Step 1 Getting Organized

Overview

Getting organized to begin a corridor management study involves forming an Advisory Group to direct the effort, identifying key concerns to be addressed, drafting a set of goals to provide a common understanding of the purpose of the study, defining the corridor boundaries, developing a work plan, and lining up resources to carry out the work program. A single individual or a small group can be designated to lead these startup activities. Under some circumstances, it may be desirable to obtain consultant support for front-end planning activities as well.

Getting Organized – Major Activities	
Form Advisory Group	• Identify key stakeholders • Recruit Advisory Group members
Establish Study Goals	• Review previous studies • Identify issues and concerns • Identify goals of corridor management study
Define Corridor Boundaries	• Identify transportation facilities included • Identify corridor endpoints • Identify area of influence
Develop Work Plan	• Develop public involvement plan • Develop work plan
Hold Public Meeting	• Review study goals, corridor boundaries, and work plan
Line Up Resources	• Define roles and responsibilities • Hire consultant(s) as needed • Obtain staff resource commitments

Form Advisory Group

The Advisory Group provides study oversight and will also ideally play a key role in implementation.

The initial step in pursuing a corridor management study is to form an Advisory Group. This group will provide both policy and technical direction throughout the study, and ideally will play a key role in building and maintaining support for implementation of the resulting corridor management plan.

The corridor management study typically will be initiated by VTrans, Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) and/or the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) in order to address one or more issues of concern. The study initiator (or lead agency) should make a list of important corridor stakeholders and then identify from these stakeholders a set of candidates for the Advisory Group. At a minimum, the Advisory Group should include representatives of the local jurisdictions in the corridor study area, the RPCs and/or CCMPO, Transportation Advisory Committee(s), and VTrans. Inclusion of at least one citizen representative is strongly encouraged.

It is not necessary to include representation of the full set of stakeholders in the Advisory Group – the public involvement component of the study can be designed to provide broad opportunities for input. However, it is important that the agencies and organizations who will likely have responsibility for implementing study recommendations are represented on the committee, and are actively involved in the decision-making process.

Advisory Group members should be able to effectively and fairly represent the viewpoints within their agency or the concerns of their constituents, and should be expected to discuss study issues and communicate findings with others in their agency or jurisdiction.

The size of the Advisory Group can vary depending on the scale of the study, but it is best to keep the group to a manageable size (e.g., 10 to 20 people). Large scale corridor management studies can consider forming two advisory bodies – one which focuses on high-level policy direction and another that focuses on technical review and comment. The activities of these bodies should be closely coordinated.

Key Stakeholders for Corridor Studies

Federal and State Agencies	• Vermont Agency of Transportation – District Transportation Administrator, Policy and Planning Division, Program Development Division • Vermont Agency of Natural Resources • Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (Departments of Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing, Housing and Community Affairs) • Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Division Office
Transportation Providers	• Railroad Owners and Operators • Trucking Interests • Transit Service Providers
Regional Planning Agencies and Advisory Bodies	• Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) and/or the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) • Regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TAC) • Local and Regional Economic Development Agencies
Local Jurisdictions	• Elected Officials (Select Board Members, City Council Members, Trustees, Planning Commissioners) • Planning, Community Development, Zoning, and Public Works Staff
Nonprofit Agencies	• Economic Development Organizations • Environmental/Smart Growth Advocacy Groups • Transportation Advocacy Groups
Businesses and Residents	• Abutting Property and Business Owners • Chambers of Commerce • Developers and Builders • Industries Relying on the Corridor for Goods Movement • Tourism Industry Representatives • Community and Neighborhood Groups

Establish Study Goals

Once the Advisory Group is formed, its first order of business is to develop a statement of goals for the corridor management study. This statement should describe what the existing or expected concerns are for the corridor, and how the corridor management plan is expected to help address these concerns.

This statement can be used as the basis for defining the corridor boundaries and developing the work plan.

Example Issues and Concerns

Typical issues and concerns that have been identified in other Vermont corridor studies include:

- Intersections or segments with unacceptable levels of congestion/delay;
- Intersections or segments with actual or perceived safety hazards (for motor vehicles, pedestrians, or other road users);
- Geometric deficiencies that create problems for trucks;
- Inadequate lane or shoulder widths for bicyclists;
- Areas with high existing or potential pedestrian usage that lack pedestrian facilities or crossings;
- Areas with unacceptable traffic noise or vibration impacts;
- Village areas with high levels of truck traffic;
- Substandard pavement or bridge conditions;
- Inadequate access to specific properties or establishments;
- Inconsistencies between access management classification guidelines and current design;
- Land use and growth patterns that exacerbate transportation deficiencies; and
- Lack of alternative transportation choices.

Development of the study goals should reflect the issues motivating the study and the perspectives of the Advisory Group members. Lead agency staff and the Advisory Group should review relevant existing studies and plans relating to the corridor. Such studies and plans may include previous corridor studies; town plans and local economic development plans; regional plans, including the regional transportation plan, TIP, and economic development plans; statewide transportation plans, including modal policy plans, the long-range transportation plan, and the STIP; Act 250 documents; and other plans such as watershed plans and wildlife corridor plans.

Early review of past efforts can help to define an appropriate focus for the current corridor study, by identifying issues and needs as well as solutions already recommended (or rejected). The goals and scope of the current corridor management study can be crafted with the benefit of this experience.

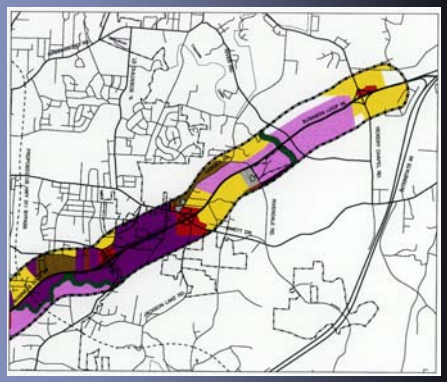
Advisory Group members also should be encouraged to discuss issues of concern with others in their organizations and other key stakeholders in their communities. This will help them to ensure the study is scoped with the full benefit of existing information and that its stated objectives reflect a wide range of perspectives.

It is quite possible that there will be conflicting objectives – for example, encouraging economic development and preserving scenic views. The challenge to be undertaken in the corridor management study is to acknowledge each objective and work out a balanced set of strategies that achieves the best possible compromise across them.

Sample Corridor Management Study Goals

- Ensure that future land use decisions across multiple jurisdictions are compatible with the likely future capacity of the roadway(s) in the corridor
- Address congestion problems during tourist seasons
- Reduce noise and safety concerns associated with heavy truck traffic in village areas
- Support continued development while managing impacts of additional truck traffic
- Address deterioration of bridge before load posting is required
- Address safety "hotspots"
- Minimize environmental impacts and support resource restoration
- Improve intermodal connections

The identified issues and concerns, as well as the established goals, should be revisited in Step 2 to determine if any revisions should be made based on what was learned from the data collection, analysis, and public outreach activities. They can be used as a reference point at each stage of the study to make sure that technical analysis, strategy development, and implementation planning activities are addressing the primary concerns that motivated the study. They also can be used to bring activities back into focus when and if "scope creep" starts to occur.



Define Corridor Boundaries

The initiation of a corridor study assumes a general geographic scope for the study. One of the first tasks of the Advisory Group, though, should be to more clearly define the corridor's boundaries – including the transportation facilities included, the endpoints, and the broader study area to be covered.

Defining the *transportation facilities* to be included will limit the scope of transportation data collection and strategy analysis. It is likely that the corridor study has been initiated in response to particular transportation-related needs and concerns. Therefore, the primary facility of concern (e.g., a roadway and its associated facilities such as pedestrian and bicycle paths) as well as intersecting and parallel transportation facilities (e.g., road, railroad, or non-motorized trail) should be included if they could make a significant contribution to reducing transportation problems in the corridor. Similarly, impacts from airports, transit hubs, and intermodal terminals should be addressed if they are either significant sources of corridor traffic, or influence the utilization of the primary facility.

Learn from past experience.

The corridor *endpoints* should be set broadly enough to include the identified locations of primary transportation-related need or concern, corridor transportation facilities as identified above, and any adjacent areas with a significant influence on transportation conditions in the corridor. For

example, if the study was initiated to address high levels of congestion in a series of towns along a particular state highway route, the endpoints should be set to include the towns of concern. In the towns at each end of the corridor, the endpoint should be established far enough outside the town center to encompass all problems and potential solutions for that particular town (e.g., access management, land use, alternate routes). If a neighboring community includes traffic generators that make a significant contribution to traffic in the corridor (such as a ski resort), it should be included as well.

Source: Resource Systems Group, Inc.

The corridor *study area* defines the scope of land use-related data collection (e.g., population and employment trends, major trip generators) and strategies, as well as municipal participation in the corridor study. It should be established to include the geographic area with the most significant influence on transportation conditions in the corridor. The corridor study area commonly includes the cities and towns that are traversed by the transportation facility or facilities being studied. It also may include adjacent towns that significantly contribute to corridor traffic (e.g., the corridor "travelshed"). Additional considerations may include viewsheds as well as environmental resources (e.g., watersheds, wetlands, wildlife habitat) impacted by the transportation facilities and related development. The boundaries should not be set so broadly that the study becomes unmanageable in scope, and should not include areas with only a minor and indirect influence on corridor conditions.

Once the exact corridor boundaries are established, the composition of the Advisory Group should be adjusted to ensure representation from all included communities.

Develop Work Plan

A work plan for the corridor study should include the following:

- Study goals;
- Map showing the definition of the corridor and study area boundaries;
- Study tasks, including data collection, future conditions analysis, analysis of options, and public involvement;
- Definition of major products; and
- Tentative schedule of milestones and key decision points, including who should be involved at each point.

The work plan should be in line with available resources. The major factors affecting the cost and duration of a corridor study are:

- Size of the corridor and complexity of issues;
- Data availability and additional data collection needs (see Step 2 and Appendix A for recommended corridor planning data and resources);

- Transportation model availability and extent of future conditions analysis needs (see Step 2 and Appendix B for analysis requirements and options); and
- Extent of public involvement activities (see below for a discussion of developing a public involvement plan).

A straightforward and noncontroversial plan will average 12 to 18 months from start to finish. More controversial or complex corridor management plans are likely to take longer.

It is important to set a realistic time schedule but also to keep the study process moving forward, in order to sustain the interest and active involvement of stakeholders. At the same time, if unexpected issues arise during the study process, it is important to maintain flexibility in order to ensure that these issues can be adequately addressed. For example, the study partners may discover sensitive community issues in a particular location that may require more extensive public outreach than originally anticipated. If doing so will have a significant impact on the study budget, either additional resources must be found, or more detailed planning should be deferred as a recommended follow-on activity to the current corridor study.

The Advisory Group should be relied upon to provide input into development of the work plan and detailed review of drafts. This ensures that their concerns are reflected early on in the process, and that they have the opportunity to weigh in on how to best focus the limited resources that are available. The members also can help to identify existing data sources or other resources that are available to help with the study.

Innovative Approaches to Public Involvement – Community Workshop in Suffield, Connecticut

The Town of Suffield, population 12,000, is located about 25 miles north of Hartford, Connecticut. As part of a regional growth visioning project, the town initiated a public planning process to develop a vision for future growth and transportation in the community. A key component of this process was a community visioning workshop, at which participants reviewed the results of a Visual Preference Survey taken by town staff and citizens; reviewed existing land use, zoning, and transportation patterns; mapped desired land uses; and identified transportation concerns and potential improvements.

About 40 elected officials, town staff, and citizens attended the three-hour workshop, held in summer 2001. Participants were then divided into small groups to undertake a series of visioning exercises. In these groups, participants were given base maps of the Suffield region and the town center, along with tracing paper and markers, and asked to draw on the maps and make recommendations.

After hearing final comments from participants, the project consultants synthesized the results of the workshops into a set of recommendations for the town, which were provided to town staff, elected officials, and workshop participants. As an outcome of the workshop and associated activities, the town undertook specific implementation steps, including zoning changes, land preservation, and streetscape improvements.

Public Involvement Plan

Public involvement is a critical component of the corridor planning process, serving two fundamental purposes. First, it ensures that the issues and needs of residents, businesses, travelers, and other interests in the corridor are adequately addressed through the study process and recommendations. Second, it helps ensure that people are aware of the study and understand the justification for its recommendations, which should lead to broader support for implementation activities. The public should be given

opportunities for input at all stages of the process, beginning with the establishment of goals for the study corridor.

A Vermont Public Participation Success Story: The Danville Project

The preliminary design process used for the Vermont Danville project showcases techniques for community participation and consensus building that also can be applied within the context of a corridor planning effort. This project includes the reconstruction of U.S. Route 2 through the village of Danville, reconstruction of town roads around the Danville town green, new underground utilities in the area of the green, a new traffic signal, lighting, landscaping, and artistic enhancements.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) entered into a unique partnership with the Vermont Arts Council (VAC) to ensure that the project would enhance the historic section of the village it traverses. In April of 2000, a Local Review Committee (LRC) was formed and consisted of a group of interested residents. Members include a school teacher, a local business owner, the town administrator, and others. In June of 2000, under the guidance of the LRC, VTrans and VAC hired an artist and a landscape architect to assist with the design and facilitate community involvement with the proposed aesthetic treatments on the project. The public was involved over a two-year process, through the LRC. Public involvement activities included a series of public meetings, workshops, school events, property owner visits, site walks and focus groups.

The resulting design was widely accepted within the community, because people saw that their ideas and concerns were being heard. At the same time, the public process provided an opportunity for people to better understand the function of the roadway, design issues, and other concerns of agency engineers. This allowed for development of a consensus on design tradeoffs that would have been much more difficult if this process had not occurred. The two-year consensus-building process allowed the project to move forward without public opposition, and produced a design that addresses important safety concerns while enhancing the historic character of the community.

The appropriate extent and type of public involvement activities will depend upon the nature of issues being addressed as well as the resources available for the corridor study. At a minimum, public involvement should include communication of corridor study issues through newsletters and media coverage, as well as opportunities for public comment at public meetings and through telephone, e-mail, or written channels. More in-depth public involvement may be conducted using methods such as surveys, focus groups, and interactive workshops. Advisory Group members (particularly elected officials) represent the public by the nature of their position and should be selected with the goal of representing the range of interests in the corridor.

Innovative Approaches to Public Involvement – Community Fair

The Rutland Regional Planning Commission, in association with town planners in Castleton, Vermont held a community fair to involve the public in the 2002 updates of the Castleton Town Plan. The fair provided a mechanism to share progress on the plan update and to learn about residents' views on topics of concern for the future of the town. The fair venue has allowed people to participate who might not otherwise have the time or interest to attend a standard public meeting, or who might have constraints such as child care. It also allows planners to establish an informal yet productive dialogue with residents.

The public involvement plan should specify the number, format, and timing of meetings to be held. It also should describe other communication and outreach activities (e.g., number of newsletters produced, extent of mailing list, groups to target in survey). While the study budget will constrain the extent of public involvement, the public involvement process should not be shortchanged. Failing to identify and address issues of community concern could limit support for the study's recommendations, and jeopardize the

success of implementation efforts. Input should be solicited from the early stages of the process – overlooking key issues until late in the study process may potentially require additional planning work to address these issues. In the long run, a good public involvement plan can actually save the stakeholder agencies money and lead to more feasible and beneficial study recommendations.

Hold Public Meeting

A public meeting should be held during the initial stages of the corridor planning study. The purpose of the meeting is to introduce people to the goals, scope, and timeline of the study, and to obtain feedback on these topics before they are finalized. The public should be asked to review the list of issues and concerns generated by the Advisory Group and confirm the goals that were established. Any additional issues that need to be considered can then be identified, and the study goals may be revised or expanded to encompass these issues, if necessary. Public input also can confirm the appropriate geographic scope of the corridor.

Line Up Resources

A mixture of agency staff and consultants is typically used for corridor studies. If resources for consultants are limited, a corridor study can be conducted using pooled agency staff resources, supplemented with consultants as needed for specialized tasks such as data collection and modeling.

Hire consultants as needed.

Once the scope, timeline, funding and public agency roles and responsibilities have been defined, a consultant or consultant team can be recruited through a Request for Proposals (RFP). The lead agency for the Corridor Management Study (with input from the Advisory Group) should write an RFP that clearly defines the scope of services expected and establishes the study's timeframe and budget.

Document agency responsibilities and commitments in a memorandum of understanding.

The involvement of agency technical staff experienced in the types of services expected will help ensure that expectations are consistent with available resources. Even when consultants are used, it is necessary to plan for and secure commitments of internal agency resources to work closely with the consultants and provide the necessary direction and oversight. Staff should be identified and managers contacted to ensure that the proposed staff will have adequate availability during the proposed timeframe of the study. Where staff from multiple agencies is involved, it may be helpful to draft a memorandum of understanding to document each agency's agreed-upon roles, responsibilities, and commitments of resources.