



**Chittenden County
Metropolitan Planning
Organization**

Planning for Rational Growth



US Route 7 was western Vermont's principal north-south corridor prior to the construction of I-89. Today, it still serves this function south of Burlington. North of the city, however, I-89 has largely supplanted it for inter-city travel.

Within the northern portion of Chittenden County, the US Route 7 transportation corridor is only about 3½ miles wide, bordered by the Interstate to the west and the Georgia Mountain – Brigham Hill ridgeline to the east. From south to north it extends roughly 17½ miles, from the Winooski River to Exit 18 in Georgia. Along the corridor are growing industries, commercial centers, and the communities that host them.



*This publication
was prepared in
collaboration with:*



ROUTE 7

Current Challenges

Most development within the corridor has concentrated in the vicinity of exit 16 in Colchester. (See Map 1) More recently, however, development in Milton and Georgia, and traffic increases at exits 17 and 18, have begun to strain the entire corridor's transportation capacity. The corridor also contains a number of "high accident locations" (HALs) and a number of intersections that operate beyond acceptable capacities. Some of the worst areas of access are at the Interstate interchanges.

Few transportation alternatives to the private automobile are currently available within the corridor. Public transit is limited to a small area of Winooski and a commuter route from Alburg to Essex Junction. Sidewalks are almost non-existent outside of Winooski, Milton Village, and Colchester Village.

Clearly, significant development would overwhelm the system as presently constituted. With further development anticipated for Severance Corners in Colchester, Exit 17 near Milton, and downtown Winooski, a comprehensive understanding and approach to corridor-wide transportation issues must be developed.

Looking Toward the Future

To address these issues, the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO), in cooperation with Northwest Regional Planning Commission

(NRPC), launched a comprehensive, corridor-wide transportation study. In addition to a consultant team consisting of transportation planning, urban design, and community planning professionals, the MPO assembled a project Task Force of local representatives and other interested parties to oversee the study.

Changing Patterns of Land Use

The study began with a comprehensive analysis of development potential within the corridor. Its purpose was to estimate the largest reasonable level and distribution of growth to be expected over the next twenty years. Based on data such as local zoning, existing development patterns, geographic features, public lands, strength of the anticipated development market, and known development plans, the findings served as a basis for transportation system planning.

As shown in Map 2, residential development potential over the next twenty years was found to be moderate, amounting to an additional 3,000 units. However, the potential for new non-residential development was found to be very large, amounting to over 6 million square feet supporting over 11,000 new employees. (Today the corridor supports about 7,500 residential units and about 10,400 employees.)

Vision Statement

While transportation planners analyzed potential development, the Task Force developed and adopted the following vision statement for the corridor's transportation future:

The US Route 7 transportation corridor between Burlington and Georgia Exit 18 provides an increasingly important link in the economic and social lives of the communities it serves. The parts of the transportation system within this corridor are closely interwoven with each other and with the economic and social life of the communities. This system should be enhanced to effectively serve person travel and goods movement within and through the study corridor, support municipal and regional land use visions and plans, preserve or enhance the quality of life for those living within the corridor, and resolve the numerous identified site specific problems.

Although alternatives to private motor vehicle transportation should be fostered within the corridor, private autos and trucks using public roads and highways will remain the principal means of transport over the twenty-year planning horizon of this study.

Transportation Principles and Priorities

Building on the vision statement, the Task Force developed the following principles to guide their planning:

- The corridor should be served by a hierarchical roadway system.

- The interstate would serve through traffic, Route 7 would provide a distribution collection function, and back roads would be used by local traffic.
- Provide a safe environment for highway users and abutters. Improvements would include correction of unsafe roadway geometry, ensuring adequate sight distances for turning, controlling speeds, reducing opportunities for cut-throughs in residential neighborhoods, and providing safe bicycle and pedestrian travel.
- Provide meaningful alternative means of transportation.
- Alternatives to the private automobile, such as bus service, rail service, vanpools, and carpools, are especially important resources for young, elderly, disabled, and economically disadvantaged residents.
- Transportation service and facilities should support and enhance community land use and development strategies.
- They should help to balance growth and economic development with environmental protection and community preservation.
- Transportation facilities, particularly roadways, play a major role in defining community character.
- These facilities should complement the areas in which they are located.
- Provide for sound and effective long-term fiscal management of necessary improvements within the corridor.

Ideas and Insights from the Public

Public participation was deemed essential in planning the future of the Route 7 corridor. Thus, the CCMPO and NRPC held small-group meetings in each community and two public meetings in Milton and Winooski. Out of the discussions, the following themes emerged:

Planning and Growth – Most participants reported an increase in traffic volume in their communities and were aware of the need for US Route 7 and other corridor roads to respond to and serve growth in their town.

Scenic/Town Character – Most participants were searching for the best way to adapt the roadway network to changing needs without adversely affecting the scenic qualities of the corridor or the character of their town. There was strong support for improving the visual quality and urban amenities of all town centers.

Safety/Speed – A high priority for most towns was improving difficult intersections and slowing traffic in or near town.

Cut-through Traffic – Most towns wanted to discourage cut-through traffic in residential neighborhoods and keep through traffic on US Route 7.

Interstate Exits – Most towns wanted Interstate exits improved or, in the case of Milton, added. Winooski was concerned about the impact of Exit 15 expansion on the surrounding neighborhoods but wanted to consider the traffic advantages of this improvement in light of the new downtown.

Economic Impact – The capacity, flow, and design of US Route 7 was seen as affecting the economic strength of each town; from access by trucks to industrial uses to on-street parking in downtowns.

Transit – Both bus and rail were seen as a desirable alternative transportation services for the corridor. A key factor in expanding transit services is financing operating costs without relying on local property taxes.

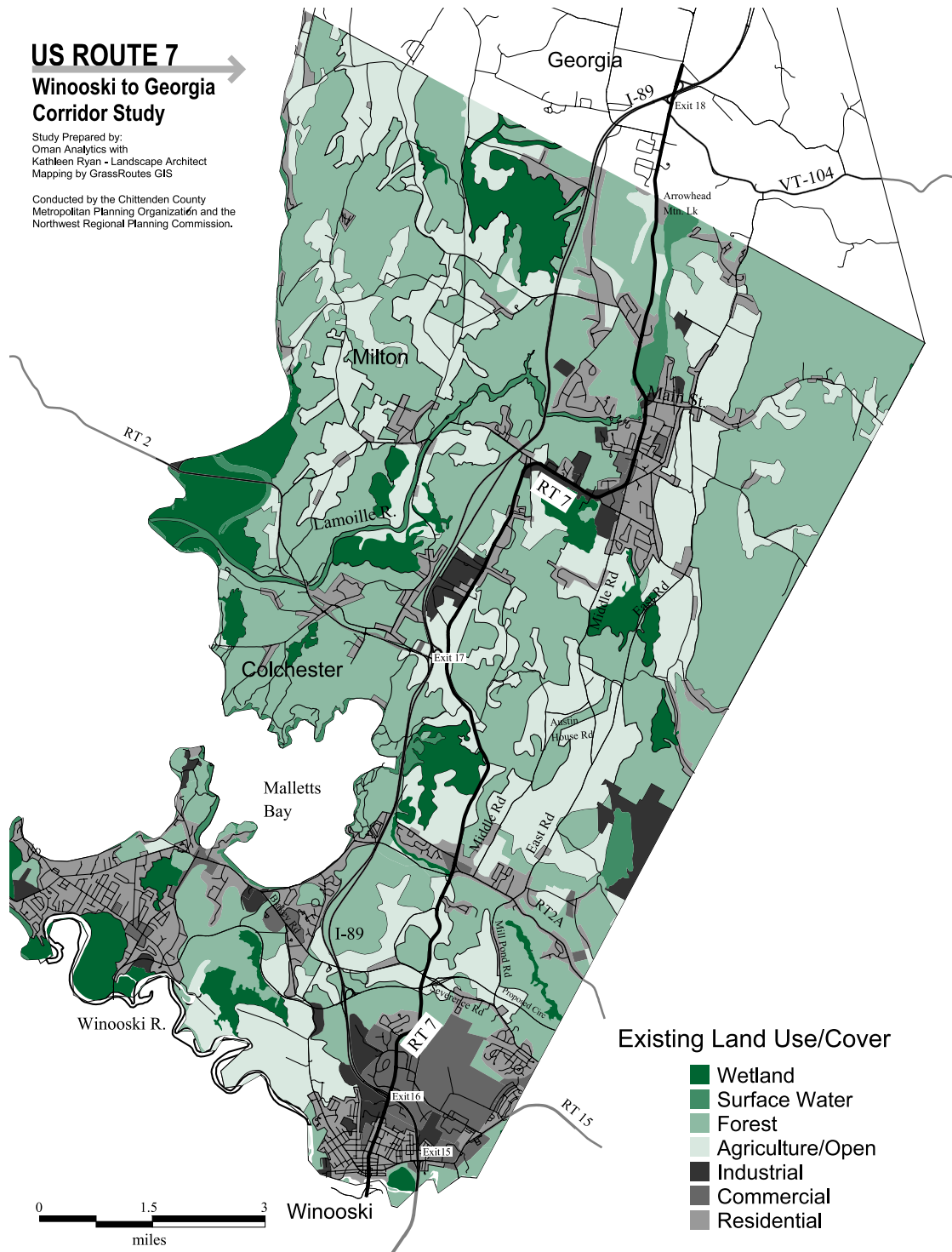
Pedestrian/Bicycle – All communities saw pedestrian and bicycle facilities as essential.

Park and Ride – Georgia and Milton were especially concerned about the location and level of services at their park-and-ride facilities.

Existing Facilities – Upkeep of existing facilities — from drainage problems to Route 7's problematic concrete subbase — was often mentioned as essential yet costly and hard to fund.

Map 1

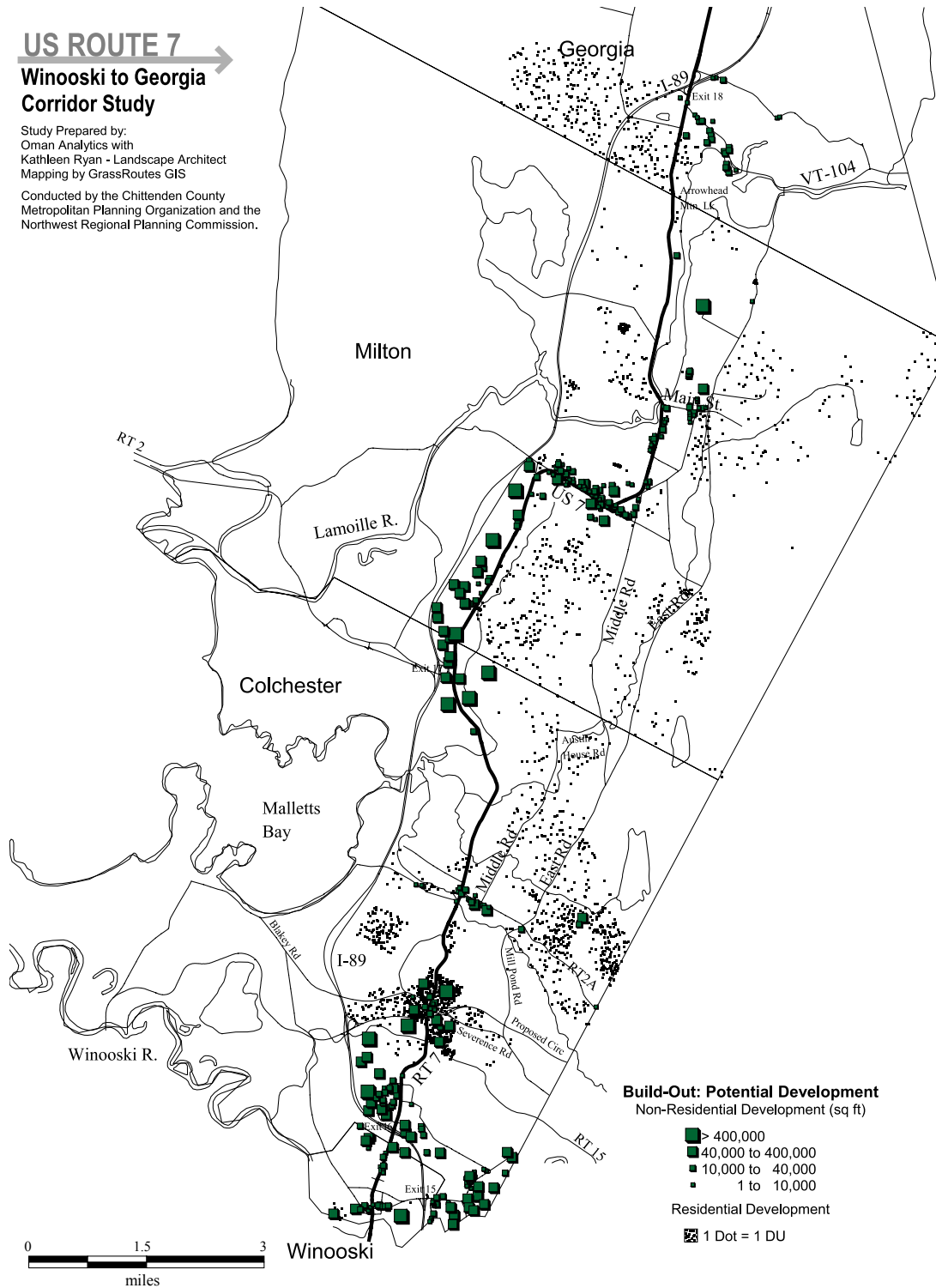
Current Land Use Along the Route 7 Corridor



This map illustrates existing land use patterns along Route 7. While much of the corridor is still forest or farmland, residential and commercial development are increasing. This is especially prevalent in the area of Exit 16 in Colchester.

Map 2

New Development Potential Along the Route 7 Corridor



This map shows the distribution of development anticipated for the Route 7 corridor. New commercial and residential construction will challenge transportation planners to accommodate increased traffic volume, provide practical alternatives to the private automobile, maintain existing facilities, and preserve the scenic qualities of the corridor.

Planning for a Rational Transportation Future

Reflecting the vision and principles developed by the Task Force, the US Route 7 corridor transportation plan includes four elements that operate as a synergistic whole. These are designed to help realize the future development patterns that the communities and the larger region desire, as well as a more rational transportation future that supports those development patterns.

Land Use/Development Plan

Every corridor community and the region as a whole have expressed a strong desire for a “Growth Center” development pattern. This maintains the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside. Thus it concentrates both development activity and transportation demand in smaller, more manageable centers.

The communities have selected these strategies for implementing a Growth Center approach:

Georgia identified its “Southern Tier” — the area just south of I-89 interchange 18 that is served by both I-89 and Route 7 — as the focus for future development. It also indicated substantial interest in continuing to focus non-industrial (residential and commercial) development in an area along Route 7 roughly between VT 104A and Ballard Road. This would be a “main street” style development with on-street parking, sidewalks, and the potential for public transit.

Milton envisions a new town center adjacent to the existing center in the area of Bombardier and Railroad Streets. In support of this, Milton has already located its town hall, library, and police and rescue building here.



As did Georgia, Milton expressed a desire to adopt a “main street” development style.

Colchester has designated three growth centers in the study area: Exit 16, Exit 17, and Severance Corners (at the intersection of Severance, Blakely and Route 7). Exit 16 is largely developed as a conventional suburban office/commerce park. The Exit 17 area is slated for mixed-use development that will not include “big box” retail stores. Severance Corners is intended to be a residential and small-scale commercial community center with a pedestrian/transit orientation.

Winooski is undertaking a major community redevelopment project that includes an urban mix of office and retail spaces, services, residences, and a hotel. It features intensive pedestrian- and transit-oriented development.

Network Plan

The network improvements are designed to provide for long distance/mobility travel needs on the interstate highway, preserve the function of local and rural roadways for lower-volume use, and emphasize the collector role of Route 7 and its associated state highways.

The network plan focuses on achieving better access to and from the interstate by improving and expanding

Did you know...?

- Route 7 extends from Highgate, Vermont (at the Canadian border) to Norwalk, Connecticut, a total of 318 miles.
- The Vermont portion of Route 7, from the Canadian border to the Massachusetts border, is 135 miles long.
- As originally designated, Route 7 ran from St. Albans to New York City and was known as “The Ethan Allen Highway.”

interchanges and, in one case, building a new interchange. Roadways and intersections immediately serving the interchanges are also included in the network improvements.

Improvements to existing interstate highway interchanges have been proposed for:

- Exit 16 - Route 7/Water Tower Hill.
- Exit 17 to Colchester, Milton & the Islands, as well as Chimney Corners at the intersection of Route 2 with Route 7.
- Exit 18 - Georgia, also including the realignment of the Skunk Hill Rd industrial park access with the Exit 18 northbound intersection.

Expanded interchanges have been proposed for:

- Exit 15 - Route 15 in Winooski would be expanded to a full (North-South) interchange to better serve Winooski and its new downtown development.

A new interchange has been proposed for:

- I-89 at West Milton Road in Milton, to serve an expanded town center. This would include improvements to the West Milton Road intersection with Route 7.

Alterations to Winooski's downtown circulation plan were not included in the study because they were developed as part of the downtown development plan. However, improvements to East Allen Street are

contemplated due to the increasing importance of Exit 15 in serving Winooski's new and existing downtown development.

Modal Plan

The modal plan includes enhancements to the transit system, the park-and-ride/multi-occupancy vehicle infrastructure, and the pedestrian/bike system.

Transit enhancements include:

- Express bus service from Milton Village to Burlington, incorporating the Exit 17 growth center area and Severance Corners, as well as transit feeder service in the Milton Village area.
- Jitney service in the Exit 16/Water Tower Hill area.
- A potential transit extension to the Georgia town/growth center.
- Commuter rail between Burlington/Essex and St. Albans is a long-range objective.

Park-and-ride locations have been identified for:

- Chimney Corners, Severance Corners, and Exit 16 in Colchester.
- Exit 18 in Georgia.
- Milton village/town center.





**Chittenden County
Metropolitan Planning
Organization**

**Communities working together
to meet Chittenden County's
transportation needs**

30 Kimball Avenue, Suite 206
South Burlington, VT 05403-6825

☎ 802.660.4071 📠 802.660.4079

www.ccmpto.org info@ccmpto.org

About the CCMPO

Established in 1982, the CCMPO is a federally funded but locally controlled agency that plans, prioritizes, and coordinates the use of about \$30 million in annual federal, state, and local transportation funds for Chittenden County and its 18 municipalities. For more information, visit www.ccmpto.org



**Serving the municipalities of
Franklin and Grand Isle Counties**

7 Lake Street, Suite 201
St. Albans, VT 05478

☎ 802.524.5958 📠 802.527.2948

www.nrpcvt.com pcaster@nrpcvt.com

About the NRPC

The NRPC serves the 24 municipalities of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties through its regional planning programs and provides information, education, technical support, and assistance with grants and funding. For more information, visit www.nrpcvt.com

Pedestrian and bike improvements support transit-friendly development because they enable transit passengers to efficiently travel to and from the bus or train. The plan envisions significant sidewalk and/or bicycle improvements in conjunction with “main street” style or growth center developments at:

- Georgia town center.
- Milton’s new town center.
- Colchester’s centers at Exit 17, Severance Corners, and Exit 16.

Milton is currently undertaking a town-wide sidewalk improvement plan. Improvements are also envisioned for VT 2A between Colchester Village and Route 7, with bicycle access proposed for the local roadways. Finally, Winooski already has an extensive sidewalk network that it anticipates further integrating with its downtown development.

Specific Improvements Plan

The fourth element of the corridor transportation plan is a combination of supporting improvements proposed for intersections and roadway segments within the corridor.

Intersection improvements have been proposed for Main/Spring, Main/Lafountain/Stevens, and Main/Tigan in Winooski; Exit 16 growth center roadways including Mountain View/Water Tower Hill, Hercules, and Rathe Road in Colchester, Main Street at Route 7 and Railroad Street in Milton; Ballard and 104A in Georgia; and additional intersections in Colchester and Milton.

Roadway enhancements have been proposed primarily for VT 2A between Colchester Village and Route 7. Additional enhancements in the 2A/Bay Road/Creek Farm area are included in the plan, as are improvements to Route 15 between Exit 15 and the new Winooski downtown development. Access management enhancements along Route 7 in Milton are also anticipated in conjunction with new interchange and town center development.

Railroad crossing improvements have been proposed for the crossings at East Road in Milton and Farnsworth in Colchester. Also, proposed is relocation of East Road to the east of the tracks.

Implementation Costs

Implementation of the corridor plan has been estimated to cost \$31 million to \$46 million for all capital improvements and about \$180,000 for annual transit operating costs. This does not include any right-of-way or property acquisition. Further, although all costs have been inflated to year 2000 dollars, some of the estimates are based on engineering estimates prepared several years ago and many projects are not likely to be built for several more years. Under these circumstances, it is entirely possible that the final cost of all projects will be considerably more than the current estimates.