

1. PURPOSE OF LS DSEIS

1.1 Introduction

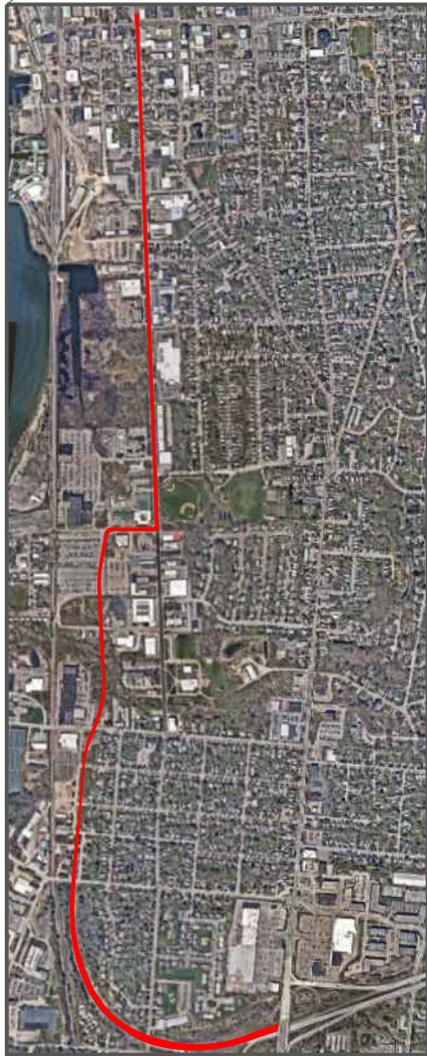
This document has been prepared to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Southern Connector/Champlain Parkway project (Project) is a proposed transportation link located in the southwestern quadrant of the City of Burlington, Chittenden County, Vermont providing access between I-189, Shelburne Street and the City Center District (CCD), formerly known as the Central Business District (CBD). A project location map showing the area is provided in Figure 1-1. In 2009, a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) approved the Selected Alternative consisting of a roadway that utilizes both new alignment and existing City streets from I-189 to the CCD. A Record of Decision (ROD) was issued in January 2010.

On October 11, 2019, the FHWA, in cooperation with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), rescinded the ROD for the Project. Although the 2005 Draft SEIS and the 2009 Final SEIS each considered disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority and low-income populations in accordance with Executive Order (EO) 12898, public outreach for that analysis addressed the general public involvement associated with the NEPA process more than the targeted approach recommended for EJ communities.

This Limited Scope Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (LS DSEIS) is being prepared to perform an environmental justice analysis for the Maple Street and King Street Neighborhood and determine whether the conclusions reached in the 2009 FSEIS remain valid. FHWA and VTrans also determined that the environmental justice analysis and conclusions in the NEPA review should be reevaluated using the most recent census data. This Reevaluation concluded that a LS DSEIS is warranted because a new standard of practice related to Environmental Justice (EJ) analysis exists today that wasn't applicable at the time the 2009 FSEIS.

All other project design elements and resulting environmental resource impacts summarized in the 2009 FSEIS were reassessed in the May 2017 Reevaluation associated with the two post 2009 FSEIS rail crossings and January 2020 Reevaluation.

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 PROJECT CORRIDOR

Southern Connector/ Champlain Parkway

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III Wilmers Circle, PO Box 5269 • Albany, NY 12205-0269
Mobile: (518) 453-4500 • www.chiacompanies.com

FIGURE I-1
PROJECT LOCATION MAP

1.2 Statement of the Project Need

The statement of Project Need as provided in the 2009 FSEIS has not changed. The Statement of Project Need as stated in the 2009 FSEIS is:

“The City of Burlington extends for approximately seven miles along the eastern shore of Lake Champlain in Chittenden County, Vermont. As the city has grown from its late 18th century beginnings, the transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with development, resulting in a number of highway deficiencies. One of the most distinct deficiencies has been the evolution of a city-wide street pattern with few north/south travel routes that are continuous.

The deficiency is particularly pronounced in the southern end of the City, on streets that carry traffic between the U.S. Route 7 (Shelburne Street) interchange and I-189 and the CCD. The intersection of two Principal Arterial highways, I-189 and U.S. Route 7, is a focal point of traffic moving north and south, to and from downtown Burlington and points east.

Shelburne Street in the northerly extension of U.S. Route 7 into Burlington. As it proceeds to its north end at the intersection of St. Paul Street and South Union Street, Shelburne Street carries four lanes of traffic, plus turning lanes, for approximately two thirds of the distance between the I-189 interchange and the CCD. The traffic volumes on this section of Shelburne Street are on the order of 24,000 vehicles per day (two-way) based on Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) 2002 traffic data. This section of Shelburne Street is also heavily developed with commercial properties, most of which have direct access onto U.S. Route 7; therefore, traffic wishing to proceed into the CCD or through the City is heavily congested.

Motorists wishing to avoid the traffic impediments on Shelburne Street often times divert from this primary thoroughfare onto the local street network in an attempt to bypass the congestion. For these reasons, the principal alternate routes into the CCD from the south are St. Paul Street, which extends from the north end of Shelburne Street; and Pine Street, which parallels St. Paul Street and Shelburne Street.

St. Paul Street and South Union Street are both two-lane residential streets which commence at the Y-intersection at the northern terminus of Shelburne Street. South Union Street is narrower than St. Paul Street, does not provide direct access to the CCD, and is restricted to one-way northbound traffic between King Street and Main Street. South Winooski Avenue, which diverges from St. Paul Street, is also a narrow, residential street, limited by one-way traffic restrictions. As a result, St. Paul Street

carries the majority of traffic between Shelburne Street and the CCD. However, St. Paul Street does not have adequate capacity for the traffic it is forced to carry.

Pine Street provides a continuous and direct route from the southern end of the City to the CCD. Beginning at its southern terminus with Queen City Park Road and continuing north to Flynn Avenue, Pine Street is a two-lane residential street. North of Flynn Avenue, Pine Street continues to be a two-lane roadway, but the character of the area changes. With the exception of the Jackson Terrace Apartments and the Champlain Elementary School, Pine Street is lined with commercial businesses and light industrial uses between Flynn Avenue and Kilburn Street. As Pine Street continues north to Main Street and the CCD, the area returns to a high-density residential neighborhood. Pine Street is highly desirable as an additional north-south route providing access between the CCD and points to the south.

However, Pine Street has no direct connection to the two Principal Arterials, I-189 and U.S. Route 7. Pine Street is only accessible by traffic migrating to and from Shelburne Street over local, residential streets which include Home Avenue, Lyman Avenue, Ferguson Avenue, Flynn Avenue, Birchcliff Parkway, Locust Street and Howard Street. These local streets are not intended to, nor do they have the capacity to carry the volume of traffic which is diverted from arterial or collector systems.

In addition, the existing street pattern encourages use of neighborhood streets by trucks due to the lack of alternative routings. This mix of traffic has created conflict and access concerns in the vicinity of the C-2 Section neighborhoods, and the King Street/Maple Street neighborhood, located at the north end of Pine Street. These conditions have caused congestion and resulted in safety and neighborhood concerns throughout the southwestern quadrant of the City of Burlington. The need for the Southern Connector/Champlain Parkway project was identified by studies conducted early in the history of the project, as discussed in Section 1.2 [of the 2009 FSEIS].

The need to improve traffic flow has neither abated nor has it been addressed in the 30 years since the 1979 FSEIS was approved. It is necessary that a facility be constructed to service the routing of traffic through or around the Pine Street Barge Canal Superfund Site, to provide relief of congestion and improve safety in the southwestern quadrant of Burlington.

In summary, the existing problems and deficiencies that have been identified are:

1. *Congestion (including insufficient capacity to appropriately service traffic volumes and provide appropriate access);*
2. *Safety concerns created by vehicles utilizing roadways that functionally operate at a higher classification than intended, both along the minor arterials and in neighborhood areas which are acting as short-cuts; and*
3. *Mix of local and through-traffic in neighborhood areas (including truck traffic) created by a lack of a north/south arterial to access the CCD.”*

1.3 Project Purpose

The Project purpose as stated in the 2009 FSEIS remains valid. The purpose of the Southern Connector/Champlain Parkway project is to improve access from the vicinity of the interchange of I-189 and U.S. Route 7 to the Burlington CCD and the downtown waterfront area; and to improve circulation, alleviate capacity overburdens, improve safety on local streets in the Project study area and provide traffic relief in the southwestern quadrant of the City of Burlington.

The purpose of the Project is also to eliminate the disruption to local neighborhoods and separate the local and through-traffic. Truck traffic that is destined for the CCD or the industrial areas accessed from Home Avenue and Flynn Avenue would be directed onto the Southern Connector/Champlain Parkway and removed from the local street network. The proposed transportation corridor is expected to become the major routing for north-south through-traffic in the area. The reassignment of the majority of through-traffic to this route would reduce traffic volume levels along neighborhood streets and improve accessibility to adjacent neighborhood areas.