



COMMON SENSE SOLUTIONS
FOR A CHANGING VERMONT

H.740 – Transportation Improvement Districts

VNRRC was founded in 1963 and is Vermont’s oldest environmental organization. We work to protect, restore and promote Vermont’s surface and ground waters, viable communities, forest and wildlife resources, working landscape, and energy independence.

Because our transportation investments affect the quality of both our communities and our natural resources, we are interested in transportation-related issues. With that in mind, we submit the following comments on H.740, Transportation Improvement Districts.

General feedback

- *We support the concepts behind the bill.* We very much support the concept behind the bill. Proportional share is the right type of fee structure for the “last one in” problem.
- *Proportional share can support infill development.* We feel this fee structure is better for promoting infill development – filling in the blanks in the areas where we want growth, rather than sprawling ever-outward – than the “last one in” approach we have now.
- *Acknowledging planning goals is an important part of creating a sustainable transportation system.* We appreciate that part of the bill’s intent is to ensure that transportation investments support Vermont’s planning goals. These goals include supporting our compact centers surrounded by working lands, discouraging strip development, and also providing for “safe, economic, and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment,” including transit and paths, and supporting a “strong and diverse economy” (24 V.S.A. 4302).
 - Where and how we improve roads affects how land gets used, for better or for worse, so making transportation investments with our planning goals in mind is an essential part of supporting well-planned growth.
- *We support inclusion of multiple transportation options.* We’re pleased that this bill integrates the full range of transportation options by recognizing walking and biking infrastructure, transit, and transportation demand management as part of the whole system.
- *More clarity is needed about how this bill can help avoid greenfield development.* We would like more clarity as to how the bill solves “last one in” while also not pushing development further out. We recognize that this is also a land use planning issue, but it’s still important that this and other transportation investment policies contemplate it.

Specific feedback: TIDs and local land use

- As the bill is written, both the TID and the TID fee are determined based on anticipated future development in the area. Knowing what future development is likely to take place is how the Agency figures out what capacity improvements will be needed, and how much those will cost.
 - The bill talks about examining “land use assumptions” (p. 8) and “future land use projects” (p. 9) to do this. Regional plans are mentioned, but presumably this process also involves analyzing local zoning to see what it allows.
- Local zoning requirements have the potential to affect how traffic flows, and what types of transportation improvements are needed as a result. Sometimes, zoning can even contribute to congestion.
- While basing TIDs and fees on land use is essential, it is important to note that the process, as currently outlined, does not evaluate whether underlying zoning will ultimately lead to more expensive transportation needs and expenditures for VTrans.
 - This could lead to the state’s paying *more* for transportation improvements if the underlying land uses are designed in a way that contributes to congestion.
 - *Suggestion:* Include some provision that allows for an exchange between VTrans and the municipality about this topic.
- This bill cannot accomplish everything at once, and good planning is the responsibility of more than just VTrans. This is a larger conversation; fortunately, some bills under consideration this year, such as H.823, start to look at this bigger picture.
- Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the underlying land uses are going to affect transportation expenditures over time – both in the TID context, and in terms of other projects you approve and fund. As you consider this policy and other policies as a committee, I strongly encourage you to remember that it’s not the responsibility of the state to subsidize sprawling zoning.
- What the committee and VTrans CAN do, through this and other investments, is find a way to reward good land use decisions. I encourage you to keep this in mind as you continue your good work to make the best use of limited funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments and please do not hesitate to contact me with further questions.

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