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Dear Mr. Sikora,

I would like to express my opposition to the plan for extending the Chittenden County Circumferential Highway as outlined in the various "preferred alternatives" selected by the EIS study consultants.

Vermont is a special place which shall forever be remembered as a small and personal place. It is a special place where the air is clean, the skies are bright, and has an abundance of wildlife, open space and is full of all sorts of people who greatly appreciate such things.

As far as I can tell the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released this Summer was completely biased towards considering the narrowly defined needs of the people who live near the area to be circumvented, namely Essex Junction, as well as by people who currently are facing traffic on their way to the interstate highway in Williston.

However the EIS only cursorily mentions that the outlining areas, such as where I live, won't be affected because development has "already spread with the assumption that the Circ. Highway will be built." I postulate that this is a preposterous assumption, and it is clear that the extension of an additional loop of interstate highway around the county will invariably lead to ever more rapid expansion of the suburbs out into the hinterlands and country.

If people now live as much as 45 minutes away to get to a job in Burlington -- you can be sure that they will move ever further out if the opportunity presents them to zip around the county via superhighway on their way to work. This means new housing developments in places such as Fairfield VT, which is currently a mostly rural community.

To think that citizens who live in Williston, near where the Circ. will be built, will not suffer a downgrading of their quality of life is a faulty assumption. Currently the area is centered by a beautiful meandering stream and surrounded by wide fields and some housing developments. After the Circ. would be built there -- it would have a scar of un-passable highway right down the middle, fumes from the trucks, cars and busses speeding by, and there would be new source additional never-ending highway noise forever more. These effects will probably also cause many the people who currently enjoy their pleasant surroundings in Williston to seek to move out into the newly accessible hinterlands. Thus, I argue that this addition would not serve the community of Williston nearly as well as simply installing another exit or two on the existing stretch of Interstate 89 already in place.

It is also quite obvious that although the cars will speed by places that are currently congested, they will, in fact<sup>1</sup> end up in congestion somewhere else during rush hours, either at or near to the exits or entrances of the new Circ. highway, and for example, even the EIS report itself advertises marginal improvements to travel times across the county.

At present there are a wealth of possibilities for relieving the existing traffic in Essex Junction and at the I-89 entrance near Tafts' corner, where the true traffic problems arise periodically<sup>2</sup>. A new exit where the Circ. was to have split off I-89 in Williston, or near old-town Williston, would do a lot to relive the traffic around the intersection of I-89 and route 2A near all the shopping plazas.

Additional improvements such as "smart" traffic lights -- which can adjust signal times according to traffic patterns, the utilization of web-cams for pre-trip planning, and the efficient transmission of traffic information for use with on-board GPS systems -- all of which can allow travelers to adjust their travel patterns according to current traffic patterns.

Also there appear to be several existing ways to go around the intersection at Essex Junction (or commonly referred to as Five Corners). There are rail yards nearby which could easily accommodate routs for going around the congested spot, or a rotary or roundabout could be installed, or a diversion tunnel could be used to shunt some of the traffic under the tracks and under the intersection, perhaps along the existing pathway of Route 2A.

Another factor not considered properly was transportation alternatives. It isn't exactly clear why the State decided to

scrap the emerging rail transport network in Chittenden county, its' most populated area, and then promote automotive traffic instead via fast-tracking the building of the Circ Highway extension -- but I can tell you that this was not a publicly considered decision and was not a fair one either -- since the Federal Government and the State of Vermont had already invested substantial funds in upgrading the rail transport network and by acquire passenger train cars for providing an clean and energy efficient method of transporting commuters to the central work areas of the county, centered around Burlington. In fact it seems that the State did not live up to its commitment to test-out the new rail system for a specified number of years.

As such, at this time I suggest that the consultants and guardians of our State's transportation network reconsider their rejection of Alternative 1 of the EIS -- which advocated reasonable alternatives to the current over-reliance on automobile traffic to move people around the area. Among the reasonable items of this plan included additional park and ride lots, a transportation management association, better bus services, new rail alternatives and other innovative approaches to our meeting our transportation needs now and into the future.

I would also like to say that there was no proper discussion given in the EIS to the wealth of possibilities that could be done with the existing Circ. rights-of-way. Among them are what could amount to a great step to create one of the most beautiful and self sustaining metropolitan areas of the entire nation -- which I envision as a circumferential park -- with a series of parallel small roads and paths setup to accommodate a wealth of alternative methods of transportation -- seemingly the types of transportation supported by a large portion of the County's population.

In particular, a bicycle path for self-propelled wheeled transportation path, a foot path for walkers and joggers etc., another path for small motorized transportation vehicles such as snowmobiles, dirt bikes and all terrain vehicles, and another rough and windy dirt path for wildlife observation, horse-based transportation, dog walking, and even for moving livestock when needed. Then, along these parallel paths, there could be another right-of-way for a light rail system -- which could literally loop along the Circ's right-of-way down to Burlington and then back along I-89 past the big box stores etc. If trains were to loop in each direction and there was a park and ride at each stop -- it would be quite convenient to do a day's errands and other tasks via mass transit. Then, a bus network could run-out of this network in a hub and spoke pattern which could more-efficiently cover large areas of the region with a safer, cleaner and energy-efficient alternative means of transportation.

I also believe that a comprehensive alternative transportation network around the county would better serve the community at large by improving the local environment, by keeping many people closer to home for recreation, by allowing people to get to Burlington safely, by attracting high-value leisure tourists, by raising nearby home values, and by providing a positive example to the nation as a whole -- about how we as a society can offer viable alternatives to our current transportation system based solely upon ever larger amounts of internal combustion engine cars moving people around in an inefficient way. It's not hard to imagine how anybody wouldn't want to have access to this type of Circ. alternative; yet such a solution was not properly addressed or presented as a viable choice in this multi-million dollar EIS report, why not? Just because there's a precedent for consultants and infrastructure planners to ignore and reject such alternative possibilities doesn't mean it is the best thing to do.

In addition to the benefits of building a set of viable alternative transportation networks around the County, we would also benefit by not having the pay for and maintain another huge paved superhighway network around the County. The existing interstate highway infrastructure in Vermont is already improperly maintained. For example, until recently the existing stretch of interstate highway between Montpelier and Williston had indiscernible lines on its sides and huge ridges along the parts of the roads where vehicle tires typically run, and another stretch of I-89 near Randolph was nearly rubble on one side until this year. Talk about dangerous -- with no discernable lines -- if it was raining and/or snowing and cars were coming the other way at night -- it was nearly impossible to see where you were going. All these issues are presumably because of either bad management and/or a lack of funding. Yet somehow the funding is available for laying more superhighway -- which will presumably fall into similar state of disrepair in a few years and will then have to wait years into the future before there's any chance of improving the situation for lack of funds and/or efficient management.

Perhaps, I postulate, if we could devise a real and viable plan to properly-maintain our existing infrastructure with the money that would be spent on the Circ. -- we could then gain improved travel times and safety scores which even surpass the projected benefits of proposed the Circ. highway, whatever those may be.

This aforementioned "build and decay" approach, as described above, seems out-of-line with what should logically be done -- which is designing a plan for a proper level of maintenance and repair for all the existing State and Interstate highways in the state, and developing a steady and reliable program of bridge maintenance as well. For example, I am quite aware that my town, Westford VT, will need to wait at least ten years to obtain State funding for much-needed bridge improvements, which we are told is the amount of time that all bridges must wait for much-needed repairs -- and yet we are still considering paying for the massive expense of building a huge and outdated new road network -- which must also be maintained over time.

Also, seemingly, the EIS study consultants did not take the time to go out to other small metropolitan regions that had already built "ring" highways to accommodate additional traffic etc. If they did such a thing then it was not documented properly in the report -- and it is most certain that they would have discovered a massive extension of suburban expansion (sprawl) within ten years way-out into the hinterlands. I have been able to view this phenomenon directly in other small-city areas of this nation, and a study of subsequent real-estate transactions and traffic analysis patterns would certainly be able to tell you the results of building new and redundant limited access highways in outlying areas. It is a fact that new limited access highways, in regions such as ours, will extend more and more traffic, housing and commerce into what has, up until now, been utilized for agriculture and rural purposes.

The people of the state of Vermont, are proud of their beautiful, rural, and "small is beautiful" self-managed traditions, we appreciate our rural areas and, in fact, we depend upon their continued existence to support our farm-based industries and to help keep the tourism business vibrant in this area. We also need to face the fact that our over reliance on the automobile for personal transportation has left us in a potential weak spot in the case of fuel supply interruptions and/or new environmental regulations.

As such, I would also like to make note of the fact that the current Circ. EIS study narrowly took major consideration of the impact and effects of the project upon the citizens who live and work within a narrowly defined area around where the new highway segments will be built and were correspondingly not generally concerned with the well-being or quality of life of the regional area as a whole.

I would also like to state that for receiving several million dollars to do the study the consultants could not even update their website with the extension date of this filing until near-to or shortly-after the original filing date had occurred. Similarly, we have only seen notice of the extension in many publications during the most recent week, and until such information was posted on the EIS website there was no real way to know if the notice of extensions we received via email were real or not. I would also like to say that for such amounts billed -- this company should have posted this information on its website immediately and in a clear and responsible manner before sending-out email notices of such changes -- so that the citizens may have properly verified that they have been informed by the proper authorities and not by tricksters or spammers who have seemingly taken over our email boxes from time to time. Such behaviors seem to indicate a general lack of commitment to the Circ. EIS study project as a whole, and serve to indicate that the consultants took the easy way out -- by modifying and resubmitting the generalized content of other previously conducted projects -- instead of coming up with a set of approaches which sufficiently meet the real needs of an area as unique and attractive as that of Chittenden County, Vermont, and its outlying areas.

Given the overwhelming preference for small, personal, environmentally conscious, clean and energy efficient solutions in the area -- you would have thought that any study considering such a massive extension of the interstate highway through currently semi-remote areas of the County -- would have at least made mention of the great wealth of possible alternates and scenarios available to us. As such, to do what the EIS study did, which was to simply break the list of available options down to a few choices between large stretches of highway and various levels of exits and entrances -- does a disservice to our community and to the well being of those who will live here in the future, especially considering the costs involved. In fact, the Circ. EIS list of options was so clearly misaligned with our region's real needs that you would almost think that this study was managed out of some urban place near a large city -- because they didn't even seem to consider options which might serve to enhance the harmony and pleasantness of the existing life and culture of the area as part of their EIS.

A proper study of the situation would have included some of the needs of the citizens who currently experience traffic in certain small areas of the county during a few short hours in the morning and even fewer hours in the evening, and would also have given equal or more consideration to the quality of life experienced by the larger body

of people and wildlife who would have to endure having an ever expanding ring of suburban sprawl accelerated by a new main route into the center of town.

A proper (and thus non-flawed) EIS would have included mention, discussion, and analysis of sustainable urban growth plans -- and would have considered, and probably would have advocated, developing innovative ways of improving our regional transportation network -- and would to seek to find ways to keep the trade and housing networks from needlessly expanding out of the countryside (at an accelerated rate) -- and would also have made ample mention of alternative means of transportation, or at least discussed why such alternative means of transportation are not even viable enough to consider.

As such I implore you to reconsider the validity of the Chittenden County Circumferential Highway's EIS and to insist that a proper study be done which honestly considers the true cost of the externalities associated with expanding our current over-reliance on massive highway projects for the sole provision of transportation around our county and state. Please select another local-minded contractor to do the study and please make this organization go out to other metropolitan areas where they've done what the Circ. EIS is proposing to do and report what the end results were ten years later, and alternatively they should seek to identify places which rejected such plans and determine what actually did happen thereafter.

If this EIS was properly done I think and know that they would find that keeping our existing highway-based transportation network "as it is" will be more than sufficient once viable alternative methods of transportation are available, and once the issues associated with the few "hot traffic spots" such as Tafts' Corner and Five Corners are addressed in a local and personal way -- instead of by utilizing a massive bypass highway to do what new exits and bypass streets, roundabouts or tunnels could accomplish.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider my reasons for opposing the further construction of the Chittenden county circumferential highway and for opposing the incomplete and boilerplate conclusions offered in the EIS statement about which I am commenting on.

Sincerely,

W. Stuart Hunt  
Westford, Vermont

Notes:

1. As many studies have shown, there is a natural limit above which traffic will self-regulate, once people's commute times go above approximately 45 minutes they tend to take alternate actions to reduce their travel and/or commute times.
2. My personal experience has shown that, in reality, you can experience a 10 minute wait at either of these traffic points at some peak travel times. Most of the time it only takes a few minutes of waiting for the light to change to get through these intersections.