

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 30, 2020

## **Chittenden County Interstate 89 2050 Study**

*Charlie Baker, CCRPC Executive Director, Addresses the Purpose of this Multi-Year Study*

In light of Richard Watts' recent opinion piece, I would like to address the [Interstate 89 2050 Study](#) to further explain its purpose and provide a more accurate description of its goals.

Mr. Watts' letter insinuates that the intention and outcome of this project is preconceived in that it will ultimately recommend the widening of Interstate 89 and/or lead to the installation of a new interchange. This is not true. In no way does this study have a predetermined outcome. No decisions have been made to this point, as we are just beginning a significant community outreach effort, starting with an initial series of public meetings (January 30, February 13, and March 11). The study started in 2019 with the bulk of the work to be done in 2020 and reaching conclusion in 2021.

The study goal statement Mr. Watts quotes that informed his opinions is unfortunately outdated – at no fault of his, as it was still shown on our website this week. This statement was pulled from the request for proposals (RFP) the CCRPC used in seeking a third-party consultant to work on this effort. The RFP included a range of potential work including the ability to work on interstate widening and interchanges in our effort to hire a consultant team with the professional capacity to address all possible outcomes. Regrettably, this statement was not updated on the study website ([envision89.com](http://envision89.com)) after a consultant was chosen and a December 16, 2019 Advisory Committee meeting yielded the following draft vision statement and goals:

### **DRAFT Vision Statement**

The 2050 Vision for the I-89 Corridor through Chittenden County is an interstate system (mainline and interchanges) that is safe and resilient and provides for reliable and efficient movement of people and goods in alignment with state, regional, and municipal plans.

### **DRAFT Goals**

- **Safety:** Enhance safety along the I-89 Study Corridor and Adjacent Interchanges for all users.
- **Mobility & Efficiency:** Improve the efficiency and reliability of the I-89 Corridor and Adjacent Interchanges for all users.
- **Environmental Stewardship & Resilience:** Establish a resilient I-89 Corridor that minimizes environmental impacts associated with the transportation system.
- **Economic Access & Vitality:** Improve economic access and vitality in Chittenden County.
- **Livable, Sustainable and Healthy Communities:** Promote livable, affordable, vibrant, and healthy communities.
- **System Preservation:** Preserve and improve the condition and performance of the I-89 Corridor.

As Mr. Watts indicates, this study comes at a significant cost of \$526,000 over those three years. Without context, it may be easy to dismiss this as a very large investment that would be better spent elsewhere. However, it is important to note that this cost is a small percentage of CCRPC's \$4+ million direct investment over those three years in regional and local transportation-related issues such as to Green Mountain Transit, Local Motion, CarShareVT, Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association, Vermont Energy Investment Corporation, United Way – NeighborRides, and numerous municipal projects to improve safety, biking, walking, transit usage, and water quality.

On the larger question of how CCRPC is addressing climate change, it is important for the public to know that the CCRPC fully supports the State's energy and climate goals and that our ECOS Plan, adopted in 2018, addresses the State's energy goal of 90% renewable energy by 2050 and we are doing everything we can to work with our municipalities to achieve these goals. Our Plan calls for a doubling of transit service, significant investment in biking and walking, and a major shift to 90% of our vehicles being electric.

CCRPC's ECOS Plan also calls for a significant increase in housing density in those areas served by transit to decrease dependency on automobiles, improve public health, decrease pressure on our rural landscape and thereby address climate change. Specifically, the ECOS Plan calls for an increase in density with 90% of all new housing units to be developed in planned growth areas.

Examining the future of I-89 will also lead to a conversation about economic development. While our economy is growing at a small but important pace, employees in those jobs are driving longer distances to find housing that is affordable – often outside of the county. Until that pattern changes, I-89 continues to be an essential component of our overall transportation system, including its role as a critical corridor connecting points north and south. It is also a major public safety route, as our largest medical center is located directly off Exit 14. Ignoring these realities would be a disservice to our residents, most of whom live in rural areas and still need personal transportation to access services and get to work.

The CCRPC fully supports the State's energy and climate goals and we are doing everything we can to work with our municipalities to achieve them. If enough people convert to other modes of transportation over the next 20-30 years, major capacity investments will be unnecessary. Looking at the trends and the volume on the interstate, however, show that Interstate 89 will be over capacity before 2050. Peak hour congestion is common between Exits 12 and 17 and caused significant safety issues; so much so that it has been designated a "Safety Corridor" by the State.

While one of our roles is to enable and encourage behavioral shifts that allow Vermonters to drive less, another is to plan for and explore possible future issues so we are prepared for them – and we simply cannot ignore these projections and their current and future impact on our overall transportation system. That is why we are undertaking this study.

The I-89 2050 study has just begun, and our first round of public outreach kicks off with a series of public meetings to solicit input and finalize the study's vision and goals. Next, I-89 interchanges will be evaluated throughout the spring and fall, and alternatives will be identified for the public's review between the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. A full timeline can be viewed here: <https://envision89.com/project-overview>

We strongly encourage everyone in and outside Chittenden County to participate as this study moves forward so the outcomes incorporate all feedback and meet the needs of all users of this vital roadway. There will be many opportunities to share your feedback, both in person and online. If you're unable to attend our public meetings in person, they will be live-streamed on the study website where you can also submit comments and questions in real time. The first study survey is now live, and you can sign up to receive periodic updates from the study team here: <https://envision89.com/public-meeting>

For those interested in providing specific input on the link between transportation and climate, we are also hosting a Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) meeting on February 6 from 6:00-8:00pm at Contois Auditorium in Burlington City Hall: <https://anr.vermont.gov/content/transportation-and-climate-initiative>

We look forward to working closely with the community as this study moves forward.

Charlie Baker  
Executive Director  
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

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The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) provides planning and technical assistance in the areas of community development, transportation, natural resources, housing, economic development and emergency management to the 19 municipalities of Chittenden County and to the public, while remaining consistent with federal and state requirements. The collaboration between the CCRPC, Chittenden County municipalities and State and federal agencies results in the development and implementation of plans that support sustainable development and improve the region's environment and quality of life. For more information about the CCRPC, please visit [www.ccrpcvt.org](http://www.ccrpcvt.org).