

Listen to Paul Revere

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Some time ago I worked on a project that required huge quantities of “import” soil as part of a major regrading effort on a US Navy installation. The numbers of dump truck loads was significant enough to warrant consideration of a special entrance and additional roadways on the base just for this hauling effort, for the duration of the project. This would keep these heavy trucks and dirt off existing roads, and minimize disruption to the normal base traffic volume and patterns. The site to be graded was several miles from any entrance, and adjacent to a deep water pier and warf section that was being closed to all operations for this project.

When the VE Team reviewed all the environmental impact, cost and need for additional security associated with the proposed truck route, they looked in another direction for a more cost effective and functional solution - toward the sea! The Team proposed that the import soils be barged in, directly to the area where the fill was needed. They determined that a portable conveyor system could be set up to move the fill right from the barges, and could be extended for much of the distribution once ashore. This approach also provided more flexibility in the event of project delays, in that the barges could be parked along the warf with no penalty. A major benefit to the community was the complete elimination of dust accumulation along the base roadways, while providing a virtually noise free environment except right at the job site.

In preparing this proposal for the Presentation Phase, the VE Team Leader put sketches on his flip charts, with a #1 by the “present” plan, and a #2 by the “proposed” plan. He then presented the options, quoting Paul Revere - “ONE if by land, and TWO if by sea”.

This story serves to illustrate that many times those elements which might be considered site restrictive could in reality be turned around to be site enhancing. A land site bounded by water can often give the VE Team a totally new domain to consider for possible cost effective solutions.

Another example was a Coast Guard project along Florida’s Gulf coast. The Coast Guard has a number of “satellite” stations approximately 50 miles apart, stretching from St. Petersburg north, beyond the Crystal River area. These are small stations with generally less than 10 assigned personnel, basically high speed outboard motorboat operators with communications links to a regional facility. Their mission is to respond quickly (less than 25 miles) to an emergency situation, including drug interdiction. Problem was that many of the stations were converted homesites or other older facilities, but they had piers and were situated on rivers with access to the Gulf. These were “non-secure” buildings, and a number of drug smuggling cases could not be brought to trial because the evidence had been stolen by local thieves. The solution was to replace these older buildings with concrete structures that had secured vaults.

This particular project site was so small that temporary housing planned at the site during construction allowed very little “laydown” area for the contractor, and precluded him from working along one total side of the construction area. When the VE Team asked if the personnel could be housed in an appropriate sized Coast Guard vessel docked at the same pier as the motorboats, the answer was affirmative. This opened the site for a more economical and quicker construction, and saved over \$100,000 in temporary construction costs. Personnel at the final presentation also entertained the idea of constructing a barge for this purpose, since a number of similar projects were in the total plan.

The anti-climax to this story is that I went to visit my parents in Inverness, FL right after the VE Study conclusion, just before the 4th of July holiday. During a BBQ that weekend I got into conversation with some neighbors there, and when I mentioned my most recent project, and the results, one shared an interesting observation with me. She said she had a cottage on a river just north of Crystal River, about 20 miles away. She swore to me that the Coast Guard was constructing a concrete building just upstream of her cottage, but that it was replacing a barge that had housed the GC there for many years. For the price of a lunch, we motored (on the river) about 2 miles upstream of her cottage, and I could not believe my eyes as we rounded the bend and approached the Coast Guard station. It WAS a barge!!

I requested permission to “come aboard”, and explained my interest in their construction project. Then I was told that the plan was to strip the barge of all communications and any other equipment of value, and sink it offshore for an artificial reef. I gave them the names of our CG contacts, took some pictures, and actually got them developed in time for inclusion in the final report. Since this project was less than 150 miles from my other VE Study project, the barge could be towed to the VE site, an “already built” solution to that problem, and certainly a more cost effective utilization of CG resources for the project about ready to complete construction. Definitely a “Win-Win” situation!