do you gauge the impact on the urban ecology in these macro terms?*

*Answer:* This is just a planning-level modeling tool. We would definitely want to explore the opportunity to add urban ecology to it, but the current model does not.

*Question: A six is average. What does that mean?*

*Answer:* That means that the average score of a certain area is six. That value shifts depending on the target area. This also indicates that areas with a score higher than six are significant impact areas that may be good targets for preservation. The mean average score of REF values in the Planning District is six. What this means is that areas with scores above the average (in the top 50% distribution) are the areas with higher ecological value. Those areas with scores above 14 or the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile have a significant concentration of resources and thus impact to those areas should likely be minimized.

*Question: Shouldn't we look at this in terms of where it falls as a percentile? So what's the significance of a six when you say that above a six is a significant impact area?*

*Answer:* We can look at the values in terms of a percentile, but the results are the same. Areas with values above a six occur less frequently in the dataset, indicating that they are of significant value to the local environment.

Sarah Rhodes also noted that any infrastructure improvement would cause an impact. The purpose of the REF Tool is not to find an alternative route that is impact free, but determine the potential impacts of the alternative route in order to more appropriately consider mitigation options and opportunities. This is how the REF Tool will be used later in the process.

*Question: It seems like the point by point score is more important than the average point, and that we should know the impact of stretches of a road as it traverses the cost raster.*

*Answer:* We can look at this map in terms of the raw numbers rather than the averages, but the result will be the same. The averages are simply a means of simplifying the data. Once the model is where we want it to be, we can certainly use it to analyze the impact of suggested roads. The intended use of the raster is to help avoid and minimize impacts and to provide a

framework for comparing the potential impacts of different project scenarios. Most likely we will find that making a comparison between scenario scores will be a better benchmark than looking at the region wide average. In addition to scoring the tool will also be used to identify the individual resources impacted by a project scenario.

*Question: It's great that this framework is together and that we are hoping to enrich this tool. Is there a list of datasets that we can choose from to add to this tool?*

*Answer:* There are a number of datasets that we can add to this tool to make it more accurate. Historic areas, parks, schools, neighborhoods, places of worship, and so forth can all be included. This is what we want the stakeholder team to do next.

*Question: Those of us who were around last time talked about the Eastern Connector. We evaluated three paths and at the end of a large study we evaluated that none of those paths made sense, from any perspective. I think it would make better sense, than starting in a microcosm, to look down on a map from farther away to see how roads can better direct traffic.*

*Answer:* These paths here are in no way indicative of what we may choose to do. They're just a demonstration. The staff will not actually be proposing any options, because that's up to the stakeholder team.

*Question: Is this model something that can be used for later projects? What size area do we want to -this model to cover?*

*Answer:* Yes, when the environmental and physical models are coupled this model will be useful for a number of purposes. By stacking the different data layers, the model can be used to assess projects from multiple perspectives, both now and later.

*Question: Would the data sets in the second module be stacked on top of the environmental data sets? Or would they be incorporated into a separate model?*

*Answer:* At this point, it seems best to do it separately and then use both models to determine best paths. This will develop as we work on reconstructing the tool. The most likely scenario is that the environmental model will remain separate from the cultural/historic/economic component.

*Question: Is it accurate to say that the resource agencies determined the scores based on what is required by code or law?*

*Answer:* Yes. For example, the rank 1 endangered species areas are given a value of 10 because they are supposed to be of the highest importance. The scores were given to assign importance of a dataset and an attribute importance may relate to code or law. However, the REF is designed to be reflective of environments that are regulated. The tool includes the location of wetlands, water bodies, endangered species and their habitats.

*Question: What is important to the community? That sounds very subjective compared to the data right now. So how do we factor in what's important with the community?*

*Answer:* Our process here is to have the stakeholder group figure out some of what is important for the community. The REF data is only a means of checking community values with environmental ones.

*Question: Are we going to get a chance to suggest re-ranking the different datasets/land uses in terms of importance?*

*Answer:* Yes, part of today's meeting involves group work where the stakeholder team will be able to suggest new ranks.

### **Small Group Breakout Discussion and Reporting Back**

Stakeholder team members divided into five small groups to discuss the current rankings of the REF model datasets and to complete the REF ranking worksheet. This exercise ensured that all team members had an opportunity to analyze the current rankings and to suggest new rankings. The teams also assembled lists of new datasets that they thought should be incorporated into the model.

After fifty minutes of small group discussion, one member from each group recorded their group's suggested and displayed them on a chart for the other groups to see. When all suggestions were displayed, Frank explained that each group would get an opportunity to present the highlights of their discussion. The five groups presented the following highlights:

*Group 1* – This group agreed that threatened and endangered species datasets were ranked accurately. In comparison, the group thought that the species observation dataset was ranked too high and that its rank should be lowered, although they did not want to specify what it should be lowered to. Additionally, in order to preserve the area's endangered species, the rank of the wildlife corridors dataset should be increased to a 6. The group also suggested changing the stream order ranking because they believed the Rivanna River rank should be higher. Finally, the group suggested that the following data sets, if available, should be added to the model:

- drinking water resources;
- floodplain areas;
- soil fertility;
- environmental justice issues;
- school locations;
- recreational areas;
- educational areas;
- sites of archeological importance;
- Native American history;
- historic impact; and
- socio-economic status.

The group was especially interested in the socio-economic data because they want to avoid targeting low income areas for road routes.

*Group 2* – This group thought that the data for the DGIF species observations dataset needs to be closely inspected and reconsidered because they were unsure about how it was collected and about the significance of certain sightings. They suggested that the Audubon bird area dataset should be awarded a higher rank and increased it to 8. The group also expressed concern with the fact that none of their group members were familiar with any of the datasets. They explained that, since the datasets are all state level or larger in scale, there should be

some input from local expertise in order to apply them locally and that this process should identify local experts to look at the data and to contribute local datasets to the model.

*Group 3* – Rather than suggest modifications to the original rankings, this group decided to weigh the datasets according to their importance, as decided by the group members. Since none of the group members believed they had sufficient knowledge of the datasets to change the rankings, they took the rankings as a given. Instead, the group ordered the ten datasets from most important to least important and weighted them on a curve (from 20% to 2%), relative to their identified importance. The threatened and endangered species dataset, for example, was deemed the most important dataset and awarded a weight of 20%. The group suggested that the following data should be added to the model:

- greenways;
- parks and recreation areas;
- historic and cultural sites;
- socioeconomic status;
- U.S. census; and
- business and economic corridor locations.

The group also supported Group One’s notion that routing decisions should not disproportionately disadvantage people of lower socio-economic status.

*Group 4* – This group suggested modifying the national hydrography dataset by either lowering its ranking or by decreasing the size of its river system buffers. They also explained that the watershed dataset should be checked to ensure that it is consistent with the local area and appropriate for use in an urban setting. The group expressed that the REF tool should be used only to figure out the more detailed path once the larger scale routing barriers are resolved. The main question, therefore, is about how to find another point to cross the river, so that Free Bridge is not the only route. The group suggested that a land conservation easement dataset be added to the model.

*Group 5* – This group did not reach consensus on any suggestions to modify the datasets rankings. Much of the group was comfortable with the original rankings, and some group members did not feel comfortable changing or judging the rankings because they didn’t think that they had sufficient knowledge. The group suggested that the following data should be added to the model:

- traffic;
- historic resources;
- existing land use;
- data about traffic accidents on existing roads, and economic analysis data.

## **Discussion**

After all the groups presented, Frank opened the floor to the stakeholder team for a brief discussion and asked if any participants had any questions about the presented highlights.

One participant shared that he liked how group 3 weighted the datasets, rather than re-ranking them. He asked why the group seemed to prioritize the water datasets by awarding them greater weights and about the effect of such low weights awarded according to their curve (2% for the lowest priority dataset). A member from group three answered that his group identified local water features as the most important environmental elements. He also agreed that the weighting system they used might not be totally relevant or accurate, but explained that the method of assigning weights to the datasets could still work.

Another participant commented that he liked group 3's weighting system, but that it could result in extreme results if the weighting scale is not distributed carefully.

A third participant expressed that it is difficult to look at rankings that experts have already analyzed and expect to change them in a knowledgeable way. He indicated that perhaps it would be more important for the group to list what types of land uses are of greatest local importance more broadly, rather than working to modify the original professional analysis. The group could focus on determining what is important to the community first, and then provide that information to professionals who can assign new ranks with that knowledge in mind.

Participants in group 3 noticed that the datasets overlapped. They expressed that, on the one hand, this is good because it ensures depth of the data. However, this could be problematic because it could artificially boost the value of certain areas due to double counting. Wood responded that, since the datasets are for different elements, it is not likely that the final raster would be skewed by double counting. However, Wood said that he would look into this.

### **Discussion of Next Steps and Outcomes from the Small Group Discussions**

Since the next steps of the process were discussed earlier in the meeting and the outcomes from the small groups were discussed during the findings report time, the stakeholder team decided to proceed through to the public comments agenda item. No public comments were offered.

### **Meeting Wrap-up**

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 location was great.

$\Delta$

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- The information discussed might have been a little too complex.

The next meeting (Meeting 3) will be held on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from 4 – 7 p.m. at Charlottesville High School.

### **Meeting Attendees**

- Stephen Bach – City of Charlottesville - Citizen Representative
- Kirk Bowers – Sierra Club
- Ken Boyd – Albemarle County BOS
- Morgan Butler – Southern Environmental Law Center
- Blake Caravati – City of Charlottesville - Citizen Representative
- Diane Caton – Albemarle County - Citizen Representative
- Ron Cottrell – Martha Jefferson Hospital
- Dennis Dutterer – Albemarle County - Citizen Representative
- Elaine Echols – County Staff
- Bill Emory – City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
- John Hackett – Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
- David Hannah – Streamwatch
- Anne Hemenway – Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center
- Satyendra Huja – City of Charlottesville CC
- John Jones – Charlottesville Area Transit
- Michael Koslow – Charlottesville Bike and Pedestrian Safety Committee
- David Mitchell – Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
- Cal Morris – County Planning Commission
- Nina O’Malley – DEQ
- John Pfaltz – City of Charlottesville – Citizen Representative
- Stanley Rose – Albemarle County – Citizen Representative
- Donna Shaunesey – JAUNT
- Mike Smith – City Staff
- Jeff Werner – Piedmont Environmental Council
- Clara Belle Wheeler – Albemarle County – Citizen Representative

### **Meeting Planners and Facilitators**

Sarah Rhodes – Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Wood Hudson – Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission  
Frank Dukes – Institute for Environmental Negotiation  
Kelly Wilder – Institute for Environmental Negotiation  
Jason Knickmeyer – Institute for Environmental Negotiation