

Transporting the Public



Opportunities and actions to improve mobility, create healthy and economically vibrant communities, and protect our natural environment



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The Snelling Center for Government
Fostering responsible and ethical civic leadership, encouraging public service by private citizens, and promoting informed citizen participation in shaping public policy in Vermont.

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Executive Summary

Each day, Vermonters struggle to find ways to get to where they want or need to go if they cannot drive or do not have access to a car. At the same time, Vermonters concerned about gas prices, air quality and global warming may be motivated to drive less, but find alternatives lacking. A new approach is needed for transporting the public that improves mobility while reducing the need for driving single occupancy vehicles; an approach that simultaneously contributes to healthy living, creates economically vibrant communities, protects our natural environment, and utilizes a wide variety of existing public and private transportation assets. That's why in early 2009, AARP Vermont with assistance from the Snelling Center for Government, launched the Transporting the Public project.

According to an AARP Vermont telephone poll of 800 Vermonters aged 18 and up, older, lower income, and unemployed residents are more likely to have problems with transportation and get out less frequently. This lack of mobility greatly impacts social connections, access to necessary goods and services, and employment opportunities. Of those polled, 54% do not believe there are adequate driving alternatives in their community and a majority of these people would like to see more alternatives. Interest in these alternatives is strong in communities where they are not available.

Interest in alternatives to driving is high for a number of additional reasons. Many Vermonters recognize and are concerned about the impacts on our natural environment. The rising cost of transportation for individuals and public providers is another reason to seek alternatives. In 2007, the total annual spending for the purchase of petroleum in Vermont was nearly \$1.2 billion, compared to less than \$600 million in 2002. Total expenditures, public and private, on transportation in Vermont are estimated at \$4.3 billion per year.

As a society we are spending more and more on transportation, but we are still not able to meet the transportation and mobility needs of all our citizens. We need to use the broad range of public and private assets more efficiently, more creatively, and more strategically, and we must reorient our policies and expenditures related to transportation.

A convergence of interest is emerging in shifting our planning and thinking from "public transportation" to a system designed for "Transporting the Public." Some are primarily motivated by the social service and socialization needs of their constituents; some by the need for Vermont to reduce its carbon footprint; some by the commuting needs of employees and the businesses they support, or others by concerns about maintaining Vermont's historic settlement patterns with our concentrated community centers and vibrant connections in local communities.

At the start of the project, a core team drafted a set of principles which provide a framework for transitioning our current transportation planning in Vermont to focus on "transporting the public." This diverse group included human service providers, transportation providers, land use planning groups, transit users and riders, businesses, environmental advocates, and educational institutions. Central to these principles are actions and policies to: improve and expand mobility options; integrate land use and transportation planning; and ensure adequate and flexible funding for programs and projects that provide mobility options.

The principles provide common ground from which to develop future policies and programs. They also establish a vision around which other groups, businesses and individuals can coalesce. In June, 2009, individuals from over 85 agencies and organizations participated in a forum to identify actions and policies that would bring the

principles to life. Literally hundreds of ideas were explored by participants. These ideas were thematically connected to three broad areas of policy, which were further explored by workgroups of experts this summer.

1. At every stage of the project, the need for greater integration of land use and transportation planning was articulated. Vermont's planning and land use tools, such as Act 250 and the Growth Center Program, need further refinement to adequately consider public transit and other mobility options in development. Strategies are needed to raise awareness and/or incentivize municipalities and developers to consider, on the front end of projects, how people who cannot drive will access services and the community.

2. Increasing mobility options, such as sidewalks and bike paths, and accommodating multiple users on the roadways was another important area of emphasis. Besides driving, walking is the most common mode of transportation in Vermont, according to AARP research, but safe walking routes to services are not available to many citizens. Policies are needed that recognize the role community design in creating healthy communities. Access to safe walking and biking routes play a proven role in supporting healthy communities and local efforts to reduce obesity. State programs such as CHAMPS and the Blueprint for Health emphasize the need for community infrastructure to support walking and biking as important prevention activities. Overall, there is a need for greater coordination at the state level between public health and transportation policy.

3. A more robust, regionally interconnected public transportation system is needed in Vermont. Where fixed route bus service is not practical, we need to continue to support and expand GoVermont vanpool and carpool programs, car sharing programs, and volunteer driver programs that efficiently transport many Vermonters in rural areas of the state.

Creating the policy and cultural shifts necessary to focus on a system of "transporting the public," means changes in our community design and our system for planning and funding transportation options that give Vermonters viable alternatives if they cannot drive or choose to drive less.

Making this shift will require the combined efforts of individuals, businesses, local and state planners, and policy makers. This project has demonstrated that rethinking traditional approaches is what many see as critical to helping Vermonters get where they want and need to go while protecting our natural assets, supporting our community centers, and promoting economic and community vitality.

Project Overview

On behalf of the AARP Vermont, the Snelling Center for Government designed and implemented a three phase multi-stakeholder project in 2009 to consider how we can effectively utilize and integrate the full range of financial and physical transportation assets in Vermont to increase mobility, reduce cost, protect the environment, and foster economic development.

Stakeholder Group

The stakeholder group included members from the: Champlain Islanders Developing Essential Resources, Inc. (C.I.D.E.R.), Chittenden County Transportation Authority, Northeast Kingdom Area Agency on Aging, NRG Systems, Resource Systems Group, Inc., Smart Growth Vermont, University of Vermont Transportation Research Center, Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Vermont Natural Resource Council, Vermont Rail Action Network, and the Vermont Superintendents Association.

Phase One: Craft a Set of Principles That Reflects the Convergence of Interests

Specifically, the group reviewed existing travel data, costs and impacts, mapped the various financial, physical and social assets that are part of our formal and informal systems for transporting the public, and developed a set of shared principles that can serve as the basis for future policy and program decisions (see page 6). These principles provide a framework for transitioning our current transportation planning in Vermont to focus on “transporting the public” and the corresponding public, economic and environmental benefits.

Phase Two: Hold a Statewide Forum

On June 3, over 85 organizations participated in a state-wide action planning forum in Montpelier. This event brought together transportation

providers, health and human service providers, legislators, business leaders, community and regional planners, and advocates for smart growth. During the working session of the forum, participants reviewed the draft principles and identified potential actions to improve our system for transporting the public. The top priorities identified are on page 7 and a full list of actions considered is in the *Forum Report*. A full description of the forum can be found in the *Data and Discussion Guide* prepared in advance and the *Forum Report*.

Phase Three: Identify Strategic Policy Options

During the final phase of the project, three separate work groups met to strategically identify issues for legislative action and recommend policy options and alliances to transform the way we organize, manage and fund the full range of assets in Vermont to transport the public. The three areas covered were: 1) integrating land use and transportation planning; 2) improving mobility and transportation options; and 3) integrating transportation options and improving connectivity.

The following is a report of the highlights of this three phase project. Through this project, we have begun to change the conversation and focus from increasing public transportation to creating a system for transporting the public. Through the work of a core stakeholder group and the participants at the statewide action forum, we have developed a core set of principles, embraced by a diverse set of leaders, which articulates the values and goals of a system which focuses on moving people while reducing driving, creating healthy and economically vibrant communities, and protecting our natural environment. Last, the project has identified key policy directions for future consideration.

Principles for “Transporting the Public”

(Project Phase One, Spring 2009)

The following principles were created at the outset of the project and are supported by a broad range of organizations that believe that our collective interests will be served by, and Vermont will benefit from, a robust system for transporting the public.

Improved Mobility and Transportation Options

1. Additional, varied, interconnected and improved transportation and mobility options are needed to provide all Vermonters with access to jobs, shopping, education, services, recreation, social opportunities and housing.
2. A robust and efficient interconnected system for transporting the public is essential to Vermont’s quality of life and future well-being as it will strengthen the economy; assure access to services, reduce isolation; protect and enhance the natural environment; promote energy conservation; use alternative fuels and reduce dependence on foreign energy.
3. Increasing options for transporting the public and enhancing mobility will benefit individual health and well-being, reduce isolation, improve physical and mental health, and improve access to economic and employment opportunities.

Integrated Planning

4. Integrating land use and transportation policy development, planning and implementation is essential at the community, state and federal levels to ensure development patterns, site design and transportation systems will increase access and mobility for every stage of life while enhancing our community connections and protecting our natural environment.

5. Addressing transit, bicycle, and pedestrian needs in the siting and design of development and redevelopment contributes to the vibrancy of our communities and businesses. New growth should be concentrated within town centers to connect housing, employment, commerce, community and health services.
6. Maximizing efficiency, improving access, and increasing transportation options by including transportation demand and costs in the design and implementation of health, human, education and economic services, is necessary.
7. In order to take a holistic approach to transporting the public, we need to include a range of stakeholders in the planning and resource allocation processes.

Adequate and Flexible Funding

8. Full funding to meet identified needs is essential to increase mobility, access, quality, and the range of transportation options.
9. Increased flexibility in allocating and utilizing existing and new funding, and corresponding rules and regulations, is necessary for the development of creative and innovative partnerships, greater efficiency and practical solutions to mobility and transportation needs.
10. Determining funding options and priorities must include a true accounting of the full societal benefits and costs (financial, environmental and health) of the existing system (public and private) which are borne by all participants and sectors; and consideration of new resources and creative solutions such as more flexible spending of existing funds.

Priorities for Action:
Results of the June Action Forum
(Project Phase Two, June 3, 2009)

Hundreds of creative and strategic ideas were generated at a statewide action forum attended by over 85 organizations representing transportation providers, health and human service providers, legislators, business leaders, community and regional planners, and advocates for smart growth. The following 15 items were the top priorities from the day and those with an asterisk received the highest levels of support from the full group of attendees.

1. Broaden the basis for creative funding for public transportation, e.g. a regional transportation authority with tax authority.
2. (*) Create land use/ transportation links in planning and implementing housing, economic development, growth center, neighborhoods, etc.
3. Research and publicize existing subsidization of cars vs. public transportation.
4. Combine transportation providers, coordinate transportation services, programs and information including a centralized dispatch.
5. Community organizations providing transportation services are able to combine multiple streams of funding to allow flexibility to the service provider and the user for multiple purposes (e.g. medical appointments, work, shopping, etc).
6. VTTrans create public education and marketing program to encourage volunteer drivers and support volunteer driving to ride-sharing program.
7. Increase the gas tax with an income sensitivity and transit provider rebate.
8. (*) Long range planning should include multi-modal alternatives – any new or expanded road development must take into account multi-modal alternatives.
9. Breaking down funding source limitations.
10. (*) Provide interconnection between VT regions.
11. (*) Comprehensive planning at state and local level, such as integrating public transportation and mobility options into Act 250. This would include a 30-year transportation, land-use, and energy infrastructure plan.
12. Create a clear prioritization of funding that includes a cost-benefit analysis, potential elimination of programs, or strengthening certain programs over others.
13. (*) Persistent and consistent education campaign, with a strong focus on youth education, to begin to shift public thinking and behavior change.
14. Convene a group of Vermonters (professional and grassroots) to identify federal regulation and policies that create obstacles to transporting the public efficiently, and to propose alternatives that support it. The aim is to organize our advocacy at the federal level, with a “Top 5” list, to include items such as being able to use school buses for public transportation, flexibility in vehicle specs so we can purchase the right-sized vehicles, and eliminating funding silos that limit flexibility.
15. Convene a group of Vermont educators to re-design the “Drivers Ed” curriculum and convert it to “Transportation Ed”. The new curriculum would include costs of operating a SOV vs. alternatives, eco-driving techniques, how to use public transportation, trip planning skills, etc.

An analysis of these 15 items, along with all of the suggested actions from each work group, resulted in the following set of themes. Policy solutions to address these themes were further explored in Phase III of the project.

- Integrate land use, transportation and energy planning
- Increase mobility and multi-modal options (e.g. sidewalks, bike paths, van pools, park and rides, etc.)
- Integrate transportation options and improve connectivity of public transit system
- Increase awareness through education
- Use public policy to create incentives for positive behavior and actions
- Provide more flexibility for transportation funding

Strategic Policy Options

(Project Phase Three, Summer, 2009)

Three work group meetings were held with policy experts to examine the recommendations generated at the June 3rd action planning forum and identify strategic paths for moving forward with specific policy changes. It was agreed that each group would consider education, policy and funding as part of their discussion. Recommendations from each work group are outlined below.

1. Integrate Land Use, Transportation and Energy Planning

- Develop statewide standards to be applied at the local level for the implementation of growth centers
- Create financial incentives – for towns and for developers – for meeting those standards
- Create financial incentives to businesses (and their employees) to locate in growth centers
- Create checklists for individuals (e.g. NeighborWorks), businesses (e.g. VBSR) and government (via local standards) to assess financial impact (through increased

transportation expenses) of decisions to locate outside vs. inside growth centers

2. Increase Mobility and Multi-Modal Options

- Increase funding for CHAMPS/Blueprint community grants; focus on prevention and health resonates with community members and legislators
- Utilize health impact assessment tools for new growth areas – focus on health as entry to community design issues
- Incorporate Complete Streets design into growth centers as a requirement and not an “extra”
- Create checklist/mandate for green space, Complete Streets and multi-modal in new design
- Continue and expand the Safe Routes to School program
- Focus on parking maximums (rather than minimums) and market increased land available for financial productivity
- Continue and expand support for GoVermont vanpool and carpool programs
- Continue and expand support for car sharing programs
- Expand the number of park and rides as multi-modal connectors by increasing funding, easing local licensing, and creating incentives to localities

3. Integrate Transportation Options and Improve Connectivity of Public Transit System

- Support the enhancement of state public transportation infrastructure so resources can be used for expanding interconnectivity among routes and providers
- Continue public education on importance of public transit.
- Support and publicize the use of “GoVermont” for coordinating commuting and ridesharing; pursue the use of “Google Transit” to enable individuals to plan their own trips

- Clarify “good Samaritan” law to cover “volunteer” drivers
- Pass state legislation to ensure insurance affordability for volunteer drivers
- Mobilize and support “volunteer” drivers through Vermont Department of Labor recruitment and screening
- Encourage school boards to use their authority to use school buses for public transit
- Establish safety standards for public transit which match school bus standards so the same level of safety is provided and community/parental concerns are assuaged

Moving Forward: Moving People

The impetus of the project was the recognition that many Vermonters have difficulty getting where they want if they cannot or do not want to drive. This project elicited widespread interest in finding ways to improve mobility in Vermont while protecting natural resources, and creating healthy and economically vibrant communities. The solutions lie in increasing mobility options, improving connection among transportation options and improving community design through integrated land use, transportation and health planning.

These solutions are well within our reach if we use existing resources (physical, financial and social) more efficiently, invest in public education to create and support culture and behavior change, and involve stakeholders and transportation users in future planning and decision-making.

This project marks the start of a journey that will require a shift in how we regard transportation from public transportation to transporting the public. Changing our actions and policies comes next.

Next Steps

While the project has concluded, the work will continue. If you are interested in working to improve the ability of Vermonters to get where they want and need to go, while reducing our environmental impacts, preserving and enhancing our communities and improving our individual health, you can participate in the following ways:

- Sign on the Statement of Principles and join the project list to stay informed about related policy initiatives. For a copy contact Jennifer Wallace-Brodeur at 802-951-1313 or jwbrodeur@aarp.org.
- Talk to local and state policy makers about the need for changes that will make more transportation options available to Vermonters.

Project documents can be found at www.snellingcenter.org.