

Moving to a more balanced and sustainable transportation system

Testimony for the Vermont House Committee on Transportation, 1/18/24

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Karl Kemnitzer, and I live in the Upper Valley, in Hartland. I'm representing Sierra Club Vermont, and I also have ties with the Upper Valley Ebike Lending Library and VBike in Brattleboro. I started building electric cargo bikes over a dozen years ago as a town energy committee project, and as I've understood transportation better I've also taken on a bicycle advocate role.

Sierra Club has supported Electric Vehicles for many years. Our first National Drive Electric Week event in Vermont was at the Montshire museum in 2014. Vermont now has several good EV programs in place - although the ebike incentive could be better funded - so today I'd like to highlight three bike/ped issues. Sierra Club's *Clean Transportation for All* campaign has a second important part - active transportation and transit.

First and foremost is that bicycle and pedestrian programs are woefully underfunded.

VTrans statements show annual bike/ped expenditures of \$13M to \$19M, which is around 2% of the VTrans' budget. The expenditure could be doubled just to meet current projects that are in the queue, and we support at least the \$20M amount proposed in Bill H.693. There have been decades of trying to make roads safe for automobiles, which has given us roads that are unsafe and uncomfortable for bicyclists and pedestrians. To help balance our transportation system and move towards reduced energy use and lower carbon emissions, this amount could conceivably be doubled again to 8% of VTrans' budget.

Second, *Complete Streets* features must be installed much more often.

In his testimony a day ago, Kevin Marshia talked about integrating Complete Streets design principles into the standard VTrans workflow, and Erin Sisson mentioned that the new Vermont State Design Standards would be more context sensitive. These are good steps forward. The future looks more energy efficient with denser communities, where wide, straight, and fast highways will become less valuable assets that have higher operations and maintenance costs.

Wide, straight and fast were desirable goals when all we had were muddy cart tracks, but the world has changed since the Radiant City of 1924 and those aren't the best goals anymore. Our roads affect the way we drive, they have increased our vehicle miles traveled, and disconnected us from where we live. A better goal would be to accelerate the build out of useable bike/ped networks that connect people, their towns, and their environment together. Complete Streets projects can do this if they are built more often than is the current practice.

Third, the Route 5 Bicycle Corridor should move forward

A thank you to Representatives Bartholomew, Burke, and Campbell of this committee who sponsored this measure along with other cosponsors.

The VTrans survey results convincingly show that this corridor is needed and should move forward. As someone familiar with Route 5, I can add several observations not included in the report:

- Votes of support also came from the Connecticut River Joint Commission, and the Ottauquechee District of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

- People in Lebanon working on their rail trail from Concord also support the corridor, as well as several board or committee members in Hanover, Lyme, and Orford.
- Comments I've heard included "Of course" and "immensely useful", which are in stark contrast to the usual evaluation I've heard in past years such as "My family and I will not ride on Route 5".or "I survived another riding season".
- There are bicycling communities and organizations that already exist along the corridor, such as the Bellows Falls Community Bike Project, the Prouty ride, and the Brattleboro Coalition for Active Transportation, which along with 3 ski areas: Burke with the Enduro World Series Races, Ascutney Trails, and Killington, prove interest and that the corridor is economically important for bicycling and tourism.
- Personally, I wrote a blog post for my town bicycle club explaining the corridor which ended up viewed over 1400 times. To say there is interest is an understatement.

We have a beautiful river valley that is the equal of any of the other 3 bicycle greenways in the northeast, and as you've seen from the VTrans survey, there is no question Route 5 should be brought up to safe and comfortable standards for use by everyday riders.

In summary the Vermont Sierra Club asks the committee to:

- increase funding for active transportation and it's importance in our transportation system
- accelerate implementation of Complete Streets networks for safety, comfort, and to help us meet emissions and climate goals
- take the next step in the formation of the Route 5 Bicycle Corridor

Thank you.

Karl Kemnitzer

Sierra Club Vermont chapter