



Planning Basics

Regional planning involves a wide range of activities, such as:

- Land use planning;
- Economic development;
- Community wellness;
- Transportation planning;
- Conservation and recreation;
- Historic preservation; and
- Fiscal planning.

Planning can address just about any issue of regional concern. The regional planning commission is the primary body responsible for planning for the region, concentrating on writing the regional plan. Regional planning can be divided into two steps:

Planning, where the visions and goals of the community are discussed and established and a means of achieving the goals are determined. Typically, this is done in conjunction with the adoption or amendment of a municipal plan, but doesn't need to be. The development of a specific plan such as a recreational plan or open space plan would follow the same process.

Implementation, where the goals from the planning stage are brought to reality through projects or regulations. The development of projects and regulations is principally undertaken by local and state government in Vermont.



Regional Planning

Planning for an entire region is especially challenging. While we all agree that Chittenden County should be a “great place to live, work and play,” there are myriad visions of exactly what this means and which actions we should undertake to achieve this goal. The CCRPC is statutorily designated as the County’s official forum for developing public consensus on the future of Chittenden County.

In Vermont, planning is performed collaboratively by the State, RPCs, and municipalities. Laws define how this collaboration is to work, specifying different responsibilities for each level of government. This means that the regional planning undertaken by each RPC is intended to be different from the planning undertaken by municipalities and the State.

Regional planning performed by RPCs is at an intermediate level between the most local planning performed by municipalities and the most general planning performed by the State. As a consequence, it makes sense that the regional planning responsibilities of RPCs are intended primarily to promote the coordination and collaboration of planning activities, both between each RPC’s member municipalities and between those municipalities and the State.

The State calls upon each RPC to fulfill the following duties:

1. Promote the mutual cooperation of the RPC’s member municipalities and cooperate with neighboring states, regions, counties, and municipalities;
2. Assist and advise municipalities in the preparation of plans, studies, and Bylaws regarding the appropriate development and use of the region’s physical and human resources;
3. Prepare a regional plan at least every eight years;
4. Review proposed State capital expenditures for compatibility with the RPC’s regional plan and assist municipalities in assessing compatibility with municipal plans;
5. Appear before District Environmental Commissions to aid in *Act-250* reviews of proposed developments and appear before the Public Service Board to aid in *Section-248* reviews of proposed utilities; and
6. Confirm municipal planning programs and approve municipal plans.

In order to fulfill these responsibilities, the State empowers each RPC to exercise certain powers:

1. Prepare studies, plans, and recommendations on a broad set of issues;
2. Retain staff and consultant assistance, enter upon land with the prior approval of the owner to make examinations and surveys, hold public hearings, and require municipalities and the State to provide information;
3. Carry out, with the cooperation of member municipalities, programs for the appropriate development and use of the region’s physical and human resources; and
4. Perform other acts or functions that the RPC deems to be necessary or appropriate.

The [CCRPC Bylaws](#) provide details on many of these powers and duties, as well as the strategies that CCRPC has embraced to use them to promote the well-being of Chittenden County.



Transportation Planning

The surface transportation system is not just highways, but a wide array of modes that are used to provide mobility and serve the economic and social needs of the region.

A region, however you define it, can have a range of transportation types, but to get them to function effectively as a system takes transportation planning to develop the initiatives, both projects and operational strategies, that will optimize its utility.

Regional transportation needs at any level can be met by some combination of several planning approaches:

1. Modifying or adopting strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing operations;
2. Developing policies to influence transportation behavior and practice; and
3. Construction of new or enhancement of existing capital projects.

As the region changes over time, transportation needs, and the demands on the existing system, are also likely to change. So transportation planning is an ongoing process that has to factor in how the system is performing in relation to those changing needs and demands—and performance will be affected by the condition of the system's components.

Transportation planning is about more than just transportation. It must account for the extended and unintended impacts of the transportation system, and strike a balance in relation to non-transportation policies. The location, construction, and operation of transportation systems have effects that are the focus of non-transportation statutes.

Transportation shapes and is shaped by all aspects of community life. Non-transportation policy decisions—on land use, housing, economic development, and social services—made by State, regional, and local agencies can have a bearing on transportation decisions.

Because of this interdependency, a number of other laws—Federal, State, and local—bear on transportation planning.

- **Land use decisions** are generally in the purview of State governments and have often been delegated down to the city and county level. This means that generally State DOTs and MPOs do not control this process.
- Because **traffic congestion contributes significantly to air pollution**, planning efforts to reduce congestion are a key Federal requirement.
- Federal transportation law and regulations tie into the **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**, which requires varying levels of environmental review, depending upon the nature of the transportation initiative.
- **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** requires universality of design. In transportation, this particularly impacts public transit infrastructure and vehicles.
- **Environmental justice under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act** means that the effects of transportation initiatives may not adversely affect the well-being of any subgroup of the population in a discriminatory manner.

Planning is clearly important, but regional transportation planning is essential. Planning that pulls in adjoining jurisdictions, the affected stakeholders, and the public has the greatest likelihood of yielding a system that will anticipate and support future needs.



The Importance of Public Engagement

Community planning and regional planning enable people with different outlooks and awareness to learn about important and sometimes controversial matters, to agree on common objectives, and to collaborate on undertaking coordinated agendas of actions. Planning by public bodies strives to engage people not only because our laws and democratic traditions require it, but also because public engagement makes planning better. Planning that engages affected people, communities, and organizations promotes:

- Greater understanding of key facts,
- Deeper and more widespread appreciation of divergent views,
- Increased consensus on important goals and objectives, and
- Improved collaboration in undertaking complicated sequences of interrelated actions.