



Town of Middlebury

The Middlebury Bridge & Rail Project
A Community Liaison's Perspective on Partnerships &
Best Practice

Municipal Day Presentation · October 26, 2018

Our Agenda

- Brief Overview of the Middlebury Bridge & Rail Project
- The Community's Concerns & Response
- The Role of the Community Liaison
- Lessons Learned

Introductions

- Your name and affiliation.
- What would you like to take away from this session?

Goals of the Project

- Replace two 1920s-era bridges that cross the western rail corridor in downtown Middlebury.
- Lower and rebuild 3500 feet of that rail corridor in Middlebury.
- Bridges and rail corridor are state-owned infrastructure.



The Project Team

- Federal Highway Administration
- Vermont Agency of Transportation — Structures Program
 - WSP, GPI — Inspectors
- VHB — Design & engineering
- Kubricky — Contractor
 - Subcontractors: ECI, Maine Drilling & Blasting, Hayward Baker, etc.
- Town of Middlebury — Community Liaison

Two Notable Aspects of the Project

- Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC) Process — Integrate contractor with the design process
- Accelerated Bridge Construction — Reduce road closure durations

Five-Year Construction Timeline

- 2017 = Demo of existing bridges and installation of temporary bridges
- 2018 = Construction of drainage system and temporary access road
- 2019 = Support of excavation and utility work in rail corridor
- 2020 = Lowering and rebuilding of rail corridor/replacement of bridges with tunnel; Vermont Rail rerouted up the eastern side of the state; Main Street and Merchants Row closed to vehicular traffic for 10 weeks
- 2021 = Final landscaping, paving, and line marking



Middlebury

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Middlebury Facts & Figures

- Shire town of Addison County, commercial hub of west-central Vermont
- Home of two of the largest employers in Vermont — Middlebury College (1,100 employees) and Porter Hospital (600 employees)
- Population = 6,000 residents + 2,500 students
- Summer home of Middlebury Language Schools & Breadloaf Writers' Conference
- Industrial heritage: AgriMark, J.P. Carrera, Otter Creek Brewing, Woodchuck Cider
- Intersection of four state highways (Routes 7, 30, 125, 23)
- Median annual household income = \$51,186

Community Stakeholders

- Middlebury Selectboard
- Town Management — including emergency responders
- Better Middlebury Partnership — market the downtown business community
- Neighbors Together — project-specific grassroots community organization
 - National Bank of Middlebury, Middlebury College, Town Hall Theater, Middlebury Selectboard, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Addison Central School District, Addison Central Teens, Addison County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Improvement District Commission

Competing Currents

- The project represents an unnecessary risk to the downtown business community and to the environmental safety of the town
- The project represents a necessary investment in the town's infrastructure and an incentive for planning the future of Middlebury's downtown
- Just get it done and tell me what to expect along the way





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The Selectboard on the Community's Goals

- **Safety** — Our people, our historic buildings, our environment
- **Access** — Traffic flow, parking, walking
- **Impact** — Residents, cultural & religious organizations, business community
- **Credibility** — Project schedule, project plans
- **Communication** — Timely and accurate

How Did We Turn the Corner?

2017 Public Outreach by the Numbers

- **15** Public Meetings
- **70** Meetings with Downtown Stakeholders
- **85** Meetings with the VTrans Project Team
- **64** Community Liaison blog entries at www.middleburybridges.org
- **250** Responses to Temporary Bridges Community Survey

Fall 2017 Community Survey

Temporary Bridges Construction Project

- **80%** were downtown either daily or 2-3 times a week.
- **65%** are “very satisfied; it was a complex project that was managed well.”
- **25%** are “somewhat satisfied; on the whole it went pretty well.”
- **50%** are “more confident about the project” following this summer’s construction.
- **94%** consider the timeliness and accuracy of the project information they received either excellent or good.

Middlebury Voices

The Community Speaks Out

- "It is a necessary inconvenience for the greater good, and we will, as a community, get through it with grace and tact."
- "We love and support our downtown. Negativity and 'woe is me' doesn't help the shopping experience. Neighbors Together has been great. We can learn a lesson from their can-do attitude."
- "My wife and I made a conscious effort to shop and eat downtown during the project. I hope community support will continue throughout this odyssey."

The Making of a Community Liaison

- My Qualifications
 - 20-year resident of Middlebury
 - English major
 - Corporate career in publishing—problem solving, decision making, accountability, communication, team-building
 - Technology user

How the Position Works

- Reports to: Middlebury Town Manager
- Dotted line reporting to: Middlebury Selectboard
- Position funded by: FHWA/VTrans
- Funding mechanism: Grant to Town of Middlebury
- Start date: January 2016 through end of project
- Terms: Hourly compensation for 40-hour workweek; no benefits

The Job on Paper

- Act as liaison between the Middlebury community and the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Act as primary Town spokesperson for the Project.

The Job on Paper

- Respond to inquiries and complaints from residents and visitors as well as local and area businesses through interpersonal communication and written correspondence (including e-mail).

The Story Behind Middlebury's Temporary Bridges



95%



Over 95% of the project's temporary bridges are made of steel, which is a durable and long-lasting material. Steel bridges are also easy to install and remove, making them ideal for temporary construction projects. The project team used steel bridges to maintain traffic flow during construction while ensuring the safety of the community.

- ✓ Maintaining traffic flow during construction
- ✓ Ensuring the safety of the community
- ✓ Providing a durable and long-lasting solution
- ✓ Minimizing disruption to the community
- ✓ Supporting the project's budget
- ✓ Ensuring the project is completed on time



vtrans.vermont.gov/projects/middlebury

Questions or comments?
Contact Jim Gish, Middlebury's Community Liaison
Email: jgish@townofmiddlebury.org Phone: (802) 388-8100 ext. 200



2018 Construction Plan



Hours of operation: 7 am - 5 pm, Monday - Friday, with occasional night and weekend work.



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The Job on Paper

- Build relationships proactively with local and area businesses and community members.
- Regularly attend outside meetings (such as the Chamber of Commerce, Better Middlebury Partnership/Neighbors Together, and Rotary) to promote the project and listen to concerns.



A Typical Week: September 17 – 21, 2018

- Daily — Morning and afternoon walk-through of construction sites and downtown businesses
- Monday, 11 AM — Meet with Executive Director, Better Middlebury Partnership, and Co-Chair, Neighbors Together, to review 2018 marketing initiatives
- Monday, 4 PM — Middlebury Public Health & Safety Committee monthly meeting
- Tuesday, Noon — Downtown Improvement District Commission quarterly meeting
- Tuesday, 2 PM — Meet with Executive Director, Addison County Regional Planning Commission
- Wednesday, 9 AM — Planning meeting for Landscape Design Public Meeting
- Wednesday, 6:30 PM — Landscape Design Public Meeting
- Thursday, 9 AM — Weekly Project Team Meeting
- Friday, Noon — Lunch with Middlebury Selectboard Vice Chair

The Job on Paper

- Attend and participate in weekly project meetings.

The Job on Paper

- Draft and distribute press releases to local and regional media outlets (television, radio and print).

The Job on Paper

- Produce weekly project updates for distribution via the Town website and email list and appropriate social media platforms.

The Blog

- Built on Wix platform
- Delivered directly via blog website, www.middleburybridges.org, and via town listserv
- Reaches over 1,000 residents and businesses
- Weekly updates; daily during Summer 2017 temporary bridges replacement
- 52 updates so far this year; 165 total since Spring 2017

What Has Made the Blog Successful

- Keeps people informed
- Information is timely and accurate
- Short and to the point
- Features photographs of construction activity
- Consistent delivery (every Friday morning at 8 AM)
- Responds to questions raised by readers
- Offers a personal perspective
- Covers relevant town events

What Has Made the Blog Successful

Hi Jim,

I don't believe we've met, but I wanted to tell you that I think you're doing a terrific job in your updates about the bridge project.

I appreciate the clear, timely information about what's happening (just enough information and not too much), the photos that make it real, and the friendly tone which communicates a sense of community as we experience this together.

Thanks for your excellent work!

Best regards,

What Has Made the Blog Successful

Hi Jim,

I so enjoy reading your thorough updates. Thank you! Today's message made me wonder the following three things:

- 1) what was the soil contaminated with?
- 2) how do they decontaminate it?
- 3) what happens to the soil after that?

Thanks,

Lessons Learned: Partnering with the State

- There is no enemy
- Understand what drives the State's decisions
- Clearly articulate your priorities
- Get involved
- Understand the larger picture
- Manage the public process

Achieving Excellence as a Community Liaison

- Know your community
- Know who you're representing
- Get started during the planning phase
- Embed yourself with the project team
- Trust and credibility are key
- Educate, don't sell
- Respect the process and know your boundaries
- Get the story right
- Be visible day in and day out

