CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday, November 5, 2024
TIME: 9:00 a.m.
PLACE: Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Members
Bruce Hoar, Williston
Phillip Peterson, Burlington
Adam Wechsler, People with Disability
Amy Bell, VTrans
Chris Yuen, Essex Junction
Deirdre Holmes, Charlotte
Holly Francis, Environment
Jacqui LeBlanc, FHWA
Joe Segale, Huntington
Jon Rauscher, Winooski
Jonathon Weber, Local Motion
Matthew Arancio, VTrans
Norm Baldwin, Colchester
Sam Andersen, GBIC
Sandy Thibault, CATMA
Tom DiPietro, South Burlington

Staff
Eleni Churchill, Transportation Program Director
Christine Forde, Senior Transportation Planner
Chris Dubin, Senior Transportation Planner
Eliana Fox, Transportation Planner
Jason Charest, Senior Transportation Planning Engineer
Sai Sarepalli, Senior Transportation Planning Engineer
Bryan Davis, Senior Transportation Planner
Marshall Distel, Senior Transportation Planner

Guests
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Collin Smythe, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Jonathan Slason, RSG

1. Call to Order, Welcome and Introductions
Phillip Peterson called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM.

2. Consent Agenda
SAM ANDERSEN MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA, SECONDED BY JONATHON WEBER. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. Approval of October 1, 2024 Minutes
JOE SEGALE MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 1, 2024, SECONDED BY JONATHON WEBER. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. Public Comments
No comments from the public.

5. VTrans Updates to the Statewide Rail Plan
Zoe Neaderland, Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), introduced the project and turned it over to Jonathan Slason, RSG, who provided more background information on the Statewide Rail Plan update, described the importance of rail in Vermont, outlined updates to the rail system from the previous plan update, and provided some specific data points about rail service. He then provided an overview of the Plan update process and key topics for discussion including resilience, safety, climate impacts and equity.

- Resilience: there are several actions happening currently including expanding the highways Transportation Resilience Planning Tool (TRPT) vulnerability concepts to rail.
- Safety: this includes maintaining and improving rail infrastructure, storing hazardous materials, training first responders, rail crossing education for the public and more.

Sam asked about the statistics from 2015 shown on the Safety slide and why there were more deaths and other incidents. Jonathan responded he doesn't have specific information today. Christine noted in the chat that "On October 5, 2015, an Amtrak train derailed near Northfield, Vermont after striking a rock pile. The derailment injured seven people, including four train crew members and three passengers. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) concluded that the derailment was caused by a rock slide."

- Climate impacts: both freight and passenger rail can reduce climate impacts
- Equity: there are historical burdens on communities associated with rail, and equity needs to be considered in needs and prioritization of initiatives

Joe Segale referenced the map on the Equity slide and asked about the demographic metrics used in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) tool from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Jonathan said it uses English (language), disabilities, and income but not race or ethnicity and noted that it's not a great tool for Vermont.

Jonathan then provided an update on progress on capital initiatives and priority recommendations from the 2021 Rail Plan, highlighting some projects that are "active" and others that are "ongoing."

Eleni Churchill noted the Burlington Railyard Enterprise project is active so it should be prioritized differently. She also suggested that "bike, ped, transit connections" should be a first priority, not second. Her final comment is that improving the track between Burlington and Essex Junction should be a higher priority.

Sam agrees with Eleni to improve the track between Burlington and Essex Junction.

Jonathon Weber agrees with the suggestion to make bike, ped, transit connections a first priority as well as extending the Ethan Allen Express service extension and track upgrades to Essex Junction, as Eleni suggested.

Joe Segale asked if rail is part of the State's climate action plan and if not emphasized that it should be.

Chris Yuen asked about including quiet zones in certain areas to support transit oriented development (TOD). In Essex Junction there are some parcels of land that could be developed and quiet zones would foster that development.

Phillip agreed with Eleni's suggestions and asked how funding is allocated across high priority projects, like Railyard Enterprise, and if more funding can be allocated to higher priority projects. Jonathan and Dave clarified that the funding was not directly tied to the priority of projects, but rather to provide guidance on where to spend time and resources. Dave further explained that funding for projects like the extension of the Vermonter to Montreal was not directly connected to the general priority levels, but remained a high priority. Jonathan suggested improving communication about where funds could be spent, while Dave mentioned the use of discretionary grants and State transportation funds.

Jonathon Weber asked if there's an opportunity to look at rail banking or rails with trails as part of this process or if VTrans could look at these separately. He wondered where there are opportunities for rail corridors to support active transportation.

Adam said he uses a wheelchair and hasn't been on Amtrak in a while and asked if there have been improvements to hydraulic lifts and station platforms to support people with disabilities. Jonathan said there is a resource from Amtrak that identifies stations with certain facilities like level boarding stations or hydraulic lifts.

Jonathan then talked about related rail planning: Corridor Identification and Development (ID). He highlighted the successful acquisition of two Corridor ID funding grants for the sections from the Vermonter going north to Montreal and the extension of the Western Ethan Allen line from Rutland through Bennington to the Albany line. He also mentioned the directive in the Transportation Bill to incorporate the Valley Flyer (Massachusetts)

extension into the plan. He outlined a three-step process as part of the ID process, and that the Rail Plan update will include some of the information from Step 1 of the process. He then brought up ridership forecast and asked what rail passenger service could look like with increased rail service frequency.

Jonathan provided a timeline for updating the Plan and highlighted a Rail Advisory Council meeting in November with more public meetings planned for January and March 2025. A draft plan will be available later next spring with anticipated acceptance in June 2025. He provided a brief tour of the rail webpage (https://vtrans.vermont.gov/rail/reports) and highlighted some key resources and links, including an interactive map to accept comments, as well as a short overview video. He encouraged TAC members to provide comments on the map and clarified that TAC members don't need to go into the map to add comments from today.

Sandy asked if the project team can provide a short blurb for partners to share more broadly.

The presentation for this item is available on the TAC webpage.

Chat comments:
Dierdre: I frequently hear interest in passenger service to Montreal. Especially with bus service so limited since pandemic.
Sandy: Agree on connection between Burlington & Essex— a priority that might be impacted w/ future of GMT service between Burlington & Essex.
Jonathan Slason: Thanks all for your feedback and time devoted to the TAC. Here is the website for the Rail Plan update.

- https://vtrans.vermont.gov/rail/reports
- web map and comment tool. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9349d07b86a04c64958a32780cf75354?org=VTrans

We will be collecting feedback throughout November, but ideally, we start prioritizing in December.

6. FY26 UPWP Solicitation

Marshall Distel, CCRPC, announced the upcoming FY2026 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). This is the CCRPC's annual solicitation of projects to be considered for next year's work program. Information and materials will be released on November 22 and posted to the UPWP webpage: https://www.ccrpcvt.org/about-us/commission/annual-work-plan-budget-finances/. Project requests are due January 17, 2025.

He asked for two volunteers from the TAC to serve on the UPWP Committee. Joe Segale volunteered. Marshall said other folks can contact him offline.

Eleni noted that CCRPC staff are available to meet with city/town staff to discuss potential projects if desired.

Jonathon asked how much funding is available. Marshall said we don't have that information quite yet but the amount is expected to be similar to this year's work program.

7. Status of Projects and Subcommittee Reports

See bulleted list at the end of the agenda for current CCRPC projects. TAC members are encouraged to ask staff for more information on the status of any of these ongoing or recently completed projects.

Sai Sarepalli, CCRPC, gave an update on the Regional Safety Action plan. This plan will have safety recommendations for all modes and be a resource that allows communities to apply for federal or other funding. He asked if any TAC members are interested in participating in this project, which will likely have 3-4 working group meetings. Jesse Devin/VTrans, Julia Ursaki/Burlington, Brad Holden/Underhill have already volunteered.

Chris Yuen and Jonathon Weber expressed interest. Sai will follow up with them separately.

8. CCRPC Board Meeting Report

In October the Board heard a presentation from Green Mountain Transit on potential service changes. They also heard a presentation on the draft FY25-28 Transportation Improvement Program and voted to warn a public hearing for their November 20 meeting. The Board voted to approve a conformance letter for the Basin 5 Tactical Basin Plan, voted to approve a municipal dues increase, and heard updates on the draft FY24 financials/audit, equity work and other Director updates.

9. Chair/Members' Items

- **VTrans Better Roads Grant Program**: VTrans is accepting applications to support projects on municipal roads that improve water quality and result in maintenance cost savings. The grant funds are provided by VTrans in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. The Vermont Better Roads Program promotes the use of erosion control and maintenance techniques that save money while protecting and enhancing water quality throughout the State. More information and application at https://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/better-roads.
- **VTrans Transportation Alternatives Grant Program:** VTrans is accepting applications for the SFY 2025 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and the Municipal Highway and Stormwater Mitigation Program (MHSMP) grant opportunities concurrently. This year over $4.3 million of TAP grant funding is available for all eligible activities as described in the ***Vermont Transportation Alternatives Application Guide*** included in the link below. Approximately 50% of TAP grant program funds are reserved for pollution mitigation projects relating to stormwater and highways, including eligible salt and sand shed projects. Also, approximately $1.5 million of MHSMP grant funding is available for eligible stormwater pollution mitigation projects as described in the ***Municipal Highway and Stormwater Mitigation Program Guide*** which can be found in the MHSMP link below. **Applications are due by e-mail by December 31, 2024.** Applications for this solicitation, which will utilize ***Survey Monkey***, are now web-based and can be found at either website below:
  - **TAP Link**: **Transportation Alternatives Program | Agency of Transportation (vermont.gov)**
    - **Scott Robertson,** Transportation Alternatives Program Manager, 802-793-2395, scott.robertson@vermont.gov
  - **MHSMP Link**: **Municipal Highway and Stormwater Mitigation Program | Agency of Transportation (vermont.gov)**
    - **Ross Gouin**, Municipal Highway Stormwater Mitigation Program Manager, 802-595-2381, ross.gouin@vermont.gov.
- **FHWA Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program** to help make surface transportation more resilient to natural hazards, including climate change, sea level rise, flooding, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters through support of planning activities, resilience improvements, community resilience and evacuation routes, and at-risk costal infrastructure. $1.4 billion in contract authority over five years (FY22 – FY26). https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/protect/.
- **USDOT Funding Resources/Opportunities:**
  - USDOT Discretionary Grants Dashboard (https://www.transportation.gov/grants/dashboard) provides an overview of discretionary grant opportunities The Dashboard also includes Federal grant programs outside of DOT that may be of particular interest to rural communities.
  - DOT Navigator https://www.transportation.gov/dot-navigator
  - Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) https://www.transportation.gov/rural
  - Reconnecting Communities – USDOT released the 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program Fiscal Years (FY) 2024-2026. A total of $607 million will be awarded under this NOFO. This program was created to help reconnect communities previously cut off from economic opportunities by transportation infrastructure. https://www.transportation.gov/reconnecting
- **Vermont Local Roads** has resources and learning/training opportunities throughout the year: https://localroads.vermont.gov/.

Adam asked if there are slides from the GMT proposed service reductions. Eliana Fox provided this link: https://ridegmt.com/service-reductions/.

Zoe Neaderland, VTrans, shared information about the Big Data Transportation Data Resources, including the addition of local road requests and the focus of the December 13 workshop at CCRPC on signal improvements on Route 7 in the Shelburne area

The next TAC meeting is scheduled for December 3.

The meeting adjourned at 10:11 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Bryan Davis