

March 8, 2014

To: House & Senate Transportation Committees
From: Delsie Hoyt, Chair
West Fairlee Selectboard
Re: Vermont Local Roads Technical Assistance

As a Selectboard Chair, I am writing in support of the vital and valuable services currently provided to Vermont towns by the Vermont Local Roads (VLR) program delivered through St. Michael's College. I'm certain you have already received testimony regarding the excellence of VLR's technical training programs for road personnel so I will speak only from the vantage point of a Selectboard Member.

I believe it would be unwise (if not impossible) for VTrans to attempt to duplicate VLR's well-established services, and it would be devastating that if, in that attempt, VLR becomes a casualty of this redundancy. While I am certain that VTrans does an admirable and effective job in supporting and training its own employees through the VTrans Training Center, Town governments and road crews have requirements that go well beyond workshops and seminars.

Highway budgets consume the lion's share of Town budgets and we're constantly struggling just to stay on top of basic repairs and growing expenses. VLR is an essential and growing resource for Selectboards looking for reliable information required for long-range planning as well as annual and capital budgeting -- information gleaned and distilled from current research and "best practices" across the country. VLR serves as a critical bridge between the Selectboard and its highway department. Besides this specific, case-by-case input, at times the additional, critical skill they offer I can only call "finesse": the ability to navigate those complex relationships -- to convince a Selectboard that add a new expense line to the budget will yield future (sometimes immediate) cost savings or, on the other hand, to convince a recalcitrant road crew to change "the way we've always done it."

Towns need VLR's independent voice and collaborative mission. VLR's willingness to "wade in" rather than take the politically expedient and "safe" route which often plagues State agencies like VTrans is cost effective and productive.

The Selectboard needs efficient, focused sources of information. I rely on VLR's Listserve which provides efficient problem-solving among Towns on highway-related issues. Within the past few months I've found timely and useful insights from other Towns on topics such as salt shortages; discussion and examples of Town policies on roadside mowing, culvert, and driveways; examples of RFP's and contracts appropriate to the customary scope of small-Town projects; and more. Further, VLR's e-newsletter the Rumbling Strip is a digest of useful program links (often more in-depth follow-up on Listserv posts) that I frequently share with our Conservation and Planning Commissions.

VLR is agile and adept at tailoring its services when needed. For example, West Fairlee is one of a handful of Towns in Vermont that contracts for all highway maintenance. VLR reviewed and commented on a recent comprehensive revision of that contract document. Their thoughtful

and very specific suggestions and advice vastly strengthened the document; further protecting the Town's interests.

West Fairlee had a significant backlog of repaving needs. Where to start? Which areas really required expensive reclamation versus simple overlay? What are the long-term budget and capital fund needs? VT Local Roads provided a paving engineer for a day to assess and prioritize our resurfacing needs and created a five-year plan for getting on top of the backlog. That type of expertise and documentation is essential to building – and passing – realistic highway budgets.

Finally, as we experienced in Irene, in a natural disaster all VTrans resources need to be focused exclusively on State infrastructure. I want the assurance that next time, our Town will have Vermont Local Roads in our corner for technical documents and specifications, as well as its network of selectboards and road crews from across the State, to help get our local recovery underway sooner.