

## Eco-Logical Pilot Project - Free Bridge Congestion Relief Stakeholder Information Handout

**Problem:** The US 250 link across the Rivanna River known locally as Free Bridge. This bridge is a key connection for local and regional traffic, but continued use of this link will result in more congestion, economic development and public safety issues that must be addressed. Regarding congestion, there are currently 53,000 vehicles per day on Free Bridge and the overall level of service is an F. The MPO's travel demand model estimates that Free Bridge will have a daily traffic volume of approximately 70,000 vehicles a day in 2040, making Free Bridge's already failing level of service 25 percent worse.

**Goal:** To find a project option that will alleviate these congestion, economic development, and public safety issues but will do so with the least costs to environmental, social and cultural resources. As no project is impact free a sub-goal would be to develop mitigation alternatives and plans for any new impacts that are caused by the chosen alternative.

NOTE: While finding a capacity-building alternative is the main goal of this effort, it is not a requirement of the grant project.

**Grant Assessment:** This grant process focuses on two key elements.

1) The first is testing the **Eco-Logical Process**, an ecosystem-based approach to infrastructure planning. This process fosters interagency cooperation, as well as stakeholder involvement, in the development of new infrastructure. The goal of the process is to collaboratively develop project ideas in an effort to address significant impacts early on in the project development process.

2) The second is the implementation and enhancement of the **Regional Eco-Logical Framework (REF)** Tool. This tool is a mapping resource that identifies and establishes numeric values of ecological resources in the TJPDC region. The tool also provides a way for planners to identify important ecological areas early on in the project planning process. When the tool is run in GIS it can identify the least environmentally impactful project alignment in addition to providing ecological impact scores for additional alignments.

**Participation:** The Eco-Logical process is based on open and productive communication between various stakeholder groups. In order for this process to be successful it is essential that stakeholders are open-minded about the process. To try and facilitate this process MPO staff has set a few limitations on stakeholder participation.

- 1) Representation between the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County must be as balanced as possible.
- 2) Representation between resources (environmental, social and cultural) must be as balanced possible.
- 3) All stakeholders must be connected to the study area either physically or be resource engagement. Meaning all stakeholders must have a vested interest in determining a viable solution to this issue.

- 4) MPO Staff reserves the option to ask certain organizations to submit nominations for stakeholder representation.
- 5) Each organization may only have one representative; however MPO staff and MPO Policy Board can allow additional representation from the same organization in an effort to keep representation equal and balanced (1 & 2)

### **Types of Stakeholders**

Citizen Stakeholders – Representatives who live within the study area. The MPO is looking for 8 to 12 citizen representatives, half from the City and half from the County. These citizens will fill out a basic application form in order to participate. Representatives will be chosen based on geographic, demographic and mode diversity when compared to the rest of the applicant pool.

Resources Representatives – Representatives who have expertise regarding environmental, social and cultural resources in the study area or representatives who do not represent the key resources but are essential for transportation planning, including local staff, VDOT, FHWA, Army Corps of Engineers and so on.

Both stakeholder groups contribute fully to the consensus-building process.

**Process:** The goal of the Eco-Logical process is to determine resources and impacts earlier in the transportation planning process so these impacts can be minimized and mitigated appropriately. To execute this process the stakeholder group will complete the following tasks.

MEETING ONE: Discuss the issues at Free Bridge, history of planning in the area, and demonstration of the Regional Eco-Logical Framework Tool (committee input will contribute to the diversification of this tool).

MEETING TWO: Identify resources within the study area and rank these resources to determine. The resources and rankings will be added to the Regional Eco-Logical Framework Tool.

MEETING THREE: Demonstrate the updated Regional Eco-Logical Framework Tool, showing new and improved best alternative. Discuss results and consider what other alternatives are available. *Staff will complete preliminary Eco-Logical Assessment of Alternatives.*

MEETING FOUR: Present preliminary assessment of alternatives and determine which alternatives should be assessed further with the aid of Engineering Firm (TBD).

\*ENGINEERING FIRM: Will review alternatives to assess preliminary costs, feasibility and impacts.

MEETING FIVE: Present the findings from the engineering firm regarding the cost, feasibility and environmental impacts (REF) of each alternative. Committee would rank the favorability of each alternative, including NO BUILD option.

Once alternative(s) are identified discussion of the mitigation options will begin to take shape, specifically, which resources are impacted and what mitigation options would be most appropriate for each

alternative. If the NO BUILD alternative is chosen the MPO will complete analysis of the other alternatives, but the committee would not assess mitigation.

MEETING SIX: Report on mitigation options and choose which options are most preferred. Develop agreements regarding the preferred alternative and the identified mitigation of impacts from preferred alternative.

FINAL MEETING: Discuss and provide input about Eco-Logical Process and Regional Eco-Logical Framework Tool.

**Schedule**: The Eco-Logical Grant period runs from August 2013 to February 2015. The stakeholder meeting process will run from November 2013 to November 2014. At the most, stakeholders will be asked to meet monthly in the evening. At the first meeting the stakeholder group will decided on a regular meeting time and date.

**Subcommittees**: MPO staff might request that a subcommittee of certain groups be developed as part of this process. The main stakeholder group will be made aware of these subcommittees in a timely manner. Furthermore, subcommittees would advise the process. Project consensus will remain with the main stakeholder group.

**Public Outreach**: Public outreach for this process will be developed as this process takes shape; however MPO staff anticipates at least one public outreach event each quarter.