




**Chittenden County  
Metropolitan Planning  
Organization**

# **A Vermont Solution**

FOR A VERMONT CHALLENGE

## **Overview**

*The Route 15 Corridor* is the stretch of land 8 miles long and several miles wide between Essex Junction and Burlington that runs along Route 15 in Chittenden County. In this historic area are Fanny Allen Hospital, now part of the Fletcher Allen Health Care System, St. Michael's College, and the picturesque Fort Ethan Allen, now a vibrant mixed-use area with housing and commercial development. The surroundings of its main artery, Vermont Route 15, also include the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds, Camp Johnson, Vermont's richest farmlands in the Intervale, and the protected land of the Winooski Valley Park District.



**THE ROUTE 15 CORRIDOR:**

# Overview

C O N T I N U E D

At either end, the eight mile corridor connects two of our major economic centers, the IBM Essex Junction facility and the City of Burlington. The Corridor pulses with activity, with people going to good jobs, to school, and to all the shops and services growing along the way. Population in the Corridor is expected to grow 44% by 2025, sharply increasing traffic congestion.

Our challenge is to create a plan that will care for the natural environment, protect the quality of life people in this Corridor now enjoy, and to improve capacity within the Corridor for the movement of people and goods.

## ***A locally controlled approach to planning with state and federal assistance***

This is a plan that springs from expressed wishes of local people and will continue to have their input as it progresses under the auspices of CCMPO. It recognizes that finding a solution requires public participation. Input and support are needed from the local residents and officials affected, area organizations, businesses and special populations who rely upon the mobility and transportation options available within the Route 15 Corridor, regional transportation providers, the State of Vermont and many others who would also be affected by the approach selected. For that reason, CCMPO has provided presentations of the project update to local officials and others, and will continue to do so.

## ***The result: a multi-modal plan***

People who live and work in this area said they wanted a plan that would not depend on the automobile and highways alone, but recognized that car and truck traffic will continue to be important. The addition of commuter rail service in the Corridor adds an important option, with several stations near the major employers and destinations. Trains linking to feeder bus routes and increased bus service during the project's development, and the addition of bicycle and pedestrian path improvements round out the major aspects of the plan.

Transit improvements create other needs and opportunities. CCMPO recognizes these in its Transit Oriented Development (TOD) planning in the Corridor.

The TOD plan provides guidelines for the development of areas lining the transit routes and surrounding the stations. It presents a vision and planning information to work with towns, municipalities, and land owners to create spaces that can enhance land values and quality of life in those areas. The transit improvements create opportuni-

ties for residential and commercial development that can support transit use while the transit facilities support the high quality, environmentally friendly development.

### ***New development in the works***

Significant development projects are now under discussion in the communities along the Corridor. For example, the City of Winooski has a \$200 million downtown reconstruction plan underway; the Town of Colchester has three major institutions involved in expansion, the Fletcher Allen Health Care facility at its Fanny Allen campus, St. Michael's College, and housing at Fort Ethan Allen for the University of Vermont.

The Town of Essex is planning for a substantial size hotel and other future economic development along the Susie Wilson Road and Kellogg Road area; the Village of Essex Junction is now in discussion with developers of the A&P

Shopping Center to reconstruct this commercial center along with a hotel and other amenities, and plans are underway for the commercial subdivision of the former Flanders Lumber Company and Central Vermont Railway properties on Park Street.

The common thread among these projects will be the ability to move goods and people to these places of work and living. Another consideration will certainly be the challenge of satisfying the transportation access issues, which will be considered in the Vermont regulatory process.

### ***What are the alternatives?***

To continue with the effort to secure the Congressional earmarks, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), which administers the funds, determined that the project required a comprehensive alternative analysis of the Route 15 Corridor. Route 15 parallels the rail line in the



### ***SOME FACTS ABOUT THE Route 15 Corridor***

- *The population for Chittenden County is expected to increase 44% by the year 2025.*
- *Traffic congestion within the Route 15 Corridor is anticipated to increase 275% by the year 2025.*
- *The number of jobs within the County is expected to increase 56% by the year 2025.*
- *At present in Vermont, 95% of person travel is by the automobile.*
- *Local municipal plans along the Route 15 Corridor have clearly stated that expanding the footprint of the road will have a significant effect on the quality of life in their communities.*

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corridor. Therefore, the CCMPO and VTrans performed an Alternatives Analysis study of the Route 15 Corridor from Essex Junction to Burlington.

Initially, the study explored several different scenarios to maintain or improve transportation capacity within the Route 15 Corridor. Those alternatives include:

- No-Build
- Transportation Systems Management (TSM)
- Highway
- Express Bus Service
- Commuter Rail Service

Any federally funded project must consider the impacts on minority and low-income communities. In 1990, the minority population of Chittenden County accounted for 3.1% of the total population of the county. An analysis of the minority population in this Corridor indicates that the minority population is slightly higher than the county at around 4%.

Low-income households accounted for 3.3% of the total population of Chittenden County in 1990. An analysis of the low-income households in this Corridor indicated that a much higher proportion of low income households reside in the Corridor — between 11% and 19%.



Minority and low income populations depend more heavily on public transportation. Therefore, we can conclude that this project will have a positive impact on the minority and low-income populations of the county.

### ***What is the recommended approach?***

In June of 2001, the consultant, after performing the Alternatives Analysis for the Route 15 Corridor, provided the multimodal approach. That approach, which we call the “Route 15 Corridor Improvement Plan,” has been embellished since then to optimize the highway system through improvements to the intersections, signal timing along the Corridor, Intelligent Transportation Systems (technology that improves traffic flow and safety), and bicycle/pedestrian paths.

### ***New services and capital investments***

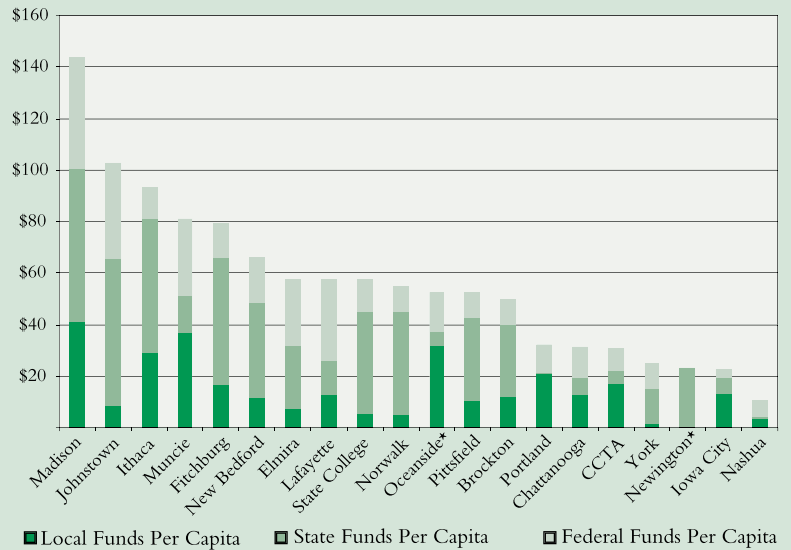
The amendment to the long range transportation plan includes the following components of new services and physical improvements:

- Highway improvements, including improving the timing of the traffic signals to improve traffic flow and safety and Intelligent Transportation Systems, on Route 15 between downtown Winooski and Essex Junction.
- Bus improvements, including the purchase of buses for additional routes before commuter rail is implemented and feeder bus routes when it is implemented.
- Commuter rail improvements
  - Rail track and bridge structure
  - Improve the North Avenue tunnel
  - Ten at-grade fully protected crossings including directional horns and/or quiet zones
- Five small-scale stations
- Bike/Ped Path



**Public Funding Per Capita: Comparison of local, state, and federal funds across peer agencies and CCTA (Figure 1).**

Figure 1



**Public Funding Per Capita: State and local funding sources comparing 24 peer agencies (Figure 2) and the CCTA (Figure 3).**

Figure 2

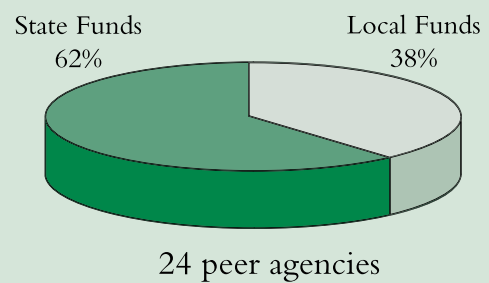
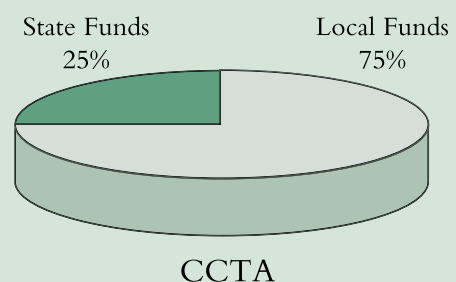


Figure 3



# Plan History

**In the mid nineties communities along the Burlington to Essex Rail Corridor requested that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) consider the expansion of the Charlotte to Burlington rail commuter service to Essex Junction.**

- In 1998 and 1999 and in response to this request, the Vermont Congressional Delegation supported the initiative by requesting and then receiving authorization of \$6,968,928 in federal funding in two Congressional Earmarks.
- VTrans was the grantee for the project and asked the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) to facilitate the project in collaboration with VTrans in 1998.
- The Vermont Congressional Delegation, through a request from the State of Vermont, sought and received two extensions from Congress on this project to September 30, 2002.
- CCMPO, at a cost of \$360,000, undertook a Rail Feasibility Study in 1998-99 of the rail corridor and determined that the extension of the Charlotte to Burlington commuter rail service into Essex Junction was feasible.
- The federal criteria were revised in 1999 to require an Alternative Analysis of the Burlington to Essex Junction commuter rail project and VTrans contracted with FTA for an Alternative Analysis in March 2000 at a cost of \$2.1 million (\$1.7 million federal and \$400,000 state).
- In the fall of 2000, CCMPO allocated \$750,000 for Phase 1A of the Alternative Analysis, developed a Scope of Work and Procurement Process, and hired a consultant.
- In the spring of 2001, the consultant undertook an Alternatives Analysis of the Corridor that is based upon the existing transportation system and all projects currently in the adopted Transportation Improvement Program. These include such major projects as segments A and B of the Circumferential Highway, Kennedy Drive, Shelburne Road, Lime Kiln Bridge, the Southern Connector, and Riverside Avenue.
- In September 2001, CCMPO approved the analysis of the consultant. They concluded that the best approach to solving the problems in the Route 15 Corridor was a multimodal solution that included commuter rail, feeder bus service, and minor improvements on Route 15, such as turning lanes and new traffic signals.
- In the summer of 2001, the consultant was given approval to proceed to complete Phase 1B to prepare an Environmental Assessment, undertake a financial and institutional study, determine more detailed costs for the improvements, and study Transit Oriented Development around the train stations.
- In February 2002, CCMPO added the Route 15 Corridor Plan to the Long Range Transportation Plan.
- In the winter of 2002, CCMPO continued to detail the multimodal transportation plan for the Route 15 Corridor and added a proposed bike/ped path between downtown Essex Junction and Lime Kiln Road, traffic signal optimization and the use of new technology in the highway corridor to improve traffic flow.
- In June 2002, the Draft Environmental Assessment of the commuter rail was completed.

## What institutional changes are recommended?

Currently, there are two transportation authorities within Chittenden County. The Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) may operate in all of Chittenden County but currently provides bus service only to Burlington, South Burlington, Essex, Essex Junction, Shelburne, and Winooski. The Vermont Transportation Authority is authorized to provide passenger rail service throughout Vermont. Currently, it provides commuter rail service only between Charlotte and Burlington. It also provides a feeder bus service from its South Burlington station.





CCMPO has proposed that the Chittenden County Transportation Authority, the Vermont Transportation Authority, and the VTrans administration, seek a solution with one transportation authority to provide services to Chittenden County.

### **What are the costs?**

This plan has a total projected cost of \$26,845,000:

• Rail component	\$20,344,000
• Bus component	\$2,460,000
• Highway component	\$1,832,000
• Bikeway	\$2,210,000

### **Current status**

Planners recently studied the transportation financing in several areas that were similar in size to Chittenden County and had a commuter rail system. The study resulted in these findings:

1. Vermont spends less per capita on transit than comparable areas, and CCTA spends only slightly more than four of the communities examined in the Regional Peer Group. (See Figure 1.)
2. Local property tax is the primary source of funding in Vermont, at 71% compared to 10% in the areas studied.
3. State funding is less for CCTA, at 25% compared to 62% in the areas studied. (See Figures 2 and 3.)
4. CCTA is a very efficient and effective operation for the area it serves.

### **Facts about funding for the plan**

- It is our intent to work with the offices of Senators Jeffords and Leahy on a multimodal earmark to cover almost all of the components of this Corridor transportation plan.
- The capital costs for the rail portion of the project will come from Congressional earmarks.
- Operations of commuter rail will come from the state transportation fund.
- There is an increased need for bus transportation. For this Corridor, both capital and operating expense for three years will be included in a request for a multimodal earmark. However, there is a long-term need for local funding of bus transportation. It will be recommended that through a new transportation authority, funding of public transportation in Chittenden County be shifted off of the property tax to other sources.
- All other projects will be included in a request for a multimodal earmark. Depending upon the size of the earmark, each project will then be implemented over the next five years or so through the normal transportation funding process.

### **What are the next steps?**

The Route 15 Corridor Improvement Plan is now part of the CCMPO's long range transportation plan. As the work moves forward step-by-step, there will be ongoing presentations to local communities and organizations, with frequent opportunities for continued public input.



**Chittenden County  
Metropolitan Planning  
Organization**

Communities working together  
to meet Chittenden County's  
transportation needs

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**The Route 15 Corridor Improvement Plan:  
part of Vermont's statewide rail trans-  
portation plan**

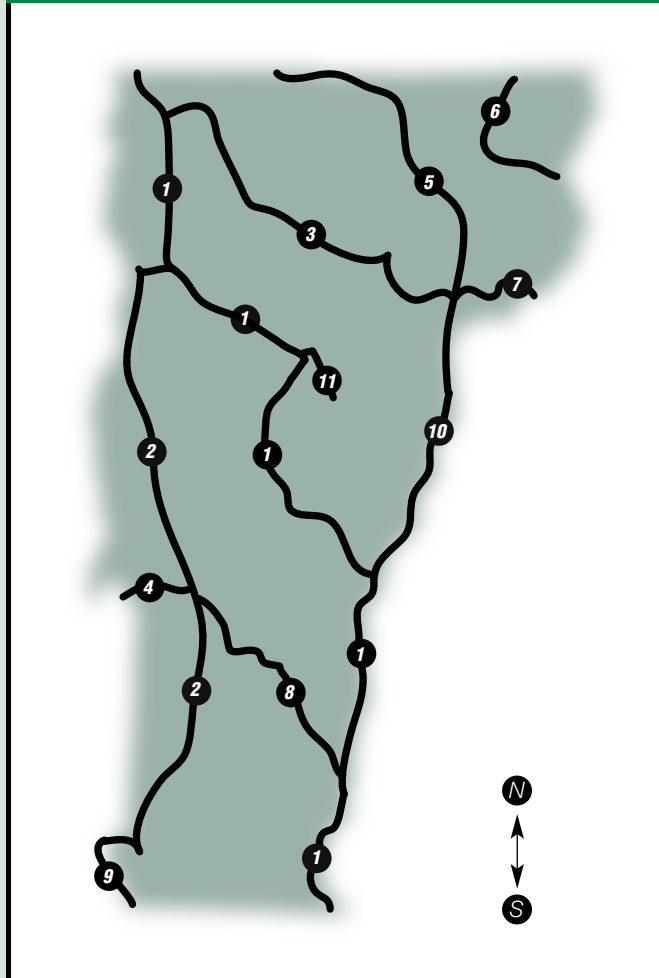
Over the last several years, the State of Vermont has made a significant commitment to the improvement of the rail infrastructure in Vermont. The purpose has been to foster expanded intercity rail passenger service, improve freight rail service and to provide the opportunity to increase transportation options, by introducing urban rail passenger service to Vermonters who live and travel through traffic congested urban corridors in Chittenden County.

This vision has been realized through the continued support of AMTRAK service (Vermont/Ethan Allen), increased freight rail usage, and the introduction of rail passenger service, as an alternative to automobile travel in the northwest portion of the State.

The Vermont Legislature and the Administration have invested approximately \$30 million (80% federal / 20% state) in rail improvements to the western corridor such as Whitehall, N.Y. to Rutland for AMTRAK service, Charlotte to Burlington for commuter rail, Hoosick to Manchester for AMTRAK.

The Route 15 Corridor Improvement Plan will add another important connecting route to Vermont's rail system.

**Railroads and Railways of Vermont**



1. New England Central Railroad, Inc.
2. Vermont Railway, Inc.
3. Lamoille Valley Railroad Co.
4. Clarendon & Pittsford Railroad
5. Northern Vermont Railroad
6. St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad
7. Twin State Railroad Company
8. Green Mountain Railroad Corporation
9. Boston & Maine Corporation
10. Berlin Branch
11. Washington County Railroad of Vermont

