

Sara Tully
Town Administrator
Town of Mendon,
2282 US Route 4,
Mendon, VT 05701
802-775-1662
mendonadmin@comcast.net

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House Committee on Transportation

Testimony regarding FY '15 Transportation Bill as it relates to the Vermont Local Roads Program and the need for additional technical assistance to municipalities.

Mendon is a small town sandwiched between Rutland Town and Killington in Rutland County, population is just over 1,000 with 22 miles of maintained roads and a 2 man road crew assisted by a part time position when needed.

I have been the Town Administrator for 15 years and have worked closely with VTRANS District 3 and Vermont Local Roads. I can speak highly of both organizations and would say I have excellent working relationship with both of them.

I support the availability of additional technical assistance to municipalities, but not at the expense of the currently structured Vermont Local Roads Program.

Recently, I learned that Section 7 of the FY'15 Transportation Bill took the Vermont Local Roads Program and renamed it the Local Technical Assistance Program. I strongly urge you NOT to eliminate the Vermont Local Roads Program as it stands independently from VTRANS without careful forethought and coordination as to how all the services that Vermont Local Roads provides currently to municipalities can be maintained. Vermont Local Roads provides essential services municipalities. They are our "go to" organization to assist towns in all road related issues. Over the past decades, they have pin pointed exactly what municipalities need and have directed the educational seminars to meet those needs. I am a graduate of the 2010-2011 Vermont Local Roads Management Academy which included a series of 10 seminars over a year and a half culminating with an individualized Development Plan. Vermont Local Roads and their staff is extremely knowledgeable about the issues and challenges municipalities face on a daily basis. It may seem on the surface to be an appropriate move to fold the Vermont Local Roads Program into the VTRANS Training Center, but I firmly believe that it will do more harm than good for municipalities.

According to The Orange Book Section 9, "VTrans has the duty by statute to provide assistance and advice to municipalities (19 V.S.A. Section 10). The advice may be for small and routine issues, or it may extend to substantial issues involving public policy at the municipal level. VTrans will analyze the facts, statutes that apply, and general policy thinking before providing the requested advice. For other than very modest work, municipalities must reimburse VTrans for its costs (19 V.S.A. Section 10(5)). Sometimes VTrans may not be able to do the work with its employees. In these cases, municipalities may be referred to the private sector or VTrans may engage a private firm."

Municipalities need additional technical assistance for two reasons which has resulted from State Codes and Standards and Agency of Natural resource permitting requirements:

1. To appropriately prepare RFP's for mid-sized construction projects.
2. To help budget for projects based on road, bridge and culvert inventories.

Current VTRANS Road and Bridge Codes and Standards as well as Agency of Natural Resource regulations require a greater level of technical expertise for most road projects and almost all culvert replacement projects. Based on hydraulic studies and ANR permits a simple 18" culvert replacement becomes a 5' X 8' cement box culvert with wingwalls, escalating the cost from a \$5,000 project to a \$50,000 project. The project quickly escalates to beyond the technical expertise of the staff in small municipalities. However, not to the point that structural engineering services are required.

In most small municipalities, road commissioners are working road commissioners. They are out plowing roads and maintaining the town's infrastructure and they are great at what they do, but they are not structural engineers, nor should they be. In order to qualify for state grant programs, municipalities must keep current inventories on all roads, bridges and culverts. These inventories are then used as budgetary tools to create a capital improvement plan. The stumbling block for the small municipality is budgeting for the small 18" culvert replacement that the town expects to be a \$5,000 project when it becomes a \$50,000 project after regulatory review. We could really use the technical assistance to help us appropriately budget for projects that meet all the state regulations. We could really use the assistance in creating Requests for Proposals (RFP's) to send to contractors in order to get bids back that compare "apples to apples". This is how Mendon utilized the Technicians from VTRANS District 3 that were hired after Tropical Storm Irene. Hiring an engineer to help budget and create an RFP is complete overkill and an expense municipalities certainly can't afford. The Technicians could assist all towns in the district. Structural Engineers certainly have their place working on large projects that require engineering, not technical assistance.

I would suggest and support additional technical assistance be provided by VTRANS or the Vermont Local Roads Programs with additional funding for either organization.

Thank you for your time and consideration to my testimony regarding the FY'15 Transportation Bill as it relates to the Vermont Local Roads Program and the need for increased technical assistance to municipalities.