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House Transportation Committee

Kelly Stoddard Poor, Associate State Director, AARP Vermont

Most of us take our mobility for granted. We grab our keys and head out to work, buy groceries, run errands and go to social outings—all without a second thought. Transportation policy and the infrastructure investments of the past 100 years have resulted in tremendous mobility for many Vermonters. But they have also left many isolated.

One-third of US residents do not drive. This number includes: children, many people with incomes too low to afford the upkeep of a personal vehicle, more than one in five people over the age of 65, many people with a disability, and others who, for a variety of reasons, choose not to drive.

For many of these individuals, accessing transportation can range from a minor inconvenience to an insurmountable barrier especially in rural parts of our state, where transportation has long been a seemingly intractable problem.

Reduced mobility has a direct and often debilitating effect on older Vermonters' independence. More than 50 percent of non-drivers over age 65 normally do not leave home most days, partly because of a lack of transportation options, those in rural areas or remote suburbs are most likely to be affected by this dynamic.ⁱ

One of the most important factors affecting the range and accessibility of transportation choices is the built environment. Transportation networks have been built mainly to accommodate movement of personal cars and cargo traffic as quickly as possible. This not only creates unsafe and unwelcoming conditions for other modes of travel, but reduces transportation options and increases injuries and fatalities. Many barriers exist, especially for older adults, to walk, bike or take public transit. Streets may be too wide to cross safely, or a lack of sidewalks may hinder a walk to the store or bus stop.

Many people are expected to outlive their driving years—men by 7 years and women by 10, on average.ⁱⁱ

Older adults overwhelmingly want to live in their own homes and communities, even when they no longer drive. Livable communities are great places for people of all ages, and in fact studies show more people of all ages desire such communities. They include safe, walkable streets; age-friendly housing and transportation options; access to needed services; and opportunities for residents of all ages to participate in community life.

Walkability -- As we drive less, the use of other transportation modes such as riding a bus, walking or using a bicycle have increased.

Safe, accessible, well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental community investment that enhances public health and maximizes social capital.

- Public Health Benefits
- Reduces Isolation & Improves Quality of Life/Independence
- Economic Prosperity
- Climate / Environment

Local communities must focus on accommodating more trips by walking. Walking provides the link that connects an older adult at home with the public transportation system.

- Crumbling or absent sidewalks, poorly marked intersections, inadequate time to cross large intersections and a lack of benches for resting presents significant challenges to older Vermonters who want to walk in their community.
- Without a safe and supportive space that enables people to walk, older adults will struggle to reach public transportation stops and other destinations.

Enhance Walkability:

- **Prioritize high-use areas and connectivity:** At the outset of a sidewalk construction program, prioritize where to build first by focusing on a quarter-mile circle around schools, parks, bus stops and key commercial destinations. Everything within that circle should be a priority for sidewalk construction.
- **Make the sidewalk wide enough:** Sidewalks are critical in downtown neighborhoods and busy retail areas, both of which have lots of people, destinations and potential conflicts with vehicles. In these areas it's important to install sidewalks that are wide enough to handle foot traffic and features such as cafe seating, benches and other spots for socializing.
- **Make sure sidewalks are well-maintained and appealing,** with safe and convenient street crossings and enough width to accommodate two or three people walking side by side.
- **Embrace proactive design and use target speeds, not operating speeds:**
 - i. When vehicles moving at 20 mph collide with pedestrians, fewer than 10 percent of those struck are killed, most injuries are minor and 30 percent suffer no injuries at all. When a vehicle is traveling at 30 mph, 45 percent of pedestrians hit are killed and many are seriously injured; at 40 mph, more than 80 percent of the pedestrians involved are killed and all are severely injured.

- ii. A proactive approach uses design elements to affect behavior and lower speeds. This may be the single most consequential intervention in reducing pedestrian injury and fatality.¹

Foster transportation system efficiency and access through Complete Streets. Streets and sidewalks should be designed for all users and give priority access to system use in alignment with livability sustainability goals. Put in place a transparent system to measure impacts, both positive and negative. Transportation is a means, not an end, and can be used to help communities achieve a variety of quality-of-life goals.

An ideal Complete Streets policy includes the following:

- **Vision and intent:** Includes an equitable vision for how and why the community wants to complete its streets.
- **Diverse users:** Benefits all users equitably, particularly vulnerable users and the most underinvested and underserved communities.
- **Commitment in all projects and phases:** Applies to new, retrofit/reconstruction, maintenance, and ongoing projects.
- **Clear, accountable expectations:** Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval and public notice prior to exceptions being granted.
- **Jurisdiction:** Requires interagency coordination between government departments and partner agencies on Complete Streets.
- **Design:** Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines and sets a time frame for their implementation.
- **Land use and context sensitivity:** Considers the surrounding community's current and expected land use and transportation needs.
- **Performance measures:** Establishes performance standards that are specific, equitable, and available to the public.
- **Project selection criteria:** Provides specific criteria to encourage funding prioritization for Complete Streets implementation.

¹ AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of the National Household Travel Survey.

ⁱⁱ D. Foley et al., "Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Aged 70 Years and Older in the United States," American Journal of Public Health, Vol 92, No. 8 (August 2002).

¹ National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO; October 2012). Urban Street Design Guide. Page 24-25. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-nacto-urban-street-design-guide.pdf>