

**Hartford Bridges Project  
Summary of Public Information Meeting  
May 20, 2014  
Bugbee Senior Center  
262 No. Main Street  
White River Junction  
6:30-8:15 p.m.**

A public meeting with project staff for the Vermont Agency of Transportation's (VTrans) Hartford Bridges Project was held on May 20, 2014 at the Bugbee Senior Center in White River Junction. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce and receive public feedback on an upcoming transportation project where two I-91 highway bridges over US Route 5 near exit 11 will be replaced. Accelerated bridge construction methods will be used to remove and replace the existing bridges over two weekends.

Kristin Higgins, VTrans Senior Project Manager, began the presentation with an overview of the Agency's Accelerated Bridge Program (ABP). Beginning in 2012, VTrans instituted a new approach to projects, incorporating accelerated construction methods to reduce the time it takes to construct a project, to both save money and minimize disruption to the traveling public and local communities. Accelerated bridge construction also reduces impacts to environmental resources, utilities and Right-of-Way. This method will be used on the Hartford Bridges Project.

Kristin gave a planning overview of the two bridges. The current structures, built in 1966, are comprised of three spans, totaling 200 feet. The structures have deteriorated and maintenance is both critical and costly. To improve safety, VTrans plans to widen both bridges by 2-4 feet, and build one 128-foot single span bridge to eliminate the need for joints, reducing future maintenance costs.

Rebuilding the bridges offers an opportunity to make improvements to US Route 5 in the vicinity of the bridges. The slip ramp to I-91 southbound will be removed and a right hand turn lane will be constructed, resulting in a single entrance to the highway at the existing entrance to the highway, west on US Route 5.

William Lammer, a project design engineer for VTrans, reviewed traffic data. Approximately 13,000 vehicles travel southbound on I-91 on weekends but about 4,500 are headed to I-89. These vehicles may be diverted to I-89 before the bridge construction area. The number of I-91 northbound vehicles is 8,200. Some 5,300 vehicles exit I-91 at White River Junction, exit 11 and 1,450 enter the highway northbound. This data will be utilized in planning weekend detours.

Kristin Higgins explained the lateral slide technology method that will be used for the Hartford Bridges Project and provided numerous illustrations to demonstrate how the lateral slide will be performed. She said the project will begin in the spring of 2015 with the construction of two new bridges on temporary supports next to the existing bridges. At the same time, new abutments, or supports, will be built under the existing bridges. When the supports and new bridges are completed, VTrans will close and demolish each bridge on a separate weekend, slide the new bridge into place and open the bridge. One side of the interstate will be closed at 6 p.m. on a Friday evening and re-opened at 6 a.m. the following Monday morning. This method will require significant planning and coordination but will have the least possible disruption to the public.

Throughout construction traffic on US Route 5 will be reduced to two lanes. The single lane in either direction will provide room for the contractor to build new structures and will provide safe passage for pedestrians through the project area.

Planning for traffic detours has not been finalized. Preliminary plans for the northbound detour are to divert traffic from I-91 onto the US Route 5 exit ramp and directly re-route the vehicles onto the northbound US 5 entrance ramp. A stop signal at the ramps would facilitate traffic control.

Southbound I-91 through traffic will take the exit 11 I-91 southbound off-ramp and follow US Route 5 south about 11 miles and re-enter I-91 at exit 9 in Hartland. During the daylight hours of the closure, uniformed traffic officers will be stationed at the intersection of VT Route 12 and US Route 5 in Hartland. Southbound traffic headed for I-89 (about 4,500 vehicles) will take the exit 12 I-91 to US Route 5 south to US Route 4 west. Vehicles will follow US Route 4 to I-89 Exit 1 and proceed north or south.

Jill Barrett, outreach coordinator for the project, said there would be proactive outreach, with numerous communication methods to stay in touch with the project such as a project website, fact sheets, public meetings, e-alerts and social media. She asked attendees to make suggestions on how to best communicate with the public and tap into existing communications networks.

Meeting attendees asked questions and made comments throughout the meeting as indicated by italics below. Responses were made by the project team.

*What do you mean by road closure?*

The entire road (Interstate 91 at exit 11) will be closed.

*What is "short duration"?*

We consider short duration to be a weekend to three weeks.

*Are you building the abutments to the new bridge behind the existing piers?*

Yes.

*Will you be keeping Route 5 open in both directions at the same time?*

Yes. With the exception of a few 10-20 minute periods during evening construction (2 a.m. to 5 a.m.) when there are maneuvers such as moving a beam into place, US Route 5 will remain open at all times – even during the two weekends when I-91 is closed.

*What's the traffic control at Route 5, southbound entrance to I-91? A lot of people coming from the VA Hospital will probably want to go southbound on the highway. It may be difficult to turn.*

We are studying the traffic at that location and at the existing northbound off ramp. We will investigate signals.

*How much of the slope at the existing abutments will be removed?*

We know that it will be necessary to cut into the existing slope, but we hope to minimize removing fill.

*Are you keeping part of the old bridge?*

No. All of the existing bridge will be removed.

*Are you closing both Route 5 and the interstate the weekend that you remove the bridge?*

No. We are only closing I-91. US Route 5 will have intermittent closures of a lane for brief periods (10-20 minutes). Tasks that require brief closures such as setting beams. These activities will be done during the evening, 2 a.m. – 5 a.m., when there are no pedestrians.

*Would there be emergency access during bridge closure?*

Yes. VTrans will put together a plan with local first responders.

*Will the closures be planned? As someone who runs a bus company, we have a tight schedule so would like to know in advance of any closures. Our service runs 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday so weekend closures should not affect our operations.*

Yes, we will have portable message boards.

*What will be the traffic southbound on 91 that will need to go through Hartland?*

The average number of vehicles on the interstate on weekends is 13,000. We know that a lot of traffic diverts to I-89 rather than continues on I-91 southbound.

*What's the lifespan of a bridge?*

75-100 years. We are building a single span, 128-foot bridge. It will have stainless steel rebar, a lot of concrete, weatherizing steel and minimal joints. The existing bridge has three-spans with joints connecting the span that are vulnerable to deterioration from salt exposure, freezing and thaw conditions.

*Will you consider avoiding Labor Day weekend and the end of August when you schedule the lateral slide as these are busy weekends? Other considerations are events held at the Upper Valley Aquatics Center and a new Town recreational field with seating for 2,500 people that will be opening next summer.*

We will try to schedule the move on weekends that will avoid when special events are planned.

*There is a construction project planned in Hartland at the junction of Route 12 and Route 5. I recommend that you learn more about this project when planning your detour.*

We will look into this.

*Will you be publicizing the detour routes?*

Yes, we will utilize multiples avenues to communicate to the public about the detour routes.

*Are you impacting the viewshed by building a 128-span bridge? What will the driver's experience be?*

We believe the area will look much the same as it does now.

*We would like this project to coordinate with the Town's plan for improving bicycle and pedestrians accommodations on Route 5. We are applying for a bike/ped grant from VTrans and it would be nice to have our grant award accelerated. Our plan shows a 6-foot bike lane on the south side of Route 5. Will there be room?*

Yes. We are planning for future bicycle accommodations.

*You appear to have new curbing on one side of Route 5.*

Yes, it is only on one side to eliminate the need for drainage.

*The closure of the slip ramp for southbound I-91 traffic is a good improvement. The Town would not have the money to do it and it will improve safety.*

*Will the garden club be able to tend the garden it has put in?*

The club will have access this summer but not in 2015. We will put a construction fence around the garden area.

*Will the traffic light at the northbound exit be permanent?*

No. It will only be there during construction as lanes are narrowed down.

*Will lights be compatible with an on demand feature for emergency responders?*

We will look into this.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.