



Vermont Transportation Board

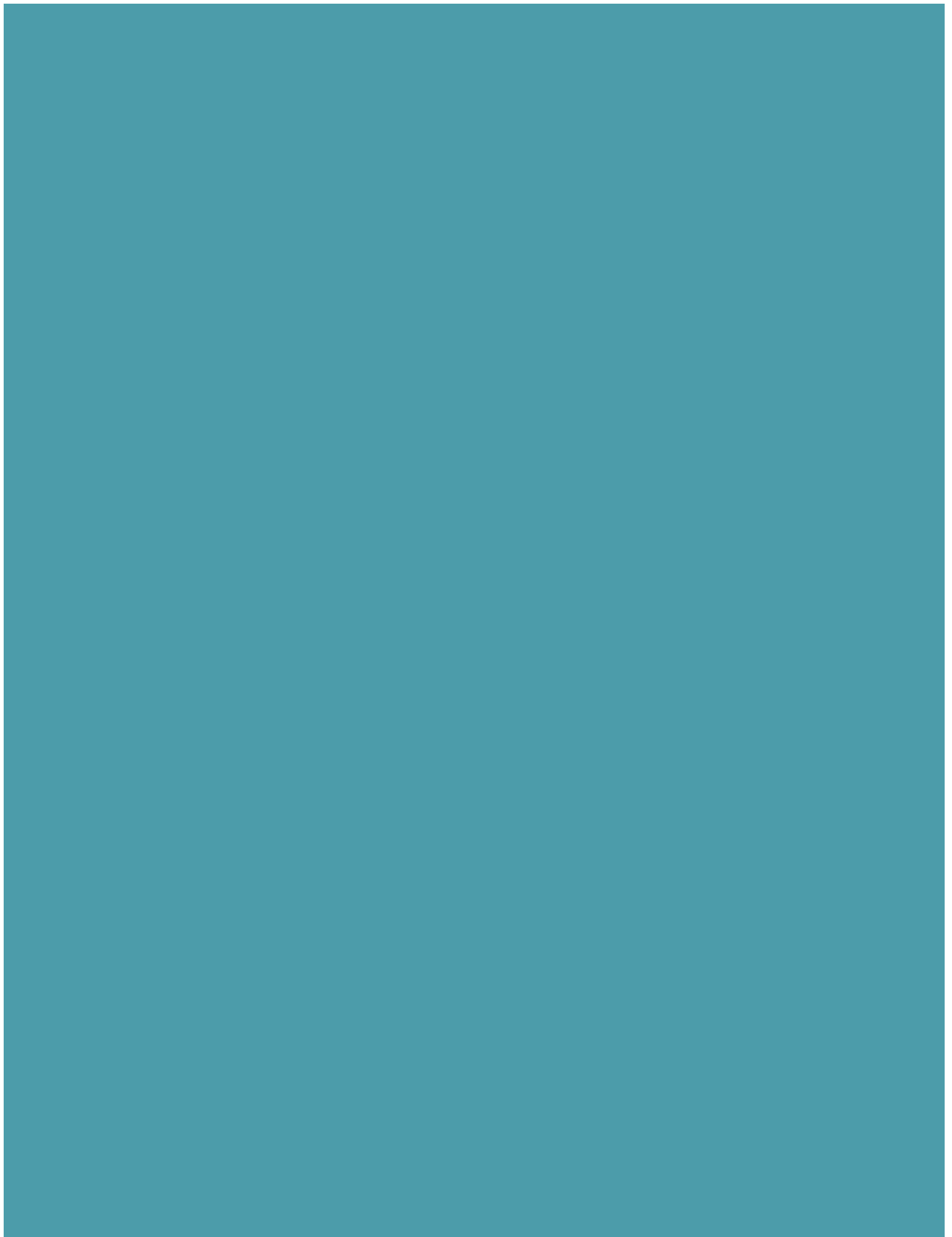


**2013 Report to the Legislature's
House and Senate Transportation Committees**



Submitted Pursuant to 19 V.S.A. § 5 (D) (8)





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Vermont Transportation Board

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INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Transportation Board was established according to Title 19 V.S.A. § 3, and is attached to the Agency of Transportation. The Board consists of seven members who are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Governor appoints Board members, so far as possible, whose interests and expertise lie in various areas of the transportation field. The Governor appoints the Board's chair, and members are appointed to three-year terms. Board members may be reappointed for two additional three-year terms, but are not eligible for further appointment. No more than four Board members can belong to the same political party.

The Board's authority affects all modes of transportation, including air, rail and roadway travel. The Board primarily performs regulatory and quasi-judicial functions. Its cases are varied and involve appeals of both Agency decisions and select-board rulings, as well as appeals of contract disputes, small claims, land-compensation challenges, scenic roadway and byway designation, and requests for a host of things including railroad bridge variances, public and private aviation landing areas, and utility installation. Disputes between towns regarding roadway discontinuance, as well as disputes between local auto dealerships and their national auto manufacturers, are also adjudicated by the Board.

Challenges to quasi-judicial Board decisions are filed in Superior Court.

Oversight and administrative responsibility for the New Motor Vehicle Arbitration Board was transferred from the Department of Motor Vehicles to the Transportation Board on December 31, 2012. The transfer represents a homecoming of sorts for the Arbitration Board, which about a dozen years ago was transferred from the Transportation Board to DMV. The Arbitration Board adjudicates the State's "Lemon Law," and employs one, full-time employee.

The Transportation Board experienced considerable change in 2013 as the Governor replaced two members whose terms expired. To succeed Timothy Hayward of Middlesex and Charles Bucknam of Walden, Governor Shumlin appointed Thomas Dailey of Shaftsbury and Vanessa Kittell of Fairfield. The new appointees joined Chairman Maurice Germain of

Colchester, Nick Marro of Montpelier, James Fitzgerald of St. Albans, Wesley Hrydziusko of Windsor, and ranking member Robin Stern of Brattleboro. The Board is administered by John Zicconi of Shelburne.

While most of the Board's time involves regulatory and quasi-judicial functions, Title 19 V.S.A. § 5(d)(8) charges the Transportation Board to work together with the Agency of Transportation to annually hold public hearings "for the purpose of obtaining public comment on the development of State transportation policy, the mission of the Agency, and state transportation planning, capital programming and program implementation."

To comply with this statute, the Board each year holds six public hearings. The Board's findings following its 2013 hearings makes up the primary subject matter of this report.

In years past, the Board scheduled public hearings with little agenda other than seeking public comment on whatever transportation-related topics or projects attendees wished to broach. In 2012, the Board altered its approach and began structuring its public hearings to seek comment regarding specific topics, while still providing time for public comment on whatever topic or projects attendees wished. The Board, in 2012, also began accepting written comment via its website from Vermonters unable to attend the public hearings.

To identify specific topics for its 2013 hearings, the Board consulted with both VTrans staff and representatives of the State's 11 Regional Planning Commissions. Following lengthy discussions, the Board in 2013 chose to seek public comment on the following six topics:

- Transportation Revenues – Including How to Tax Alternate Fuel Vehicles
- Bike and Pedestrian Issues
- The Future of Both Freight and Passenger Rail Services
- Public Transit – Intercity Service and Service for the Elderly
- Roadway Safety
- Park & Ride Expansion

These topics were chosen because either the Agency of Transportation or the General Assembly is actively in the process of making policy decisions

that affect each. By focusing the public's attention on these specific topics at this time, public comment included in this report can be considered before policy decisions are finalized, thus providing decision makers with a tool to help them better understand public opinion.

To help the Board choose public-hearing locations, the Board worked with the regional planning commissions to select six locations that were geographically spread across Vermont. This consultation resulted in public hearings being held in Bennington, Middlebury, Morristown, Newport, Springfield and St. Albans. During 2012, the Board held similar hearings in Brattleboro, Montpelier, Rutland, St. Johnsbury, White River Junction and Winooski. In 2014, the Board will continue to seek a diverse geographic distribution so that over time it may hear the opinions of a wide distribution of Vermonters.

Attendance at the 2013 public hearings, which were held in late October and early November, was strong. The Board worked with local chambers of commerce, economic development corporations,

colleges, municipal governments, medical centers, front porch forums, news media and regional planning commissions to spread the word. The effort resulted in an average attendance of about 30 participants with a high of 45 in Middlebury and a low of 10 in Morristown, which had the unfortunate circumstance of being held on the evening that the Boston Red Sox began competing for a World Series title.

Hearing participants included a mix of business owners, town officials, members of the general public, and, in several locations, members of the Vermont General Assembly. The Board also accepted comment via its website, and received more than 60 written submittals.

At the hearings, discussion on each subject was preceded by a short PowerPoint presentation to both provide background and help set the stage for comment. This report is broken down into similar sections so that the reader can easily understand not only the issue at hand, but what the public had to say.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Transportation Board each year schedules six public hearings in geographically diverse locations spread around Vermont so that it can look for trends that transcend specific local communities or state regions. To further aid this objective, the Board also scheduled this year's hearings in locations far from those held in 2012 so that the Board can gain an even greater geographic diversity over time.

At each hearing in 2013, the Board provided a PowerPoint presentation as a way to provide participants with background information on each topic, as well as prompt them to provide feedback. Participants also were encouraged, and were not shy, to express unprompted concerns regarding transportation issues not specifically placed on the hearing's agenda.

After engaging the public on six different occasions for more than two hours at a time, as well as communicating with dozens of additional citizens via email, the Board was able to identify common concerns, reoccurring themes and nearly universal suggestions, all of which are identified in this executive summary and detailed in the various report chapters. Where appropriate, this report also notes trends that transcended across the hearings conducted in both 2012 and 2013.

While the information presented in this executive summary is meant to synthesize participant's most common thoughts, it by no means is meant to represent a complete offering of what was on the minds of the more than 250 participants who answered the Board's call to weigh in regarding the state of transportation in Vermont. To understand the full depth of what was on participant's minds, the Board recommends that the reader digest in full each of the report's chapters, which are written to provide an in-depth perspective of each topic.

■ Transportation Revenue

The Agency of Transportation in 2013 prepared a revenue study for the General Assembly which concluded the State faces a roughly \$200 million annual shortfall when it comes to transportation. Understanding that available revenue drives the legislative budget process, the Board elected to discuss this revenue gap at every hearing.

Participants clearly understood that additional transportation revenue will be needed if VTrans hopes to properly maintain the condition of the State's aging roads and bridges, expand public transportation, and improve infrastructure related to bicycle and pedestrian safety, all of which were priorities for many in attendance.

The most common forms of revenue increases supported by public-hearing participants were altering DMV fees to take into account the size and weight of a vehicle, increasing the gas tax beyond what the Legislature did during its 2013 session, and stopping – or at least reducing – the annual “raid” on the Transportation Fund that helps to support the State's General Fund.

Many participants also supported finding some way to tax how many miles a vehicle travels instead of how much gas it consumes. While raising revenue based on vehicle miles traveled (VMT) was discussed at the Board's 2012 public hearings and largely panned, the Board at that time did not couch the discussion in a way that also emphasized the conundrum of how to tax the growing number of alternate-fuel vehicles that are not powered by gasoline. Much to the Board's surprise, this additional discussion point appeared to alter how many view VMT taxation.

The Board asked participants whether they favored the use of VMT only as a way to collect revenue from alternate-fuel vehicles, or whether they favored switching all vehicles to a VMT tax. This question, however, did not result in clear majorities. Some favored VMT only as a way to tax alternate-fuel vehicles, while others liked the idea of abandoning the gas and diesel tax altogether and establishing a VMT tax for all vehicles.

While people disagreed over what form of VMT to implement, they usually found common ground regarding vehicle size and weight. Participants were nearly unanimous in their view that 1) the Legislature should establish different registration fees depending on the size of pleasure vehicles – an RV or Suburban should cost more to register than an economy car like a Prius – and 2) commercial trucks damage roadways much more than pleasure cars, and as a result should be taxed accordingly.

The general sentiment was that good financial

policy looks at cost generation, and should charge (or tax) users proportionately to the cost they generate.

Public hearing participants overwhelmingly encouraged the Legislature to eliminate, or at least lower, the amount of transportation revenue that is annually redirected to the State's General Fund. The Board made people aware that in 2013 the Legislature discussed reducing the annual \$25.3 million transfer to \$22.75 million in Fiscal Year 2015, and lowering it again in FY16 to \$20.25 million. Participants nearly unanimously supported these actions.

A potential VMT tax was discussed extensively during a hearing segment where the Board focused on the growing number of alternate-fuel vehicles. The State set a goal of having 25 percent of the public fleet (nearly 143,000 vehicles) fueled by a source other than gasoline by 2030. If successful, this move would result in an annual \$21 million shortfall in transportation revenue as the drivers of these vehicles would not pay gas taxes.

The Board broached this subject and asked attendees for their thoughts regarding how to tax alternate-fuel vehicles to at least make up this shortfall, if not increase transportation revenue. Three basic options, which were outlined in a recent State study, were presented: 1) a flat annual fee, 2) a volumetric tax, and 3) a vehicle-miles-traveled fee.

Some people appreciated the simplicity of a flat-fee tax, but they also were quick to point out that such a system would be unfair to low-mileage drivers, and conversely would do nothing to encourage people to drive less, which is a stated State goal. People generally liked the idea of a volumetric tax, but questioned how it could be accomplished. Some suggested the use of smart meters on vehicle charging devices as a way the State could electronically gather information and bill users for their consumption.

As already mentioned, VMT taxation drew mixed support. The bugaboo for many critics tended to lie within the tracking mechanism. Images of Big Brother tracking their movements through GPS technology was a definite concern to some. Others, however, said GPS tracking is now a fact of life and were unconcerned at the prospect of their vehicle containing such a device.

■ **Bicycle & Pedestrian Issues:**

Without prompt, the State was often criticized for

having too many rules and regulations when it comes to building sidewalks with State aid. These regulations, participants said, needlessly increase the cost of projects and create a level of complexity that towns find excessive. Realizing that these strings often are mandated by the federal government due to State aid including federal funds, people called for VTrans to establish a sidewalk grant program that does not use federal funding so that regulations could be simplified and projects completed at a lower cost.

The single biggest bicycle and pedestrian issues raised at all hearings was safety. Participants said pedestrian safety could be improved by building more sidewalks and establishing crosswalks in strategic locations that are accompanied by pedestrian-controlled traffic signals. Main roads that could benefit from such crosswalks include routes 7, 9 and 100, participants said.

Bicyclists said their safety could be improved greatly by increasing the width of roadway shoulders, improving the condition of pavement along noted bicycle routes and ensuring these roadways are swept of debris so that cyclists can safely ride within a roadway's shoulder rather than having to take the travel lane.

Echoing the sentiments the Board heard during its hearings in 2012, participants in 2013 called for VTrans to work with local communities to identify where changes to roadways – such as where motor-vehicle travel lanes being eliminated in favor of bicycle lanes, or where the width of travel lanes can be reduced to create greater shoulder width for bicycle use – could be established.

Also like they did in 2012, participants in 2013 often called on the State to both support and fund programs that promote the ability to live a car-free lifestyle just as vigorously as it promotes and funds the need to repair crumbling bridges, roads and culverts. This discussion included the call to fund more sidewalks in villages and other urban settings, as well as a strong call to improve cycling infrastructure that connects residential areas to “destinations” like workplaces, cultural centers, shopping centers, and public-transit options like buses and passenger trains.

Both cyclists and pedestrians also said the Legislature needs to enact stricter laws that punish both impaired drivers and those motorists who injure people because they are distracted by mobile devices

such as a cell phone. Participants frequently called for laws that would impound vehicles when a person is caught driving drunk more than once – even if the vehicle is owned by someone other than the impaired driver – as well as the instillation of mandatory breath-controlled interlock devices into any car regularly used by someone convicted of drunk driving. Hands-free cell phone legislation also drew widespread support.

■ **Freight & Passenger Railroad Services:**

The federal government in 2013 increased how it scrutinizes rail projects and now requires states to adopt both a long-term capitalization plan for rail infrastructure, as well as adopt a list of rail-funding priorities. To comply, VTrans is currently drafting a new rail plan.

While the plan is not yet complete, Agency officials have said one of the questions the plan will wrestle with is whether the State should sell all or some of the 300 miles of track it now owns and leases to a private railroad company. The question is appropriate as the State readily acknowledges that track in Vermont that is under private ownership tends to be in better condition than State-owned track that is leased. Also, Vermont is somewhat of an anomaly: the vast majority of states do not own any railroad track at all.

The idea of selling Vermont's State-owned track was discussed at every public hearing. Participants were divided, but in that division they were unified in wanting more information. To date, the State has yet to fully assess the value of its track and identify how much money selling its track could bring. Both supporters of selling, as well as those opposed to selling, said they could easily change their mind depending on the financial details. The key, both sides said, is ensuring that the public's interest in rail activity is maintained and that businesses dependent on rail can thrive. Track ownership is actually secondary.

Public hearing participants were overwhelmingly pro rail. Everyone spoke in favor of increasing freight capacity, but the conversation gained a few naysayers when the topic turned to passenger rail. While the vast majority of participants were in favor of expanding passenger service to Montreal, Burlington and Bennington, a consistent minority favored the State dropping its financial commitment to passenger-rail

altogether. The reason was always the same: the Legislature's annual \$7.2 million passenger subsidy could be better used to fund other things, including increased public transit by bus.

■ **Public Transit – Intercity Bus & Elderly Services:**

While public transit is a broad topic, the Transportation Board at its public hearings focused discussion on just two aspects: intercity bus service and on-demand transportation for the elderly.

Intercity bus service throughout Vermont has declined greatly over the past 15 years. In 1998, Vermont contained 50 stops. Today, intercity buses stop in just six Vermont communities, with three of those vulnerable to discontinuation. On-demand transportation for Vermont's elderly is also lacking statewide. Everyone from VTrans personnel to elderly advocates agree that available funding covers just 75 percent of the identified need.

To curb the decline in intercity bus service, VTrans recently announced that it will spend \$1.2 million over the next three years to save one route – White River Junction to Springfield, MA –and establish two others: Burlington to Albany, NY and Rutland to White River Junction. VTrans is considering further expansion in the future. The program's goal is to establish ridership to the point that after three years of financial support, a private transit entity will continue the routes without government subsidies.

Public hearing participants overwhelmingly supported not only the three-year program (in 2012 they supported the selected new routes) but also future expansion of the program, which could include establishing a Newport-to-White River run, as well as Route 9 service that connects Albany, NY to either Manchester, NH or Boston with stops in both Bennington and Brattleboro.

Participants also overwhelmingly supported increasing State subsidies – the increase anticipated to be in the neighborhood of about \$1 million annually – that would fully fund on-demand transportation services for the elderly to ensure they can attend both critical medical appointments such as dialysis visits, as well as various day programs that allow them to better age in place and stay out of nursing homes.

As for public-transit services in general, the biggest complaint the Board heard – other than Vermont

needs to expand its public transit options – is that the various public-transit options that do exist are not interconnected very well. Participants expressed similar concern in 2012. And like in 2012, participants said Vermonters will be significantly deterred from choosing a car-free lifestyle unless buses and trains run more often, reach more destinations, and easily connect to each other allowing for longer trips in a timely manner. Buses and trains must also be easily accessible via bicycle, as well as transport bicycles, to truly be effective multi-model tools, they said.

■ Highway Safety

During the Board’s public hearings in 2012, the single biggest safety concern expressed by participants was the need to improve pavement condition. Roadways full of potholes, or roads that are either significantly or badly patched, are safety hazards because drivers try to avoid the rough spots and often leave their lane to do so.

This year, participants echoed these sentiments, but the call for improved pavement was trumped by calls for a primary seatbelt law, stopping people from driving impaired, and reducing the number of people who speed and drive aggressively.

Of these issues, the one that drew the largest response was the call to curb impaired driving, especially when it came to repeat offenders. Hearing participants were clear in their belief that the Legislature should ratchet up the penalties for repeat offenders, and strongly called for a new law that would impound any automobile used by a repeat offender, even if the vehicle was registered to, or owned by, someone else.

Adoption of a law mandating that vehicles owned or regularly used by convicted drunk drivers be equipped with breath-triggered ignition interlock devices also found considerable support among participants in several locations.

■ Park & Ride Expansion

In 2003, Vermont contained 23 Park & Rides consisting of 742 spaces. Over the past decade, VTrans not only has nearly doubled the number of spaces it maintains, but the Agency also began a municipal grant program that established 46 smaller facilities with 750 additional spaces.

The creation of Park & Ride lots is one tool deemed necessary to help Vermonters curb their dependence on single-occupancy vehicles and lower their carbon footprint. As a result, the Agency asked the Board to seek out the public’s thoughts on where new lots would be beneficial, as well as what existing lots may be lacking.

Suggested improvements ranged from adding lights to those facilities without them to finding ways to keep existing lots, especially those created through the municipal program, cleaner and free of debris. Participants also suggested that several existing lots – most notably those along the southern half of Interstate 91 – be expanded as they are often close to capacity.

As for the creation of new lots, the public suggested more than a dozen new locations, which are all listed and detailed in the chapter dedicated to Park & Rides.

TRANSPORTATION REVENUE

When the Legislature in the spring of 2013 ostensibly increased Vermont's gas tax by 6.5 cents per gallon and the diesel tax by 3 cents per gallon, the Vermont Agency of Transportation was clear that the goal was to raise enough new state revenue – some \$26.5 million annually – to leverage an additional \$56 million in federal highway funds that was already targeted for Vermont, but otherwise would be lost. The gas tax increase was Vermont's first in nearly two decades, and passed with relative ease as the House approved the measure 107-36.

Despite the action's significance, the increased revenue is expected to do little to close the multi-million dollar funding gap between what Vermont annually spends on transportation and the growing needs that are created by the State's aging and ever deteriorating inventory of roads, bridges and culverts.

Vermont's transportation budget has risen substantially since FY09, to the point that in FY14 the budget totaled \$653 million, just \$5 million short of the record \$658 million collected in FY13. The Transportation Agency, however, does not expect revenues to climb or even remain at or close to this level in the years to come. In fact, the Agency, which over the past few years has been the recipient of considerable one-time federal funding related to both the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act as well as emergency funds related to Tropical Storm Irene and other natural disasters, anticipates that the State's annual transportation budget, unless new sources of revenue are found, could soon regress to pre-2010 levels, which would fund transportation programs in the neighborhood of \$550 million annually.

Should this occur, the Agency believes that there will be a gap of about \$200 million between what Vermont spends annually on transportation and what the State actually needs to spend to keep its roads, bridges and culverts in good working order, as well as its transportation services (like public transit) at or beyond current levels. This funding gap, which was identified as part of a recent Transportation Revenue Study, is consistent with past studies conducted by the Joint Fiscal Office and the 2009 Long Range Transportation Business Plan.

The consequences of not closing this gap could

include rougher roads, posted and closed bridges, increased cost due to deferred maintenance, stagnant or possibly reduced funding for local roads, and reduced funding for non road-and-bridge programs such as bike, pedestrian, public transit and rail.

Making future financial matters potentially worse is the fact that government regulations beginning in 2017 require auto manufactures to increase fuel efficiency. This new policy will result in reduced gas-tax collection. There also is a growing trend to build cars and trucks propelled by alternate fuels such as natural gas, hydrogen and electricity, which are products that currently are not subject to state or federal fuel taxes.

This last point is something very much on the minds of Vermont lawmakers as local transportation revenues come from three primary sources: gas and diesel taxes, motor vehicle purchase and use taxes, and motor vehicle fees collected through the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles. Of these three sources, gas and diesel taxes account for \$95 million annually, which is 35 percent of the \$274 million in State transportation funds expected to be collected in FY14.

Should the amount of gas and diesel fuel sold in Vermont substantially decline in future years – something that is not only expected but encouraged by the State's Comprehensive Energy Plan – Vermont's financial foothold would fall right along with it.

While the number of alternate-fuel vehicles currently registered in Vermont is small, their popularity is growing rapidly. In July of 2013, the Vermont DMV registered 291 alternate-fuel vehicles. That number grew nearly 50 percent in just three months to 432 in October of 2013, the last month such statistics were available.

This trend is expected to continue as the State's Energy Plan calls for 25 percent of Vermont's vehicle fleet (nearly 143,000 cars, trucks and buses) to be propelled by alternate-fuel vehicles by the year 2030. Achieving this goal would equate to an annual loss of \$21 million in gas and diesel taxes. Lawmakers assigned to the Legislature's transportation committees are very much aware of this, and understand that potentially significant changes in how the State raises transportation revenue are not only inevitable, but likely necessary by the end of the decade.

Federal funding typically accounts for about half of Vermont's total transportation budget, however, the recent one-time federal surges have pushed that percentage above 60 percent. Currently, state transportation revenues total slightly more than \$250 million annually.

No one believes Vermont can raise an additional \$200 million on its own. Continued increases in federal funding will be necessary. Still, it is widely recognized that the State will need to raise tens of millions in additional State revenue as part of any solution that could successfully close this gap. Public hearing participants were asked to provide their ideas on how the State can raise these additional transportation funds, as well as how the State should tax alternate-fuel vehicles. The following represents their response.

■ Funding Suggestions & VMT

The most common forms of revenue increases supported by public-hearing participants were altering DMV fees to take into account the size and weight of a vehicle, further increasing the gas tax, stopping or at least reducing the annual General Fund "raid" on the Transportation Fund, and finding some way to tax how many miles people travel instead of how much gas they use. The idea of replacing the gas tax with a flat fee per vehicle – akin to an annual excise tax – also drew mild support.

With one exception, these suggestions represent similar sentiments expressed to the Board in 2012 when it asked similar questions. The notable exception being a vehicle miles traveled tax. While raising revenue based on vehicle miles traveled (VMT) was discussed in 2012 and largely panned, the Board did not couch the discussion in a way that also emphasized the conundrum of how to tax the growing number of alternate-fuel vehicles. This discussion point altered how many people view VMT taxation.

As in 2012, a number of people raised concern about how VMT would be tracked. The thought of the government using GPS technology to gather such information clearly made people uncomfortable. But this year, a large number of people – more than those who expressed concern – supported some form of VMT tracking, even if it meant using GPS technology.

A Morristown participant pointed out that State policy encourages both growth in the use of alternate-fuel vehicles and reducing carbon emissions. She

stated that "a mileage-based user fee is consistent with both the State's energy plan, as well its climate change plan." A Springfield participant said "the fairest way to raise money is VMT. The question is how do you get there?"

A St. Albans participant theorized that rapidly advancing technology is changing how people view GPS technology, and pointed out that many new cars already contain GPS computer chips. This technology "could easily be adjusted to keep track of miles traveled," he said.

The Board asked participants whether they favored the use of VMT only as a way to collect revenue from alternate-fuel vehicles, or whether they favored switching all vehicles to a VMT tax. This question, however, often did not result in clear majorities. Some favored VMT only as a way to tax alternate-fuel vehicles, while others liked the idea of abandoning the gas and diesel tax altogether and establishing a VMT tax for all vehicles.

How much to tax per mile under a VMT system also produced mixed responses. A recent study concluded that a tax of 1.1 cents per mile would achieve revenue neutrality for Vermont. Some participants liked this one-for-one swap. Other participants, recognizing that the State is looking to raise additional revenue, supported a slightly higher per-mile tax. Participants who supported the higher fee often liked the idea of taxing travel, believing that such an approach would have the long-term benefit of incentivizing people to curtail their single-occupancy driving and find alternate ways to travel like riding a bicycle, car-pooling or using public transportation, which is a stated State goal.

"It would reward people for making public-transit and low carbon choices," a Morristown participant said.

Aside from the fear of "Big Brother" tracking their movements via GPS, opponents of a VMT tax usually mentioned two reasons why they disfavored this approach: 1) a VMT tax does not take into account the type of vehicle, so a person driving an energy-conscience vehicle like a Prius would be taxed the same as a person driving a gas guzzler like a Suburban, and 2) a VMT tax would disproportionately tax people who live in rural towns who must commute long distances to reach employment or other services located significant distances from their homes.

Proponents of a VMT tax countered these arguments by saying the State could treat VMT taxation much like a utility charges its customers: charge an annual rate based on vehicle size and/or weight, plus a user fee for miles traveled. “You need a logarithm for mileage and weight so there is a balance,” a Middlebury participant said.

A St. Albans participant said the State could instill a VMT system without having to use GPS. “The car’s mileage is already noted on the inspection sticker,” he said. “The inspection stations could file the reports.”

Both supporters and opponents of a VMT system did agree on one thing: if such a system were implemented it needs some way to make sure the State does not lose the gas-tax revenue it now collects from tourists and other people whose vehicles are registered out of state. A Newport participant also warned against collecting such a tax just once per year. “Careful with yearly bills,” he said. “People live paycheck to paycheck. It is hard to pay once per year.”

■ Vehicle Size & Weight

While people often spared over VMT, many participants found common ground regarding vehicle size and weight. The fact that large vehicles like an RV or a truck cost the same to register as an economy car seemed unfair to many people, especially considering that larger vehicles do more damage to roads and bridges.

“Good public policy means looking at cost,” said a Bennington participant. “Charge the people who generate cost. A truck does more damage than someone driving a small car. Start here.”

Middlebury participants agreed, and many said the State also should start registering farm vehicles, which are often large and inflict significant damage to local roads. “One, five-axle truck does as much damage as 4,000 cars,” said a Middlebury participant. “And don’t forget farm vehicles, which are exempt now.”

Many people also suggested increasing the gas and diesel tax again. Even though the Legislature voted to increase these taxes in 2013, some participants said lawmakers did not raise them high enough. All the Legislature did was increase the gas and diesel tax high enough to fill a current revenue hole, they said. Instead, lawmakers should have looked to the future and anticipated the need for additional revenue as well, they said.

“Raise the gas tax more,” a St. Albans participant said. “Get it done with and stop playing games.”

Indexing the gas and diesel tax to inflation so that they would automatically increase over time also found favor with many participants. “Increase the gas and diesel tax now,” said a Middlebury participant. “This has the dual advantage of driving people to use public transportation, drive less and purchase electric vehicles. All of which are State goals.”

Support for further increasing the gas tax was hardly universal. Negatives to increasing the gas tax included the fact that it is a declining revenue source because people are driving less, and because society is shifting to non-gas vehicles as well as higher-mileage vehicles. Like a VMT tax, gas taxes also disproportionately hit lower-income Vermonters who live in rural areas and must travel extended distances for employment.

A Springfield truck driver also cautioned against raising the diesel tax. “Diesel fuel cost more than gas and is close to \$4 per gallon,” the truck driver said at a time when regular gas was selling for about \$3.50 per gallon. “Trucks get five miles per gallon. If you raise that, you are hurting truck people.”

■ Reduce the Raid

For years, the State’s Transportation Fund has sent millions of dollars in transportation revenue annually to the General Fund. While the so-called JTOC transfer has shrunk over the past decade – dropping from \$43.2 million in FY04 to \$25.3 million in FY13 – several attendees suggested the Legislature should purify the fund and work to eliminate the transfer.

The Board notes that reduction in the JTOC transfer has slowed in recent years: from an average drop of \$2.5 million annually between FY04 and FY10, to an average annual drop of less than \$1 million between FY10 and FY14, including no drop at all between FY12 to FY14. The Board also notes that the FY14 Transportation Bill calls for the JTOC transfer to be reduced in FY15 to \$22.75 million, and then reduced again in FY16 to \$20.25 million.

Public hearing participants overwhelmingly supported these decreases. No one spoke in favor of shifting additional transportation dollars to the General Fund. A few participants, in fact, suggested the General Fund should instead help pay for transportation issues.

In 2012, the idea of the State increasing its transportation bonding capacity drew widespread support. In 2013, the idea of additional bonding was hardly discussed even though the Board raised it at every public hearing as a potential revenue source.

■ Alternate-Fuel Vehicles

The Vermont State Energy Plan sets a goal of having 25 percent of all vehicles registered with the DMV by 2030 to be fueled by sources other than gasoline and diesel fuel. If successful, this would mean that about 143,000 vehicles registered in Vermont would be fueled by alternate-fuel sources. This presents a dilemma for lawmakers as one of the State's three primary sources of transportation revenue comes through taxing gasoline and diesel fuel. If the state reaches its 25-percent goal, a subsequent \$21 million annual shortfall in transportation revenue would occur.

As of October, the number of alternate-fuel vehicles registered with the Vermont DMV stood at 432, which is a far cry from 143,000. This total, however, is growing rapidly. Just three months prior to October, Vermont's number of alternate-fuel registrations was 291, which means that the State saw a 50-percent increase in just three months. The U.S. Energy Information Agency recently projected that Vermont would have some 5,600 electric vehicles by 2023, and current registrations exceed the Agency's growth curve.

While no one can be sure just how many alternate-fuel vehicles Vermont will have in future years – the number is likely to be tied to a variety of factors including charging-station development, the evolution of battery technology and consumer comfort – Transportation Committee members in both the House and the Senate have expressed the belief that the State soon will need to enact some way to tax these vehicles to make up for the subsequent loss in fuel tax revenue.

To that end, the Transportation Board during its public hearings broached this subject and asked attendees for their thoughts regarding how to potentially tax alternate-fuel vehicles. The Board believes that to be successful, such a system must not only provide the State with a stable revenue stream but must also be easy for the State to administer. To be successful, such a system also must be easy for Vermonters to both understand and accept.

To achieve this, the Board presented three basic options to the public, and asked for input. The three

options for taxing alternate fuel vehicles included 1) a flat annual fee, 2) a volumetric tax, and 3) a vehicle-miles-traveled fee. Attendees were also encouraged to suggest their own ideas, should they have any.

The State has already done some research regarding these three possibilities, so the Board also provided the public with some financial information regarding how these three options could achieve revenue neutrality. According to studies, an annual registration fee of \$146 per vehicle would be needed to provide revenue neutrality, while a per mile VMT tax of 1.1 cents would achieve neutrality. From a volumetric stand point, a tax of 3.6 cents per kilowatt hour is needed for electric vehicles to remain revenue neutral, while 27.7 cents per ccf is needed for vehicles that run on compressed natural gas.

While some people appreciated the simplicity of a flat-fee tax, they were quick to point out that such a system would be unfair to low-mileage drivers, and conversely would do nothing to provide a disincentive to driving more, which is a stated State goal.

"A flat fee encourages travel, which runs counter to state policy on energy use," a St. Albans participant said.

People generally liked the idea of a volumetric tax, the big question was how that is accomplished? Participants generally supported fees to use public charging stations, and understood that private charging stations, including those within their home, would likely have to include some way to track energy output. Homes already include electric meters that are read periodically by their local power company, so this kind of system was easily accepted. Some participants said the instillation of smart meters on such vehicle-charging devices could allow the State to electronically gather information and bill electric-vehicle users regularly for their consumption.

The pros and cons of a VMT tax have already been discussed. The only input the Board will reemphasize here is that should the State go this route, several participants suggested the state should consider abandoning the gas and diesel tax altogether and having all vehicles taxed according to how many miles they travel.

■ Additional Revenue Ideas

While altering registration fees to take into account the size and weight of a vehicle, increasing the gas

tax further, and finding was to tax alternative-fuel vehicles dominated the revenue conversation at most public hearings, other revenue-generating ideas, as well as cost-saving suggestions, were also discussed.

Several people questioned the wisdom of the way the State spends its current transportation revenues. Some asked if VTrans could save money by doing more construction projects in-house rather than hiring private contractors. Others said off-road projects like the recent ledge-removal project at Exit 8 of Interstate 89 in Montpelier was a waste of money that better could have been used elsewhere. In fact, the belief that VTrans could do projects simpler and cheaper was prevalent at several hearings.

“Can VTrans do things cheaper and easier?” asked a Newport resident. “It is easier to save a dollar than raise a dollar. What are we doing but not doing well?”

VTrans sometimes “needs to take a lower-cost approach,” said a Morristown participant, who lamented the Agency’s recent level funding to towns. “The State builds roads that are a work of art, but often more than what is needed. If the State builds a bridge or paves a road in a way that costs only 25 percent of what it costs now but in turn got only half the lifespan, that is actually a win.”

A Springfield participant encouraged lawmakers to establish a 50-50 grant program for towns that would be funded by a three-cent increase in the gas tax. Such a program could provide \$1.5 million annually in matching grants to improve sidewalks as well as \$7.5 million in annual grants to reconstruct and maintain town highways, including alignment changes, tree work, road-base improvements, ditching and drainage improvements, and new pavement.

“The intent is to provide efficient and cost-effective funding without expensive, time-delayed federal funding,” the participant said. Three cents in dedicated funding would raise about “\$9 million of State assistance to be matched by \$9 million in local dollars to fund \$18 million worth of local capital improvements per year for much needed road and sidewalk work.”

Without prompt, the idea of transferring as much truck traffic as possible to rail so that trucks are taken off the roads and therefore do not beat them up gained significant support at several hearings, most significantly in St. Albans and Middlebury.

Participants at every public hearing suggested the

State should spend more on public transportation so that people can get out of their cars, which would lessen the wear and tear on the State’s roadway network and therefore reduce the amount of money that is needed for repairs.

“Put money into public-transit programs to make it easier to not have a car,” said a St. Albans participant. A Springfield participant added: “think creatively about what we need to do to reduce the impact on our roads altogether. Put people into mass transit. Work out public-private partnerships with school buses. We need more van pools, more freight rail and better connections to rail in general.”

Middlebury participants encouraged lawmakers to “look to European countries that have established public transit so people don’t have to own cars” for bright ideas that could work in Vermont.

A Bennington participant said that transportation infrastructure benefits everybody, even someone who does not drive, because goods that everyone purchases and services people depend on require their use. As a result, the State should “look at other ways to raise money other than through the use of the automobile. The way we raise revenue is always auto centric. If that continues, the only things that get funded will be geared towards cars predominantly.”

Other revenue-generating ideas included allowing service stations along our Interstate highways and collecting rent for the use of the land, as well as allowing private industry to lease space within Vermont’s rest areas. Allowing businesses to purchase the naming rights of our roadways, as well as sponsor state trucks, also drew limited support.

Some participants supported establishing bicycle registration fees as a way to raise revenue for bike-related projects such as building bicycle paths or improving roadways to better accommodate cyclists. Others, however, want the State to either reduce or eliminate fees for those who make alternative-transportation choices.

“Don’t tax the people who are doing the right thing environmentally,” said a Middlebury participant.

The idea of “strategically abandoning” some existing highway infrastructure like pavement and bridges also drew support from participants in multiple locations. This idea was also raised in 2012. People who supported this idea suggested that VTrans review all roads and bridges (including Class 2 and

Class 3 roads) to determine where reasonable detours are located. Targeted roadways could then either be abandoned or reclaimed to gravel, with bridge maintenance discontinued altogether. Bridges would then be permanently closed once they slip into disrepair and become unsafe.

A Middlebury participant said the Legislature should assess policies and identify practices that aid in the destruction of asphalt, such as allowing studded snow tires and allowing 100,000 pound trucks to

use our Interstate highway system, and change these policies and practices so that asphalt can last longer.

A St. Albans participant said the state and federal government should revisit their policy of saving certain “historic” truss bridges such as the Checker House Bridge in Richmond because doing so is too expensive. Instead of rehabbing these bridges, the State should take the cheaper route of destroying them and building new ones that meet modern specifications.

BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN ISSUES

Improving the State's transportation infrastructure so that it safely can accommodate bicycles and pedestrians was a topic of keen interest at all public hearings. Discussion, however, was not limited to just the ins and outs of construction projects. Participants were very interested in weighing in about ways the State can better educate its citizens about bike and pedestrian safety, as well as ways VTrans can better encourage biking and walking as a sought-after means of transportation.

VTrans FY14 budget contains \$8.9 million for bike and pedestrian improvements, as well as an additional \$4.7 million for enhancement projects, many of which are bike-and-pedestrian oriented. The goal of both these programs is to improve access and safety for bicyclists and pedestrians through the planning, design and construction of infrastructure projects.

The Agency acknowledges that good bike/ped projects create attractive places to walk and bike, follow accepted standards, and do not let cars dominate. While VTrans' policy supports the creation of separate paths or trails where they are feasible, the Agency's primary focus appears to be 1) making roadways safer for the shared use of both bicycles and motor vehicles, and 2) building sidewalks within village centers.

Recent legislative activity also supports these goals as the General Assembly recently enacted "Complete Streets" legislation that requires that "the needs of all transportation users, regardless of their age, ability, or preferred mode of transportation, *be considered* regardless of the project's funding source in state and municipal transportation projects."

As was also noted in the Board's 2012 report, this legislation requires nothing more than bike and pedestrian concerns be "considered" whenever a project is being planned. The legislation jives well with VTrans' bicycle and pedestrian policy, which is similarly flexible and states that "at each stage of planning, design, construction, implementation, operation and maintenance, that VTrans' funded projects and programs *shall reasonably include* pedestrians and bicycles. New projects, reconstruction projects and other transportation facility improvements will maintain or *where feasible* improve existing access and conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists to meet applicable Vermont standards."

By design, the Complete Streets law allows VTrans and municipalities wiggle room when planning projects. Reports from many of the state's regional planning commissions indicate that while the Agency is generally responsive to the spirit of the law, municipalities sometimes are not. That said, many who attended the Board's public hearings or commented through the Board's website echoed the sentiments that the Board heard in 2012, which is that they believe the State does not spend enough time and money making Vermont communities safer and more bicycle and pedestrian friendly.

■ Simple Sidewalks

Without prompt, participants at nearly every hearing said the rules and regulations that towns must follow to build sidewalks with federal funds needlessly drive up the cost of such projects, cause delays in bringing these projects to construction, and sometimes even make municipalities forgo applying for grants. They called upon the Legislature to find a less bureaucratic way to provide such funding, saying that simplifying the rules would allow limited dollars to stretch further and result in additional sidewalk projects being constructed without the need for the State to program additional funds.

"There has to be ways to do this," said a Springfield participant. "Doing a simple sidewalk project now that should cost \$250,000 becomes \$400,000 because of the regulations. We need a simpler process...with no federal involvement so that we can do things at half the cost and faster. We realize not all sidewalks can be done this way. But make the program work better where it can."

This sentiment was echoed everywhere the Board went.

"Many of these are small projects and should not need as many rules," a Bennington participant said. "The Champlain Bridge process was modified for speed. As a result, it was constructed in less than two years. Can't we do something similar for sidewalks?" Participants in St. Albans agreed: "VTrans' grant program is too bureaucratic," a participant said. "The program needs to be more focused on simplicity."

Keeping things simple when it came to ensuring bike safety as well as building pedestrian infrastruc-

Cyclists Want Stiffer Penalties For Repeat Drunk Drivers

During the 2013 Annual Tour de Farms bicycle event in Addison County, an impaired driver operating without a license crossed the centerline of Route 74 in Shoreham and struck three cyclists, sending two to the hospital. The very next week, a similar crash took place in New Hampshire during a bicycle event. Four cyclists were struck, two died.

Dozens of cyclists commented that such tragic events involving impaired drivers who already have lost their licenses – the Shoreham driver reportedly had four previous DUI arrests – are all too common. They called on lawmakers to protect them. The following is a smattering of their comments:

- We must collectively do something to help these sick people get safely to their places of work without their driving. We must keep them off the roads.

- Vermont's drunk-driving laws are weak. Drunk driving should result in vehicle seizures (regardless of owner), hefty fines, lifetime suspensions and jail time – real jail time. The days of a slap on the wrist being good enough are over.

- Since drunk drivers are going to drive regardless of having their license suspended, give them a legal option. I suspect most people who have already lost their license would opt to drive an inconvenient legal vehicle over a more comfortable illegal one, if given the choice. I am referring to a motor-driven cycle, or moped. They are small, light, relatively harmless and can't really be operated for long by a drunk.

- I should be able to go out for an hour's ride without worrying that some inattentive, drunk or anti-bicycle driver is going to kill me... No matter how much we improve physical roadway infrastructure, we must also be firm in demonstrating that the roads are safe for bicycle

(and pedestrians, runners, and horses). There should be zero tolerance for driving behavior which endangers those who share our roadways.

- The recent tragic events in our region regarding cyclists and drunk drivers only emphasizes the importance of a zero-tolerance policy for impaired driving.

- Drunk drivers who have had two DUIs must have their vehicles impounded... even if it brings hardship to another driver in the family. The message must be clear: we can no longer tolerate dangerous driving.

- Our culture of tolerance for impaired driving must change. We should look at how Europeans deal with impaired driving. Stiffer, more certain penalties can help. Folks would think twice about their behavior if they knew their car could be impounded for a first offense. It is time for multi-pronged action, not more talk.

- If you are drunk driving or driving under the influence of drugs, it is no different than taking a loaded gun, going for a walk, and randomly shooting. If you hit someone and wound them, it's attempted murder. If you kill them, it's manslaughter or

second-degree murder... not driving under the influence with death resulting.

- I am 62. When I was 21, I rode my bike cross country. Now I ride mostly on dirt roads. Most paved roads are too dangerous. Danger comes in the form of distracted drivers, impaired drivers, angry (hateful) drivers and drivers with no or suspended licenses that just don't care. Laws should be stiffer.

- Make stiffer penalties for DUI a statewide priority. Confiscation of vehicles should be an option that is on the table.

- Thirty percent of those who are charged with DUI in Vermont are repeat offenders. Many of these individuals are being charged for the fourth or fifth time. DUI courts have been shown to be very effective in reducing the incidents of DUI. The Legislature should fund and expand DUI courts to all Vermont counties.

- We need to systematically and aggressively deal with the dangers that impaired drivers pose to walkers and cyclists, especially since an aging population and the current state of the economy mean that more and more people will lack cars.

ture was a constant mantra. Participants in Bennington rhetorically wondered what lens the State uses when deciding what grant projects to fund or where to build infrastructure.

“Those who make decisions need to look at the situational context,” a Bennington participant said.

“Put yourself in the shoes of an 11-year old trying to cross town. If that kid believes a location is not safe, then it needs to be fixed.”

■ Safety First and Foremost

Time and again participants emphasized safety,

stating that more people would walk and bike if they believed doing so was safe. To improve safety, participants suggested the State establish more crosswalks along busy roads such as Route 9 in Bennington, Route 7 in St. Albans and Route 100 in Waterbury. They also suggested that VTrans make a priority of sweeping the sides of roads that are used by cyclists, and include sidewalks when doing construction projects in densely populated areas so people feel safe walking to shopping centers and other destinations.

Bennington participants were particularly miffed that the State did not include sidewalks along Northside Drive when it recently reconstructed and repaved parts of the road in the area where it crosses Route 7. They loudly hoped the State does not take a similar approach when it constructs a planned roundabout near the community's proposed Wal-Mart. Both town and village officials encouraged VTrans to communicate their plans with them prior to entering a project's design phase.

"Make sure you coordinate these things," a selectman said. "Sometimes the work is done and the town doesn't know what to expect... We need better coordination with the locals to ensure we save money and do a better job."

VTrans also should include sidewalks along bridges known to have pedestrian use. "Think about the alternative: which is swimming," wrote one participant. "Bridges should have sidewalks and bike infrastructure. Otherwise the water... becomes an impenetrable barrier for everyone who isn't riding in a motor vehicle."

While sidewalks are valuable safety tools, the State to maximize safety also must establish crosswalks along State highways in strategic locations, a Bennington participant said. You can build sidewalks, but that work is "compromised" if the crossings are not adequate, he said.

Participants in several communities said establishing crosswalks, accompanied by pedestrian controlled traffic signals where appropriate, in strategic locations would help people feel safer and encourage more walking. A Morristown participant said Route 100 through Waterbury is a prime example of a high-traffic location that could benefit both from additional sidewalks and pedestrian crossings.

"It is time to address how we can better cross Waterbury roads," the participant said. "Technology

today is changing and can bring to a driver's attention places where people are crossing roads... Businesses would benefit as it would make it easier to access services."

The confluence of Route 105 and Route 7 in St. Albans was identified as a location that could benefit from an "on-demand" pedestrian crossing signal. Two locations in Bennington were also identified: the Route 9 section through Old Bennington at the "S" curve near the museum and church, as well as along the two-mile stretch of Route 7 between County Street and Houston Street.

One participant pointed out that many intersections, including several in Rutland City, contain pedestrian signal crossings that also allow turning traffic to have a green light in such a way that puts that turning traffic directly in conflict with the crossing pedestrians. "This is a dangerous situation," he said. "When pedestrians have the right of way, all other traffic needs to stop."

Participants in Middlebury suggested that empowering local government to set speed limits on state highways that run through their community would improve pedestrian safety as the locals often understand the nuances of key pedestrian locations better than State officials. Currently, speed limits along state highways are determined by a traffic committee comprised of the Commissioner of Public Safety, the DMV Commissioner and the Secretary of the Agency of Transportation.

"Allow towns to set speed limits, not the State or feds," said a Middlebury participant. "Towns are in the best position to know where speeds can be lowered or raised. This would allow towns to change the culture" of how motorists behave in their community.

A Middlebury participant also suggested that pedestrian safety would improve if the Legislature lowered the default speed limit through low-density areas from 50 mph to 40 mph, while a St. Albans participant suggested that improved safety could be achieved if VTrans altered its signal-warrant formula for small towns to provide them some flexibility regarding the ability to request traffic lights in targeted locations.

"VTrans has a traffic-volume threshold" when it comes to whether a signal is warranted, the St. Albans participant said. "Many low-volume towns don't quite meet the need. We need some other tripwire that will provide some flexibility."

■ Pavement Condition

Participants said bicycle safety could be greatly improved if the State does two things: regularly sweep road shoulders and maintain pavement in good condition. Poorly paved roads that are full of potholes, contain deteriorating shoulders, or are littered with lumpy or uneven patches greatly reduces bicycle safety because it forces cyclists to ride in the middle of the travel lane, they said.

“Improving asphalt conditions is the single biggest thing that can be done for bike safety,” said a Middlebury participant. “Route 74 from Shoreham to Cornwall is terrible. Bikes have to use the center of the road, which is very dangerous.”

Morristown participants said poor pavement along parts of both Route 12 and Route 15 also make cycling these roadways – which connect Morristown to destinations like Wolcott and Montpelier – dangerous.

“If you want to encourage cycling, fix the roads,” said a Morristown participant. “There are lots of paved holes on Route 15, and all the debris is pushed to the side of the road, which is where cyclists are supposed to ride. The side of the road is nothing but stones the entire way because the pavement is coming apart.”

A Newport area road foreman said VTrans should consider increasing the miles of shimming and pavement overlays it conducts each year. “We are spending millions on roundabouts and to improve intersections when the road surface is not safe,” he said.

Participants encouraged VTrans to sweep roads that are known bicycle routes on a regular basis. They defined regular as at least a couple of times each year. Also, they complained that VTrans sometimes paves just the travel lane of a roadway, often leaving the shoulder full of cracks, patches and deteriorating pavement.

“If you pave a road, pave the whole road, including the shoulder,” a Morristown participant said, echoing sentiments the Board heard not only in other locations during 2013, but 2012 as well. “Safety is key,” said a Springfield participant. “Too many people don’t bike because they think it is dangerous.”

To improve bike safety, participants at several hearings encouraged the State to shrink travel lanes from 12-foot wide to 11-foot wide in as many places as possible so that the width of a roadway’s shoulders

can be increased.

A Rutland resident who provided comment electronically encouraged VTrans to assess four-lane roads, such as North Main Street and Woodstock Avenue in Rutland, to determine which ones can be altered to have just two travel lanes (one in each direction) plus a shared left-turn lane. This kind of alteration, which was done along Williston Road and North Street in Burlington, would allow more room for bicycles to operate safely, he said.

A Newport participant suggested that VTrans paint white bicycle stencils on the pavement in as many places as practical along roadway shoulders. These stencils would improve safety by acting as a reminder to motorists to be on the lookout for cyclists. Other participants said erecting more share-the-road signs along known bicycle routes would have a similar affect.

Properly maintaining road paint is a low-cost thing the State can do to improve bike safety. Many cyclists criticized the State for allowing pavement markings to deteriorate to the point where it was nearly impossible for motorists or cyclists to understand where established bike lanes begin or end. The state can also better encourage cycling by establishing bicycle parking stations at bus stops, park-and-ride lots, and employment centers, Springfield participants said.

A couple of participants encouraged lawmakers to pass legislation mandating motor-vehicle drivers provide cyclists at least three or four feet of separation when passing.

To better educate both motorists and cyclists about safety, participants suggested focusing on children and young adults. Suggestions included the creation of a video that can be used as part of driver-education classes, including bike safety as part of the outreach related to both the State’s climate control and energy plans, and working with bicycle-oriented community organizations like Local Motion.

“Local Motion has a great program that can be duplicated,” a Middlebury participant said.

Participants said Vermont will neither significantly increase the number of people who walk or ride bikes, nor will the State make significant progress regarding either bike or pedestrian safety, as long as the State spends only \$12 million to \$13 million annually on such programs.

“The amount of money we spend is pathetic,” said a Bennington participant. “We need to spend more. If we eliminate just one paving job, the State could double its commitment to bike and pedestrian issues.”

Creating bike-friendly communities, and investing in bicycle and walking infrastructure, also are keys for tourism, participants at all hearings said. Visitors want to ride their bicycles in Vermont and walk to destinations close to their lodges, especially out-of-state visitors that live in large, metropolitan areas like Boston, Montreal and New York City.

One way to encourage cycling, a Middlebury participant said, is to provide a bike rack at every bus stop so that people looking to travel by a combination of bike and public transit have a safe and designated place to park their bicycle.

■ Priority Bike Routes

Considering the limited funding, the Board asked participants to prioritize how the State should spend its money to improve Vermont’s bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Currently, the State spends about \$2 on pedestrian improvements for or every \$1 it spends on bicycle improvements. Participants said they had no issue with this ratio. In terms of bike spending, participants overwhelmingly said the State should spend more money to improve on-road bike facilities than it spends to build off-road bike paths.

As to what roadways should take priority to be improved, many participants encouraged State officials to work with local communities to identify well-used bicycle corridors that connect “destinations” like residential areas to shopping or employment centers, as well as one town to another.

Prioritize the establishment of “bike lanes that connect center to center,” said a Newport participant, echoing the sentiments of many across the state. “Concentrate on connecting areas just outside of town so people can reasonably get to work on a bike.” Some participants even suggested specific roadways, including:

- Routes 5, 105 and 11 in the Newport area.
- Routes 12, 15 and 100 in the Morristown area.
- Routes 7 and 7A in the area of Northside Drive and Kocher Drive in Bennington, as well as Route 7 north between Bennington and Lake Shaftsbury and Route 7 south towards Williamstown.

- Routes 36 (Lake Road) and 105, as well as Gore Road in the St. Albans area.

- Routes 74 and 125 (west of the college) in the Middlebury area; Route 23 through Waybridge; and Route 131 in the Springfield area.

- Route 5 from the Hartland “three-corners” area to the Park & Ride, as well as Route 12 between Hartland four corners and three corners.

- Route 2 between Burlington and South Burlington, Route 7 from Winooski to Colchester, and Route 15 from Winooski to Essex Junction.

A Chittenden County resident via email commented now that the Circ Highway has been scrapped, the State should allow bicycles to use Route 289.

“We ride on a lot more dangerous 50-mph roads with no shoulders than Route 289,” she said. “It would remove a great deal of bike traffic from Essex Junction’s five corners and the strip in front of the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds, where it can be hard for cars to maneuver around bikes.”

As for building bicycle paths, the vast majority of participants said to fund them only in “strategic locations” where traffic volumes make on-road riding particularly dangerous or where schools are involved.

This sentiment, however, was not universal. A consistent minority at every hearing supported the proliferation of off-road bicycle paths. One participant in an email encouraged the State to establish on-street, eight-foot-wide, “protected” bike lanes wherever possible. A Burlington resident via email encouraged VTrans to build bike paths alongside new roadway projects “where appropriate” because such paths are proven to increase bicycle safety.

“These are especially valuable along arterial roadways and major routes that would otherwise be off-putting to novice cyclists but are often the only way to reach desired destinations,” The participant said.

■ Other Issues

In 2012, public-hearing participants hotly debated the value of the Legislature establishing a bicycle registration fee, with a majority of cyclists favoring such a fee if, and only if, the money was dedicated to improving bicycle infrastructure. In 2013, talk of such a fee was minimal. When it was discussed, participants broke about 50-50 on the issue, but just about all favored any proceeds from such a fee to be specifically

targeted to fund bicycle issues.

“If you are going to build paths, that is a low priority,” a Newport participant said. “But if the State does establish a bicycle registration fee, it would be OK to put that money towards paths.”

Participants said cell-phone users, who often are distracted by their mobile device, present a significant safety risk to cyclists and pedestrians. Distraction is often abetted by speeding, especially when police allow motorists to drive at least 10 miles over the speed limit before taking action, a Rutland resident said in a written comment.

“On my way to work every morning – a one-mile walk along Route 7 in Rutland – there are many times I have to sprint when crossing the road to avoid getting run over by motorists, often on a cell phone” the Rutland resident said. “We need serious enforcement, including the use of traffic cameras, before we can regain some semblance of the Vermont I was accustomed to when I move here almost 20 years ago.”

The Legislature “needs to step up and do more, particularly to stop distracted driving,” a participant said, echoing the sentiments of many. “In particular, there should be a ban on cell phones...unless the phone is hands free.”

Some participants, including avid cyclists, said motorists are not always at fault when an accident

between a motor vehicle and a bicycle occurs. They encouraged the State to work with law enforcement to issue more tickets to cyclists when they do not follow the proper rules of the road. Such a crackdown would help educate cyclists, result in fewer conflicts, and make Vermont roads safer, they said.

“Violations should be stiff for the bikers,” said a Northeast Kingdom property owner who provided written input. “That will wake them up to take responsibility for their contribution to the dangers.”

The largest beef participants had with policymakers is that they tend to view bike riding as a recreational activity instead of a primary transportation mode. The State, participants said, needs to do a better job both designing its roads so that they are bike friendly, especially in urban areas or along roadways that connect “destinations,” as well as integrating its transportation network so that bicycles in more places can be used to make at least a portion of longer commutes or trips.

Transportation funding needs to place additional emphasis on bike travel because good bicycle infrastructure leads to better-educated drivers and riders, which results in slower traffic and encourages people to live in bike-friendly places, they said. Walking and biking also leads to better health and reduces health-care spending, they said.

FREIGHT & PASSENGER RAILROAD SERVICE

While upgrades to freight and passenger lines compliment each other – what is good for passenger service is often good for rail service, and vice versa – their needs also compete for limited financial resources as most rail lines in Vermont do not carry passengers.

VTrans' goals regarding passenger rail are to extend Amtrak's Vermonter service to Montreal, and to expand Amtrak's Ethan Allen service so that it covers the entire Western Corridor ranging as far north as Burlington and as far south as Bennington, with service continuing on to Albany, New York and ultimately New York City.

The primary infrastructure improvements needed to achieve these goals is the replacement of aging and so-called "jointed" track with continuously-welded rail so that train speeds can increase to an average of between 59 mph and 79 mph. Such speeds are deemed critical to entice people to use passenger rail, otherwise it is faster to drive.

The State is looking to achieve expansion of the Ethan Allen in two phases: first extending service north through Middlebury to Burlington, and second establishing service south of Rutland through Manchester and Bennington. During 2014, VTrans will spend about \$19 million to upgrade track along a 20-mile stretch from Rutland north to Leicester. The Agency, meanwhile, is seeking federal grants to help pay for an estimated \$23 million in improvements elsewhere between Rutland and Burlington, the final pieces before Amtrak service could begin.

Freight rail, however, is less dependent on speed – although speed is important – and hinges more on track, bridge and tunnel improvements that allow heavier train cars (286,000 lbs) and taller train cars (so-called double stacked cars) to move through the state with ease. Multiple impediments to achieving these height and weight goals exist along the 300 miles of track owned by the State of Vermont.

The primary financial challenge to achieving both freight and passenger goals is that the federal government does not provide the State with regular, dedicated funding specifically targeted for rail improvements. This lack of dedicated rail funding means that federal funds used for rail either have to compete with other transportation needs, or come from competi-

tive grant programs and earmarks. All told in FY14, VTrans budgeted \$34.9 million, or 5.3 percent of its total budget, for rail needs.

Complicating Vermont's financial picture as it relates to passenger rail is that Amtrak recently changed how it allocates funding, and as a result Vermont was a big financial loser. Beginning this year, the Legislature had to allocate \$7.2 million to subsidize Vermont's two passenger services, when only \$4.8 million was needed just a year ago. This 50 percent increase resulted in no improvements, and was needed just to maintain Amtrak's current level of service, which is just one roundtrip daily on both lines.

With passenger subsidies skyrocketing, and competition for federal grants fierce, the federal government in 2013 decided to increase how it scrutinizes State rail priorities. For the first time Vermont, as well as all other states, are now required to have both a long-term capitalization plan for rail infrastructure, as well as a list of funding priorities. In the past, Vermont's rail plan was a general policy document that was only State mandated and did not contain such specifics.

VTrans is working to create such a document, but its preparation has already prompted questions, the largest being should the State continue to own 300 miles of track, or should it sell some – or all 300 miles – to private rail companies?

Vermont is somewhat unique as the vast majority of states do not own railroad infrastructure. Vermont contains some 600 miles of railroad track, of which the State owns about half and leases its use to a private railroad company. Generally speaking, Vermont's state-owned track is in worse condition than track that is privately owned. Given this, the Board asked public-hearing participants if the time has come for the State to sell the track it owns, seek public-private partnerships or form some other kind of business structure? Also, the Board asked if the State's priority should be moving freight, running passenger service, or a combination of both?

■ Selling Vermont's Rail Assets

The idea of selling Vermont's state-owned rail lines drew a mixed reaction from those who attended the Board's public hearings. Some were supportive,

while some were against. But an equal amount of others said they could not yet form an opinion unless they first knew how much money the State would receive. VTrans is working on that financial assessment, which hopefully will be part of its next rail plan. In the interim, public-hearing participants were asked to provide feedback simply regarding the concept of a possible sale.

“Retaining the rail for public use is key,” said a Middlebury participant who did not favor selling. “How profitable is Vermont Rail Systems, and what can we make from continuing to lease the track?”

“Sell the rail and let the private companies improve the line,” said a St. Albans participant to lots of head nodding. “I like the idea of selling the track,” added a Newport participant. “But don’t give it away. Get fair-market value.”

If the State does sell its track, “include in the deal the right of first refusal to repurchase the track so we can take the line back if the owner falls down on the job and runs the track into the ground,” a Morristown participant said.

Participants in both Bennington and Middlebury encouraged the state to do its homework and not only understand the rail’s value, but understand what is the best way for the State to achieve its goals and establish its priorities. If selling is the best way to do that, then sell. If maintaining ownership is prudent, then don’t sell, they said.

“Selling is secondary to making sure our policies allow rail companies to thrive in the freight business,” said a Middlebury participant. “What are the pros and cons – numerically?” asked a Bennington participant. “I am in favor of whatever financially makes sense.”

As for improving freight service in general, a Middlebury participant said the State needs to “understand the complexity of the entire system” and identify where establishing track siding could benefit local industry. “We need to invest in this type of thing,” the participant said, as he used the example of a local apple cider company that has goods transported by train to Albany, NY where it is offloaded before being trucked to Vermont. “Why can’t the unloading happen here?”

■ Passenger Service

Participants at all public hearings were overwhelm-

ingly pro rail, and encouraged the Legislature to invest in both service and track improvements. Everyone spoke in favor of increasing freight capacity. Bridge, tunnel and track improvements that benefit freight rail were viewed as both good for the economy and as a way to remove trucks from local roads.

Not everyone, however, supported continued subsidies for passenger rail. And once participants learned that operating Vermont’s two passenger services cost about \$10 million annually to operate but generated only about \$2.6 million in ticket revenue, some called for the program’s termination.

“Rail is a lost cause,” said a Newport participant. “We spend a lot of money and get very little back in rent. And we subsidize passengers too much, to the tune of 70 percent or so. Are we really obligated to help people travel to New York to this percentage?”

While several participants shared this view, they were in the minority. But even passenger rail supporters were divided on what the State’s top priority should be. Expanding train service from St. Albans to Montreal, not from Rutland to Burlington, was the people’s first priority in all locations but Bennington. Participants from the State’s southwest quadrant clearly believed reestablishing service from Rutland to Albany, with service through Manchester and Bennington, should be the State’s highest priority and be the first additional service brought on line.

“Southwest Vermont is not underserved, it is not served at all,” a Bennington participant said, stressing that commuter rail service in the Burlington area was established during the Dean administration and failed miserably. “The priority should not be Burlington... Where are the studies that show southwest Vermont would be worse than Burlington in terms of ridership?”

To boost ridership and therefore lower the annual passenger-rail subsidy, participants said the State should work with Amtrak to both increase the carrier’s options – one round trip per day is not enough – and improve its on-train experience.

“Get Amtrak to improve its services: add things like sleeping cars and a dining car that serve real food,” a St. Albans participant said. “People would travel by rail more if these things were part of the experience.”

“Amtrak needs to market better,” a Springfield participant said. “It needs to better use electronic

media and partner with the local chambers of commerce to get the word out.”

The key to increased revenue is providing service that is convenient, participants said. “The trains don’t run when people need it so people take the bus or drive instead,” a Newport participant said. “More revenue comes from more riders,” said a Bennington participant. “If you run more trains, you will get more revenue.”

Extending the Vermonter to Montreal likely is key to reducing the passenger-rail subsidy, a Springfield participant said. “A train to Montreal would increase services and add passengers,” the participant said.

A Newport participant called for the State to investigate the viability of establishing passenger rail service to Montreal from either Island Pond or Newport, while participants in other locations as well as those weighing in by email said the State needs to expand its planning beyond passenger rail and explore how to make commuter rail viable, particularly in the Putney and Burlington areas.

“The last long-term planning the State did regarding intercity rail was in 1989,” a Morristown participant said. “We need to do more planning now so that we have a plan in place regarding commuter rail so we have shovel-ready projects ready to go when funding becomes available... Planning does not cost that much, and we need to do it now. We need to think 20 years out and work backwards.”

Several participants who use train service said parking at Vermont’s various Amtrak stations needs significant expansion. “We need more long-term parking at the St. Albans station, and others if this is going to work right,” a Newport resident said.

Other participants said train ridership would increase if the state’s various public-transit services provided better connections to Vermont’s train stations. “You have to find ways to connect the modes,” a Bennington participant said. The State “needs to look at what infrastructure improvements are needed” to make this happen.

As already mentioned, not everyone supported continued investments in passenger rail. Those who opposed the continued subsidy said the State would

be better off putting the money into improved, local public transportation, including intercity bus service.

“Why do we want to support rail passenger service for a pitifully small number of travelers?” asked a Swanton resident via email. “We need to back away from nostalgia... Why not provide luxurious, high-speed, subsidized bus service to the same destinations? Invest in terminals if needed, use eco-friendly fuel types – say compressed natural gas – and make highway access improvements if needed. All this would tie into” an overall effort to improve local public transit.

■ Support for Freight

Improving rail lines to benefit freight instead of passengers, however, drew nearly unanimous support all over the state, even among many who opposed passenger-rail subsidies. Increasing freight capacity was seen not only as a way to reduce wear and tear on local roadways – which could save money – but also as a way to reduce local congestion and lower Vermont’s carbon footprint.

“Trains emit 0.7 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions despite hauling 44 percent of the freight nationally,” a participant from southeast Vermont said via email. “People and business relocate to areas serviced by trains, so this economic engine is multi dimensional. Each \$1 billion invested in trains and rails creates 20,000 jobs.”

This sentiment was echoed a couple of hundred miles to the north. “Freight is very important to the Northeast Kingdom,” a Newport participant said. “Diesel trains get 400 miles per gallon of fuel,” a second Newport participant said. “It is a very efficient way to travel and move freight.”

Participants in both Morristown and Middlebury called on the Legislature to either spend less money on roads and more money on improving the State’s rail infrastructure, or increase the gas tax to raise additional money to fund rail projects.

“Cut back on some road projects and put the money into rail,” a Morristown participant said. “How about using the gas tax,” a Middlebury resident asked. Earmark “one or two cents in gas taxes for rail. If that is politically feasible, then do it.”

PUBLIC TRANSIT – INTERCITY BUS & ELDERLY SERVICES

During each public hearing, the Board narrowed the conversation’s focus when it came to public transportation. Instead of engaging participants in a broad discussion regarding all things related to transit services, the Board asked participants to hone in on two specific aspects: intercity bus service and transportation for the elderly.

The reason for this narrow focus is timing. VTrans is currently in the midst of an effort to improve and expand intercity bus service throughout the state, so the time is ripe for people to provide feedback on services that could benefit their community. The philosophy was similar regarding transit services for the elderly. Vermont has an aging population. Decisions made now regarding transportation policy for older citizens will have a direct impact on their life choices and mobility, which affect everything from housing decisions to medical care.

This is not to say that participants did not mix in a few comments related to public transportation in general, which also are documented in this section. But the bulk of the conversation, as well as the vast majority of written comments the Board received via its website, were targeted towards intercity bus service and service for the elderly.

■ Intercity Bus Expansion

Intercity bus service in Vermont has greatly declined over the past 15 years. In 1998, Vermont contained 50 stops. Today, intercity buses stop in just six Vermont communities – Bellows Falls, Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, Montpelier and White River Junction – with three vulnerable to discontinuation.

Vermont is not alone in this decline. Nationally, there were some 15,000 stops in 1998. Today, the number is closer to 2,000. The reason for the decline is simple: economics. Intercity carriers like Greyhound, Trailways and Peter Pan have systematically cancelled routes that are not profitable. In fact, Greyhound in 2012 planned to eliminate its Vermont service connecting White River Junction to Springfield, MA (with stops in Bellows Falls and Brattleboro) until the Agency of Transportation intervened and began subsidizing the route.

The threat of losing this service appears to have motivated VTrans to take action to reverse the trend.

In November, the Agency announced that in 2014 it will spend about \$400,000 to subsidize three intercity bus routes – the aforementioned White River to Springfield, MA run – as well as two new routes: one that connects Burlington to Albany, NY, and another that connects Rutland to White River Junction. Additional stops along these routes have yet to be identified.

To provide these new – and rescued – routes time to mature, VTrans has made a three-year funding commitment. The hope is that after spending a total of about \$1.2 million (\$400,000 per year) to subsidize these three routes, that come 2017 ridership will be strong enough for a private bus company to continue the service without subsidy.

VTrans also is looking to expand intercity routes beyond these three, and has targeted a run between Newport and White River Junction (with a stop in St. Johnsbury), as well as a Route 9 run that would connect Albany, NY to either Manchester, NH or Boston with stops in both Bennington and Brattleboro.

The Board asked public hearing participants to weigh in regarding these options, as well provide general thoughts about the Agency’s efforts to expand and subsidize intercity bus routes. Participants were also encouraged to suggest additional intercity routes.

While not universal, public-hearing participants were generally supportive of both the three-year program as well as the possible new routes. Newport participants in particular were supportive of adding a Newport-to-White River run, but said the State should not stop there. The community also needs transit service that connects Newport to Burlington.

“Northeast Kingdom residents need to be able to travel to Burlington in a way that does not involve a car,” a Newport participant said. “Greyhound used to stop in Barton and Newport,” a West Glover resident wrote in an email. “Now people in our part of the Northeast Kingdom have to drive an hour or more to get a bus or a train to more distant places.”

A Morristown participant encouraged the State to look into connecting Newport to White River via train, not bus.

St. Albans participants said that a bus connection from his home area to Burlington also is needed, and called for the State to lean on Greyhound to alter

the schedule of its Montreal-to-Burlington run so that the bus not only stops in St. Albans, but also Swanton if possible.

“St. Albans lost its bus service eight-to-10 years ago,” a St. Albans participant said. “It is very annoying to drive to either Montreal or Boston and be passed by a bus” that basically ignores our community.

St. Albans participants also said that any new service that connects Burlington to Albany, NY should be extended to include St. Albans and possibly Swanton.

Springfield participants called on the State to add their community to the Greyhound service that is being subsidized between White River and Springfield, MA. They also said any new service established between Burlington and Albany, NY should include as many communities along Route 7 as possible.

“Our goal should be to get cars off the road,” a participant said. “This is one way to do it.”

A Springfield participant said she understood that successful intercity service must be somewhat speedy, which means that every community cannot be included in every route. However, she said European countries have long provided public transit service to nearly every town. She said Vermont needs to look into way to do the same.

“In Europe, even small towns have buses and you can get anywhere,” the participant said. “If they can do it, we can do it.”

Springfield participants even offered ways to pay for such service expansion. One called for the Legislature to establish a “graduated” income tax that would earmark funds for public transit, while another said that all motor-vehicle fines should go directly to public-transit expansion.

“Traffic fines should go to transportation, not other funds,” the participant said. “Level funding,” another participant said, “will not get us where we need to go. We need additional revenue.”

■ Multi-Modal Connections

Bennington participants overwhelmingly supported a service along Route 9 that would pass through Bennington and Brattleboro while connecting Albany, NY to either Manchester, NH or Boston. They also encouraged the State to ensure that any new service connecting Burlington to Albany, NY stop in Bennington.

A Bennington participant said the schedule related to such a service would determine its long-term viability.

“I want to get to Burlington (by) 9 a.m., and I want to get to Albany in time to make a connection to New York City,” he said. “To be successful, this needs a multi-model approach.”

Other Bennington participants stressed the need to make sure any new bus services are coordinated with other modes of public transportation.

“Make sure the (Route 9) bus to Brattleboro hooks up with the Vermonter Amtrak train,” a participant said. “Don’t spend this kind of money and create an expensive program that practically speaking is useless.”

Similar advice was expressed regarding any bus that connects Bennington to Albany, NY.

“We need a connection to Albany International Airport as well as the Rensselaer train station,” a participant said. “Think multi model, which is good for businesses as well as families making pleasure trips.”

A Bennington participant also encouraged the State to investigate the viability of bus service to Malta, NY.

A Springfield participant encouraged the state’s public-transit providers to rethink their philosophy of establishing bus stops at park-and-ride lots located at the outskirts of town. Instead, the State should be establishing bus routes that stop in village centers.

“Ideally, buses should stop in the middle of town so people don’t need cars to get to the bus,” the participant said.

While a majority of public-hearing participants supported subsidizing expanded intercity bus service, the sentiment was not universal. A Morristown participant said private bus carriers have pulled out of many places for a reason: hardly anyone requires the service.

“Let it stop,” the participant said. “You are throwing good money after bad.” A Springfield participant agreed: “We should not be subsidizing these things. If you provide good service, people will use it and pay for it.”

As a way to lower or eliminate taxpayer subsidies, Bennington participants encouraged VTrans to partner with ski areas that may be willing to help pay for intercity services that benefit their customers.

“Have VTrans reach out the ski areas,” a partici-

pant said to many nodding heads. “Find out if trains and buses are valuable to them.”

Participants in several locations said long-distance intercity service needs to offer both comfort and amenities if it is to be successful. “You need things like Internet, comfy chairs and coffee,” one participant said. “They need to be motor coaches, not buses. And then you need to market what it really is.”

■ Elderly Services

VTrans annually spends about \$3.4 million to provide transportation services for the elderly and disabled. This funding is used to provide rides for qualifying participants to travel to services such as medical appointments and day programs. The money is generally funneled to community organizations, who then schedule the transportation, which comes in many forms including taxi rides and volunteer drivers who are reimbursed for expenses such as mileage.

Reports indicate these services are well received, but that the funding provides just 75 percent of what is necessary to fulfill need. As a result, transportation for many seniors is curtailed once the money runs out, often resulting in missed appointments and increased isolation as seniors with limited mobility are unable to travel to programs and services designed to help them age in place.

Helping seniors age in place – a catch term for living in their own home as opposed to living in a nursing home or other care facility – is a State goal. Providing seniors the tools they need to age in place provides considerable financial benefits as the cost of providing such services is far less expensive than the cost of nursing-home care.

Adequate transportation has long been recognized as a vital tool to aging in place.

While current funding provides just 75 percent of the identified transportation need, level funding will quickly result in lost ground as Vermont has an aging population, thus demand is expected to grow. With this as a backdrop, the Board asked public-hearing participants their thoughts regarding fully funding the transportation needs of seniors. Overwhelmingly – nearly unanimously at every hearing – participants encouraged the Legislature to increase the program’s appropriation so that VTrans can provide 100 percent of the transportation funding needed by seniors who qualify for the program.

“The elderly have been paying taxes for years,” said a Newport participant. “They deserve to have the services later in life. Spend the money necessary to go from 75 percent to 100 percent.”

Professionals involved in operating elderly services said the financial shortfall works against the State’s goal of helping seniors age in place because when forced to choose, many organizations prioritize medical appointments over critical age-in-place trips associated with vocational services and other quality-of-life programs.

“This is not only about driving the elderly around,” a Newport resident said. “This is about treating them like valuable members of society.”

Participants at all public hearings were supportive of the existing program that provides grants to local community organizations, who then find ways to provide rides to seniors. They encouraged VTrans to maintain such an approach, and not to attempt to centralize services in any way.

The State, however, should play an active role in helping these local communities beyond just providing money, participants said. Many local organizations rely on volunteer drivers, which are often in short supply. The State could help recruit volunteers, they said.

“What the State can do is make people aware there is a problem,” a St. Albans participant said. “The State can help recruit drivers through partnerships with local programs that create public-service announcements and advertisements that are similar to the ones used to increase seatbelt usage and encourage car pooling.”

Maintaining a strong pool of volunteer drivers is vital to providing elderly transportation services because the only practical way to get seniors to the services they need to age in place, especially in rural areas, is in a car, a St. Albans participant said.

“The relatively small volume of riders and their dispersal across large rural areas creates a situation where traditional public transit...becomes prohibitively expensive and remarkably inefficient,” the participant said. “There simply aren’t enough riders going from one general location to another at approximately the same time.”

Since helping seniors age in place also saves money – although not within the transportation budget – participants encouraged the Legislature to think

globally and encourage VTrans to partner with other State agencies like the Agency of Human Services, which stand to benefit financially by keeping seniors out of nursing homes.

“VTrans should look to co-op services with non transportation agencies so the financial benefits can be shared,” a St. Albans participant said. A Newport participant agreed: “the financial savings from needing less nursing-home care should help pay for what is needed to boost the transportation program from providing 75 percent of what is needed to 100 percent of what is needed.”

A Springfield participant said funding for elderly transport services comes from VTrans, but service is coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services. It appears at times that the two do not communicate as well as they should, the participant said, and asked: “How can the State do better?”

A Lamoille County medical professional via email encouraged the State to find ways to expand transportation service to a greater population of elderly and disabled because some rural patients requiring care at Copley Hospital cannot get to medical appointments.

“For those who do not have traditional or managed Medicaid like VHAP, (subsidized transportation services are) not an option because they are not eligible,” one Lamoille County resident said. “So there is no way for them to get to medical appointments.”

A group of health-care professionals based in Springfield said via email that the funding shortfall for door-to-door medical appointments, combined with a lack of traditional evening and weekend public transportation services, often forces seniors to use more expensive ambulance services for non-emergency trips.

■ General Public-Transit Comments

Transportation challenges transcend the elderly. The most common complaint the Board heard was that buses do not run often enough to allow people to live a car-free lifestyle, something Vermont must make possible if the State is serious about lowering its greenhouse-gas emissions, almost half of which come from motor vehicles.

A medical professional based in Lamoille County via email said 35 patients during 2013 missed prenatal visits (often more than once) at The Woman’s

Center due to transportation issues. Another Lamoille County resident via email said a lack of weekend and evening public-transit options makes it challenging for people to live without a car. She said Lamoille County needs more than just commuter service, and encouraged service expansion connecting both Johnson and Hardwick to Morrisville.

A Winooski resident via email said both evening as well as additional daytime bus services are needed if people are going to be able to live a car-free lifestyle.

“For example, the bus only comes to the Champlain Mill after the early morning weekday rush hours,” the Winooski resident said. “This is absolutely ridiculous. Residents have jobs at different hours of the day, or would like to seek employment at different hours of the day. But this is impossible because we have no public transportation.”

A nurse who works at Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington echoed these sentiments. “Nurses schedules start at 7 a.m., 11 a.m., 3 p.m., 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. Is there any chance we could run buses to Georgia or St. Albans or Jeffersonville at these times?”

A Northeast Kingdom resident who lives five miles from a village center called for more local public transportation.

“I can’t do anything – go to work, go shopping, visit friends who live more than a mile way – without driving,” she said. “I’m 72-years old and I’m starting to think that I might have to give up my home and move to a town in order to walk to a store to buy food when I am no longer able to drive... This makes me very sad.”

Medical professionals in the Springfield area said Vermont’s youth would benefit greatly from increased after-hours transportation options in rural areas, particularly youth that need to access medical services, participate in health-related activities, and who are trying to get to work.

An Addison County resident via email said increased bus service that connects Vergennes to Burlington would be welcome. “There is a CCTA bus that runs twice a day,” she said. “But I would really like to have more time choices, like an 8:30 a.m. route and a 6:30 p.m. return.”

A Grand Isle resident via email said the State should consider funding a public-transit route from the Grand Isle ferry dock to the Burlington area.

“There is currently a bus from Plattsburgh to the Ferry dock... There should be matching bus service on the Grand Isle side,” he said. “The current funding equation for CCTA requires municipalities to pay a percentage of the costs. In this case, where a large percentage of the potential users are not (Vermont

residents) the funding model does not make sense. The ferry is considered a ‘federal highway’ since it links Vermont to New York, and the State receives federal revenues as a result of the ferry. Could some of these revenues be used to pay the local share of CCTA/GMTA service?”

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Highway safety is a perennial issue. While motor-vehicle manufacturers recently have improved efforts to make their products safer, drivers at the same time are increasingly distracted by the growing amount of technology that they either carry with them or pay to have installed within their vehicles.

Vermont highway fatalities and roadway crashes transcend geography and whether a community is urban or rural. The Green Mountain State annually experiences about 13,000 crashes, of which more than 300 result in incapacitating injury and some 70 deaths. Data shows that during a recent five-year period, nearly 75 percent of Vermont's 251 towns had at least one fatal crash occur within its borders. Quite literally, highway crashes and deaths happen everywhere.

While not all the Vermont data is in, 2013 appears to have been a typical year in terms of crash totals, including those that resulted in death. While highway fatalities had been trending down between 2009 and 2011, with a low of 55 deaths in 2011, fatalities spiked in 2012 to 77, Vermont's highest total in six years. Although 2013 saw fewer deaths, the total of 69 is right around the State's long-term average. Details involving 2013's fatal crashes breaks down as follows:

- 45 operators, 18 passengers, six pedestrians and zero bicyclists.
- 24 unbelted.
- Nine operators suspected of under the influence of alcohol.
- Three operators suspected of under the influence of drugs.
- 12 operators suspected of speeding.
- One operators under license suspension.

While 2013 statistically was a typical year in terms of highway fatalities, the fact that both the 2012 and 2013 totals failed to continue the downward trend seen between 2009 and 2011 helps to illustrate the need for Vermont to be ever vigilant in its efforts to reduce both motor-vehicle crashes in general and fatalities in specific.

To this end, VTrans and the Governor's Highway Safety Program in 2012 reenergized their efforts to enhance highway safety by creating a Vermont Safety Alliance. The Alliance in 2013 updated the State's

Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which was initially developed in 2005.

The plan prioritizes safety efforts into seven critical emphasis areas – young drivers, alcohol, driver inattention, safety belts, lane departure, aggressive driving, and intersections – of which six are largely behavioral and only one (intersections) is overwhelmingly subject to improvement efforts that involve engineering. The document is telling in that driver behavior and the acknowledgment that drivers need to take personal responsibility for their own safety, as well as the safety of others, is placed front and center.

Realizing that the State is retooling its safety efforts, the Transportation Board asked those who attended its public hearings for their thoughts on highway safety.

■ Primary Seatbelt Law

As they did in 2012, participants in 2013 overwhelmingly supported the proliferation of centerline rumble strips to warn motorists when they cross a roadway's centerline. There also was widespread support for tougher laws regarding impaired driving, including the use of both ignition locks triggered by breath sensors as well as confiscation of motor vehicles used by repeat offenders. Many participants also called for the Legislature to initiate a hands-free law when it comes to driving and using cell phones, as well as to upgrade driving without a seatbelt to a primary offense so that police can ticket motorists solely for driving unbelted.

"Give the cops the tools they need to get people to buckle up, which is a primary seatbelt law," a Middlebury participant said, echoing sentiments the Board heard all over the state. Participants in three locations said they believed support in the Senate has been lacking for a primary law, and they encouraged the Board to prompt senators to rethink their position.

A St. Albans participant noted that police whenever they run safety checkpoints must advertise ahead of time to warn people that they will be stopped at a particular location. He said such advanced warnings run counter to catching unbelted and impaired drivers, and he encouraged the Legislature to eliminate

the mandates that requires such advanced warnings.

Support for a primary seatbelt law was strong, but not universal. A St. Albans participant encouraged the Legislature to maintain the secondary law, but increase the fine as a way to encourage people to buckle up.

“Increase the seatbelt fine,” the participant said. “Right now it is \$25, which is too low.”

■ Impaired Driving

The safety issue that drew the largest response was impaired driving. People all across the state loudly encouraged the General Assembly to pass stricter laws regarding repeat offenders. Many supported a law that would mandate that any vehicles owned by a convicted drunk driver have a breath alcohol ignition interlock device installed.

Some people also said Vermont needs stricter laws punishing people that loan cars to anyone who does not have a driver’s license due to a suspension, or who blows into an ignition-interlock device so that a drunk can drive. Lawmakers should not be shy about confiscating people’s cars, no matter the personal consequence, they said.

“We need to get uninsured and suspended drivers off the road,” a Middlebury participant said. “In New York, if you lose your insurance the company contacts the DMV, who then takes your license plate away. We should do that in Vermont.”

Several Bennington participants also spoke strongly in favor of using ignition-interlock devices to curb drunk driving among repeat offenders.

“We need to focus more on impairment and repeat offenders,” one Bennington participant said. “Ignition-interlock devices will make sure a person is sober if they drive. And if you have one of these devices, the only reason you would call someone to borrow a car is because you were drunk. If someone loans them a car, you can make them an accessory.”

Another Bennington resident agreed and added: “if we have stringent penalties for these things it will show that we think it is a serious problem and that we intend to fix it. Promoting this is much more important than spending another \$1 million on a paving program.”

A third Bennington resident said the current law’s approach of blaming a bartender for serving people too much alcohol is misguided, and said the

law needs to be changed to make the drunk driver take full responsibility.

“We need a sociological shift,” the participant said. “You can’t place the blame on the bartender who makes his living on tips. Such an approach does not work on Wall Street or in real estate, and it does not work in bars.”

A Middlebury participant encouraged lawmakers to work with the court system to find ways that judges can take people’s license away but still provide them a way to get to work without a car.

■ Curbing Speed

While excessive speed was seldom discussed during the Board’s 2012 hearings, public-hearing participants in 2013 in nearly every location strongly spoke of the need to curb speeding and aggressive driving as a way to make roads safer. Several participants said police give people too much cushion to drive over the speed limit, and encouraged the Legislature to work with police to better enforce the posted speed.

“Find the maximum safe speed and enforce it,” A St. Albans participant said. “Don’t have 65 miles per hour be the posted limit and have the troopers give a 10-15 mph cushion.”

A Bennington participant called for Vermont to begin using automated speed enforcement in critical areas like school zones.

“They use automated speed enforcement in New York school zones and throughout Europe, and the statistics show it has a positive impact on reducing speed,” the participant said. “There is a firm in Maryland that will install the infrastructure and equipment for a piece of the fine.”

Statewide, participants encouraged VTrans to mount a public-service campaign to curb speeding and aggressive driving. People said they have seen such campaigns related to smoking, losing weight and driving through work zones, but that they have never seen one focused on speeding and aggressive driving.

“We need to talk more about aggressive driving, behavior problems and getting behind the wheel,” a Bennington participant said. “There needs to be a public campaign.” A Newport participant agreed. “We need more safety PSAs about these things, not just ones about work zones,” he said.

A Newport participant said higher DUI fines could be used to help pay for the creation and prolif-

eration of these public service announcements.

While such campaigns should target all Vermonters, particular efforts should target the state's youth and focus on rural roads, several Middlebury participants said. "Studies have shown that the best way to change behavior is to start with children," a participant said. "That is the place to start."

A Bennington participant encouraged VTrans to hire low-cost interns to help spread the safety message.

"We are losing the safety-messaging edge," the participant said. "We have a generation of parents that encourage jumping out from between cars and texting... Hire interns to get the safety message out and coordinate with schools."

A Rutland resident who emailed the Board said excessive speed on rural roads can be curbed by forbidding passing in areas marked with a double-yellow line. "We should join other states and have no passing on a double-yellow line," she wrote. "It just encourages people to pass where it is not safe."

■ Hands-Free Cell Phones

All across Vermont, participants likened texting to impaired driving and encouraged the Legislature to not only crack down on texting and driving, but also pass legislation limiting the use of cell phones to hands free.

A Morristown participant said it has gotten so bad that cyclists fear hand-held devices much more than large trucks. "We need to ban hand-held phones," the participant said. "And once we do, we need to enforce the ban rigorously."

A Newport participant agreed: "texting is eight times more dangerous than DUI. This needs more aggressive attention." A Bristol resident participating by email added "as much as I am committed to low-impact transportation" like riding a bike, "I can't engage in it if I'm threatened with impact from a passing car with a driver that does not see me."

A St. Albans participant encouraged the passage of hands-free legislation combined with the construction of roadside pull-offs to encourage responsible phone use. Others called for laws that allow police to ticket a motorist for texting based on the trooper's visual information only without the need for additional proof.

■ Additional Safety Suggestions

While curbing speed, eliminating impaired driving and curtailing cell-phone usage were the mostly widely discussed safety topics, participants also raised several other safety issues and offered suggestions.

Participants in both Middlebury and St. Albans said increasing public-transit options would decrease the number of cars on the road, and therefore make the roads safer. "Better public transit especially for the elderly and the young" who comprised 21 of the 46 vehicle operators killed in 2013 "can prevent the need to drive and make things safer," a St. Albans participant said.

A Middlebury participant went a step further and said teenagers are allowed to drive too young.

"Raise the age for getting a license, beef up education and update the content to include issues like texting and using cell phones," the participant said. "Kids should start driving at 16 years old, not 15."

A St. Albans resident agreed that kids start driving too young, and also called for changes.

"We need better education to help young people learn to drive," the participant said. "We need to find some way to have kids spend more time behind the wheel (with a permit) before they get their license. In France, for instance, you have to wait until you are 18-years old to get a license."

Other Middlebury residents called on the Legislature to continue to fund VTrans' Safe Routes to School Program even though the federal government has lifted the mandate. They also encouraged the State to combine the program with others such as "Bike Smart."

One Middlebury resident said halogen headlights on vehicles are too bright and create safety issues for on-coming traffic. Another said the retro-reflectivity of the new highway signs are also too bright and can cause confusion.

Newport participants said the State uses too much salt on Vermont's highways. Unless the State is going to spend the money to adopt a bare-roads policy, all salt does in most instances is turn snow to slush, which is actually more dangerous, they said.

"Salt destroys roads and does not make the road as safe as people think," a Newport participant said. "People just need to slow down. We are destroying water, cars, bridges and trees. Reduce the salt and

brine application by 75 percent and use more sand after plowing in areas where it would help. Salt is just instant gratification and expensive.”

A Newport participant noted that VTrans limits the use of salt along Interstate 91 between St. Johnsbury and Lyndon, and as a result that stretch is the highway’s safest because “the snowpack is true” and predictable. Another Newport participant said the State in many places tends to salt the middle of two-lane roads rather than both lanes individually. This results in the middle of the road being snow-free and encourages motorists to drive down the centerline and then shift into slushy lanes, which is dangerous, when they see oncoming traffic, he said.

“Don’t salt the centerline and force people to drive in the slush,” the participant said.

A Morristown participant said VTrans should use its network of Variable Message Boards much more than it does to communicate safety messages of all kinds. Another Morristown participant said the State needs to install better pedestrian crossing mechanisms, such as the type that deploy “flashing lights.”

Public-hearing participants in both Newport and Middlebury spoke of a need for better pavement condition as a way to improve safety. Roadways that are full of potholes, or roads that are badly patched, are safety hazards because drivers try to avoid the rough spots by leaving their lane. In the Northeast Kingdom, segments of Route 5A, Route 105 east of Newport, and routes 114 and 122 near Barton were identified as having particularly bad pavement, while in Addison County residents identified east-west roads like routes 17, 73, 74 and 125 as having particularly poor pavement to the point of making the roadway dangerous.

While the proliferation of centerline rumble strips was widely supported at all public hearings, a Bennington participant discouraged their use along roadsides as such strips would be hazardous to bicyclists. A Richford resident participating by email encouraged the State to do a better job painting its line striping.

“It will not cost VTrans any more to paint edge and center lines at the beginning of summer instead of the end of September,” the Richford resident said. “I’m concerned that VTrans is exposing Vermont to lawsuits by not painting the lines in a timely fashion.”

A Springfield participant called for the State to establish a centerline rumble strip along Route 5 in the Springfield area.

A St. Albans resident encouraged the State to test older drivers to ensure both their eyesight and reflexes are good enough to allow them to have a driver’s license. Another St. Albans participant suggested sunrise-to-sunset limitations for some classes of youth drivers.

A couple of St. Albans participants said requiring seatbelts on school buses would reinforce their usage within automobiles and likely result in higher seat-belt usage among adults, while another suggested a statewide ban on demolition derbies would improve the message society provides children.

Another St. Albans participant encouraged lawmakers to pass strict laws that forbid distractions such as eating and drinking (non-alcoholic beverages) while driving, as well as activities like shaving, putting on makeup and having a dog in your lap.

Construction of roundabouts was encouraged at several public hearings as a way to reduce the severity of intersection crashes and improve pedestrian safety. Some, however, criticized the State for constructing some roundabouts, like the one along Route 15 in Hyde Park, so narrow that 53-foot trucks have difficulty navigating them.

“Roundabouts serve to increase safety and reduce delay for all roadway users regardless of mode,” a Burlington resident said via the Board’s website. “To provide the highest level of service and safety... roundabouts should be constructed with accompanying sidewalks and cycle tracks around their perimeters. The Dutch, who have some of the safest roadways and the highest bicycle-modal share in the world, can be looked to for examples of what our infrastructure could look and operate like.”

A Rutland resident encouraged the State to make Route 4 between Rutland and Woodstock, as well as Route 7 between Rutland and Burlington, four-lane highways because people dangerously weave in and out of traffic on the current two-lane roads.

“I know it would be expensive,” the Rutland resident wrote. “But it would help with safety... Speeders would then have their own lane without endangering everyone else.”

PARK & RIDE EXPANSION

Vermont over the past decade has significantly increased its Park & Ride capacity both in terms of number of locations as well as services these facilities provide. As public-transit services expand, Park & Rides have become multi-model hubs where not only carpoolers but also both single-occupancy motorists and cyclists can make transit connections that allow them to travel to destinations without having to rely on a single-occupancy automobile for the entire trip. As a result, Park & Rides play a critical role in helping the State achieve its goal of reducing carbon emissions related to transportation.

In 2003, Vermont contained 23 Park & Rides consisting of about 742 spaces, all of which were owned and operated by VTrans. Today, the State-run system has grown to 28 Park & Rides comprising about 1,270 spaces. Realizing that a State-run system can provide only limited services, VTrans in 2005 initiated a Municipal Park & Ride Program whereby small grants – usually no more than \$10,000 – were issued to town governments to help them create small lots to serve local need. To date, this increasingly popular program has created 46 facilities with 750 spaces.

This rapid expansion of Vermont's Park & Ride inventory has prompted VTrans to take half a step back and develop a statewide plan that not only identifies gaps in the current system, but also looks for ways to fill those gaps. To help this effort, the Agency is working with Vermont's regional planning commissions. VTrans also asked the Transportation Board to seek public comment and ask Vermonters to identify places where they believe new Park & Rides would benefit their community.

Public hearing participants expressed considerable support for the Agency's Park & Ride program, and offered the following suggestions for expansion:

- The intersection of routes 105 and 114 in Island Pond. A bootleg lot exists there now, which should be upgraded and made official.
 - Somewhere along Route 100 in Newport Town.
 - Route 2 somewhere in Grand Isle County, possibly near the Grand Isle town line.
 - Along Route 78 in Highgate.
 - Somewhere along the new Route 15 bus corridor between Jeffersonville and Burlington.

- New Haven Junction at the crossroads of routes 7 and 17.
- Near the intersection of routes 7 and 125 in East Middlebury.
- There used to be a bootleg location near the intersection of routes 17 and 116 in Bristol. This area needs a permanent, official facility.
 - Near the intersection of routes 22A and 74 in Shoreham.
 - The Perkinsville School area along Route 106 in Weathersfield.
 - At the Hartness Airport.
 - Somewhere near the I-91 Exit 13 ramps in Norwich, possibly at the confluence of routes 5 and 10A.
 - The Depot parking lot in North Bennington acts as a “de facto” Park & Ride. The State should construct a real one somewhere along Route 67 in North Bennington.

■ Suggested improvements

Aside from suggesting new locations, public-hearing participants also made several comments regarding existing Park & Rides, as well as suggestions on how to improve the Park & Ride system in general.

A Springfield participant said the existing lot at the intersection of routes 5 and 106 has no lights, no pavement and no markings. Adding these things, along with keeping the facility cleaner, would improve usage, the participant said. Another Springfield participant said the existing facilities off of I-91 at Exit 7 in Springfield, Exit 8 in Weathersfield, and Exit 9 in Hartland all need expansion.

A Bennington participant said the existing Park & Ride in Manchester near Exit 4 off of Route 7 needs to be kept cleaner and have better signage. Another Bennington participant praised the new facility in Wilmington, and said its design and upkeep is a “great example of what needs to happen” all around the state.

A Morristown participant said that the erection of solar panels could be compatible with Park & Rides, and encouraged the State to look into how such power generation could help supply a network of electric charging stations at various Park & Rides.

A Newport participant encouraged VTrans to work with the Agency of Natural Resources and local

municipalities to encourage the public to use Vermont's vast network of public boat launches as Park & Rides.

A St. Albans participant suggested that VTrans prioritize issuing municipal Park & Ride grants to towns that plan to build lots along existing public-transit routes. Another St. Albans participant said the inclusion of public toilets and shelters at Park & Rides would enhance usage.

A St. Albans participant said the municipal Park & Ride in Swanton is often full and could benefit from expansion, while another St. Albans participant said the Park & Ride in Georgia is often at capacity and should be expanded not only with additional parking spaces but also with better geometry for bus

access. Another participant added that the Georgia lot would benefit from lights, as would most Park & Rides in general.

A participant who supported the Municipal Park & Ride Program said the State should develop some sort of "carrot" within this grant program to encourage towns to better maintain these facilities once they are built.

A Middlebury participant encouraged the State to open a Welcome Center at the Ferrisburg Park & Ride at the junction of routes 7 and 22A. The participant lauded VTrans for renovating the old train building at that location, but was disappointed it now just sits empty.

"Finish the job," he said. "Open a Welcome Center."

INDIVIDUAL LOCATION & SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Throughout the Board's public hearings, participants sometimes raised specific concerns about a local location or an issue that was regional in nature as opposed to statewide. This chapter captures these specific concerns as a way to bring them to the attention of VTrans and the Legislature.

Several St. Albans participants complained that VTrans used inadequate or "cheap" pavement during a recent repaving of Route 78 in Swanton. Participants said the new surface contained aggregate that was likely too small, which caused the pavement to rapidly deteriorate. When VTrans paves a road it needs to "make sure the pavement quality can handle the amount of traffic" that road sees, the participants said.

A Newport participant said VTrans has forbidden the local snowmobile club from using a groomer on a Route 14 bridge at Airport Road between Coventry and Irasburg. In the past, the groomer had steel lags, and the participant said the club understood the State's concern that the machine was beating up the bridge. But the club has since switched to a rubber-tracked groomer, which does not destroy the infrastructure, yet VTrans still won't allow the machine on the bridge. Instead, VTrans wants the club to move the trail so it does not cross the bridge, but doing that would be costly and possibly impossible due to nearby wetlands, the participant said. The club would like VTrans to grant it at least another year to use the bridge, and in that time also engage in discussions with the club to come to a workable solution.

A Middlebury participant said both Route 7 and Route 16 would benefit from having emergency pull-offs along their roadside, and encouraged VTrans to begin planning their locations and identifying what easements or property acquisitions may be needed.

A Bennington participant encouraged VTrans to rethink the way it builds sidewalks as the current method is unfriendly to the disabled community.

"The gap between sidewalk blocks differs greatly between the State design and the way Bennington designs them," the participant said. "The distance between two slabs of sidewalk is much greater in the State design making them inhospitable to any one who is traveling in a nontraditional manner. Folks

using chairs, walkers, strollers, etc., experience a rather violent bump in each joint as they move along a sidewalk."

A Springfield participant said Route 10 near its junction with Route 103 is very curvy and cannot handle more traffic. Improvements will be needed if development is to be approved in the area.

A Lamoille County town manager said that lawmakers should consider providing towns a dedicated funding stream for bridge repair if it wants to ensure the thousands of town-owned bridges are properly cared for.

"Although bridges are a town responsibility, the State has a major role as it receives federal aid as well as the gas tax and access to other broad-based taxes," the administrator said. "Bridges are cost prohibitive for municipalities to take care of on their own with only property taxes."

A Morristown participant said the traffic signals along Brookline Street in Morristown should be synched so that traffic flows more smoothly. "We should not erect new lights that do not use modern synchronization equipment," the participant said.

A Middlebury participant said VTrans is planning to install a traffic signal along Route 7 in Ferrisburg at a location where it is also planning, later in the future, to likely place a roundabout. The participant encouraged VTrans to ditch the plan for the signal and accelerate the roundabout. "Don't invest just to destroy later," she said.

A Bennington participant said a significant number of crashes take place at the intersection of Route 7 and Jackson Cross Road in Pownal. He encouraged VTrans to assess the location and develop a crash-mitigation strategy to make the intersection safer. Another Bennington participant also encouraged VTrans to assess the safety of the intersection of Route 7 and Carpenter Hill.

A Middlebury participant said there is no stop-sign pavement marking at the intersection of Route 7 and Holman Road in Salisbury. For safety sake, he encouraged VTrans to paint one.

A Springfield participant said VTrans and the DMV should make sure that trucks properly register the weight that they tow. The participant said truck owners often register lower weights to save money,

and then once they have their paperwork increase the amount that they haul.

A Middlebury participant said VTrans is planning a bridge project in Lincoln about 1,000 feet from a school, and the plans do not include placing a sidewalk on the bridge. The participant encouraged VTrans to rethink this decision.

A Newport-area resident via email said VTrans sometimes fails to enforce its own policy, and provided several examples that should not have happened and that he hopes does not happen elsewhere. The examples include:

- At the intersection of Route 5 and Shattuck Hill, the left-turn signal frequently operates when there is no traffic turning left, thus delaying the mainline.

- At the intersection of Route 5 and Quarry Road, VTrans did not enforce the State mandated condition that MacDonald's eliminate its current direct access to Route 5. As a result, the access sits literally right on top of the signal and is a textbook example of what not to do as it results in inappropriate turn movements and queuing.

- In addition to poor access management at the McDonald's, the stop line for southbound Quarry Road traffic is set back approximately 60 feet to allow large trucks accessing the industrial area to make the turn resulting in a loss of green time of approximately three seconds for southbound vehicles with resultant impact on the main line. Instead, a simple improved radius would have allowed the truck to turn without causing delays.

- VTrans wants to eliminate access points, yet the District 9 Garage has two within 200 feet, while a nearby business with a half-mile of frontage on Route 5 north of Derby Center with immaculate sight distances is being forced to close a very low-volume drive in order to get a permit to develop in the future.

- Meanwhile, at a location about a mile north on Route 5 towards Derby Line, an old farmhouse had apartments added to it and its two existing access points with dangerous sight distances were allowed to remain even though the property has poor sight distance and no turn-around for the parking area resulting in users needing to back onto the roadway.

A St. Albans participant said the community recently applied for money to build a bike path from the village to the high school, but was rejected. However, Colchester applied for a similar grant, which

was accepted. "Colchester got money, why not St. Albans?" the participant asked.

A Middlebury participant said the views of the Champlain Valley from the new Champlain Bridge are stunning, and encouraged VTrans to place a bench along the bridge's sidewalk where "it is wide enough" so people could relax and look over the water.

A Burlington resident via email said that national trends show that both seniors and young adults are driving less and seeking car-free transportation modes in increasing numbers. He encouraged lawmakers to establish a "Vermont All-Mode Transportation Initiative" that would receive an annual appropriation of \$90 million in general-fund revenue. The initiative would greatly improve walking, biking, and public transportation so that Vermont can serve the needs of the future. The initiative should fund projects with the following benefits:

- Economic development.
- Transportation sustainability with an emphasis on land-use transportation relationships.
- Energy conservation and pollution reduction.
- Downtown, town center and urban investments in walkable and bikable infrastructure, particularly roundabouts and cycle tracks.
- Transportation safety upgrades.

Also as part of this All-Mode initiative, general-fund revenues should be dedicated to commuter rail and intercity rail passenger service in the following way:

- Initiate commuter rail service connecting Burlington, Middlebury, Montpelier and St. Albans.

- Initiate "circuit trains" connecting Burlington to Rutland, Bellows Falls to White River Junction, and Montpelier to Burlington as the foundation for a full, intercity passenger service with connections along all existing rail corridors.

- A north-south light-rail line in Rutland connecting the south end mall via the city-center to the upper residential areas.

- Create full connectivity between rail services and the bus routes provided by Vermont's regional public transportation service providers.

"Each worker using these services to conduct a 20-mile, one-way commute instead of driving a single-occupancy vehicle would save \$7,000 in after-tax income," the Burlington resident said.

A Morristown participant called the new Cambridge roundabout a “farce” and a “waste of money.”

A participant via email called the State’s vehicle-inspection mandate “unconstitutional” because it “discriminates” against Vermont vehicle owners by requiring that they submit to having their vehicles certified annually or lose the privilege of driving on the very roads that their tax dollars are used to maintain.

“At the same time, the inspection mandate allows vehicles that are not registered in Vermont to enter our borders and travel upon the very same roads unencumbered by this mandate, potentially putting the lives of the individuals that submitted to the mandate and proved compliance in peril from vehicles that are not regulated and may be deemed unsafe based on the same Vermont safety inspection criteria,” the participant wrote.

A Morristown participant urged the State to conduct more intensive background checks of those hired to drive public-transit buses.

A Colchester resident participating via email encouraged lawmakers to allocate more funding for the general maintenance and improvement of Vermont’s roadways, especially those that experience high traffic volumes such as the ramps accessing I-89 at Exit 16 and most of Route 7 in Chittenden County.

“There are sections of Route 7 in Colchester that have not been maintained in 22 years,” the participant said. “Road-surface decay is part of the problem, drainage efforts another. It is not enough to mow the roadsides, it is of primary importance to maintain the ditches and swales along the road.”

A Newport participant said Main Street in Newport likely will need congestion-relief measures should nearby businesses like Jay Peak and others create the 1,500 jobs that are predicted. He encouraged VTrans to begin the planning now.

A Morristown participant said increasing the number of people who telecommute to work will help reduce the amount of greenhouse gases created by Vermont commuters. Reducing Vermont’s transportation-related carbon footprint is a stated goal, therefore the State should adopt a telecommuting policy for State workers that provides guidance and encourages the practice.

Morristown participants also encouraged VTrans to find ways to expand the car-share program that is successful in Chittenden County to other parts of the state. Morristown participants also encouraged VTrans to develop a statewide “slugging” network, possibly by developing a smartphone app that would allow drivers and sluggers an easy way to connect.

CONCLUSION

The Transportation Board thanks all who participated in making this report possible, including the many employees of VTrans who provided background information, municipal officials who helped spread the word about public hearings throughout their local communities, all of Vermont's regional planning commissions who were instrumental in securing meeting rooms and providing other logistics, and, of course, the 250 Vermonters who participated by either attending a public hearing or providing the Board with written comments.

The Board's public-hearing process is not meant to provide VTrans and the Legislature with a "scientific" cross section of opinions. Participation was both self-selected and 100 percent voluntary. The Board nonetheless considers the information it gathered to be a valuable resource for policy makers, especially when this year's comments are combined with those the Board received in 2012 while visiting six completely different Vermont locations. The 2012 report touched on some of the same topics as this year's report – such as transportation revenues, bike/ped issues, rail and public-transit concerns, and highway safety – and can be accessed through the Board's website at <http://tboard.vermont.gov>.

Participants both this year and last came from a wide variety of backgrounds including tried-and-true advocates, municipal officials, and average citizens. Demographically, participation ranged from young people in their 20s to seniors in their 80s, and a whole lot of folks in between.

If there was a common theme that permeated both the 2012 and 2013 process, it is that Vermonters are not satisfied with the transportation services the State currently offers. While there certainly were calls for VTrans to eliminate waste and spend its money more wisely, it also is clear that simply re-prioritizing how the Agency spends its money will not produce the additional revenue needed to both expand important services such as public transportation and improve bike-ped safety, as well as significantly reduce the estimated \$200 million gap needed to properly maintain the State's transportation assets and infrastructure.

Vermonters clearly understand that times are changing and revenue generation to pay for transportation infrastructure needs to change as well. State residents also recognize that Vermont's population is aging at the same time that a growing number of young people – especially those under 30 – value and use automobiles much less than previous generations. As a result, Vermonters require more non-vehicle infrastructure and services than they have in the past.

The input received from this year's public hearings, much like the input from 2012, highly encourages the General Assembly to find ways to increase services that will help Vermonters lower their dependence on single-occupancy motor vehicles, while at the same time strengthen highway safety and continue to improve the condition of the State's aging roads, bridges and culverts.

