

Transportation for Vermonters

AARP VT • American Lung Association in Vermont • CarShare Vermont • Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association • Green Mountain Transit • Local Motion • Renewable Energy Vermont • Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club • Vermont Clean Cities Coalition • Vermont Energy Investment Corporation • Vermont Natural Resources Council •

Vermont Public Interest Research Group

2020 Policy Agenda

The goals of accessing jobs, aging successfully in our communities, improving our health, and reducing our state’s greenhouse gas emissions all share one common solution: sustainable and accessible transportation choices for Vermonters. In support of a transportation system that will help all of Vermont’s communities meet economic, community, and environmental goals, Transportation for Vermonters has adopted the following key policies priorities for 2020.

Shape the Transportation and Climate Initiative to ensure that it is strong and equitable.

The Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) is a cap and invest system that has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and generate revenue to help transform our transportation system. T4VT supports the use of this method to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions and fund a modernized Vermont transportation system that meets the mobility needs of all Vermonters. It is critical that the program does not disproportionately disadvantage low-income and vulnerable Vermonters. T4VT believes strongly that the funds generated must advance emissions *and* mobility goals through a variety of complementary short and long-term strategies – for example, through investments in housing near transportation options, programs to help people use cleaner personal or shared vehicles, rural transportation choices, and infrastructure for safe walking and biking.

To further inform Vermont’s participation and program development under TCI, T4VT has developed the following guiding principles for the investment of TCI revenue:

- Investments should be aligned with the overall goals of the initiative, including “reducing climate changing pollution, creating economic opportunity, and improving transportation equity for currently underserved and overburdened populations.”¹
- Investments should consider both short and long term strategies to dramatically reduce emissions now while shifting our systems of land use and transportation.
- Investments should support programs, policies, and solutions that will directly reduce vehicle miles traveled and car dependence without limiting mobility.

¹ <https://www.transportationandclimate.org/nine-states-and-dc-design-regional-approach-cap-greenhouse-gas-pollution-transportation>

- Investments should promote connectivity between and among a variety of transportation modes, befitting Vermont’s rural context. Different solutions will be needed in different communities; an openness to a variety of right-sized solutions is essential.
- TCI proceeds must not be spent to backfill budgets for roads, bridges, general funds, or even other needed climate solutions like weatherization or thermal fuel switching.

Actions:

- *We call upon the Legislature to affirmatively support the adoption of a strong and equitable Transportation and Climate Initiative by the State of Vermont, provided it advances the principles above.*
- *Recognizing that TCI will likely take time to implement, and that it will not sufficiently cover all transportation investment needs, we urge the state of Vermont not to wait to make necessary investments in a cleaner, more accessible transportation system.*

Expand transit service to better serve all Vermonters.

Our rural development pattern and aging population mean that additional investment in transit – along with innovation and modernization – are needed to serve the population’s transportation needs. We see “transit” as encompassing the network of choices that links people to where they need to go, whether shared vehicles, bikes, walking, or buses. We envision a transit system that decreases greenhouse gas emissions and works for all people in Vermont, with special attention to Vermont’s older adults, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes.

Actions: As a complement to the Public Transit Policy Plan and other initiatives, we support the following:

- *Increase transit funding to create a 21st century transit system that improves overall mobility, deploys cleaner vehicles, and harnesses new technologies.* With increased funding, Vermont can build on its successes with rural transit and modernize our system in key areas, especially:
 - *Promoting transit through outreach and education* (for example, Go Vermont) as well as through improved ride scheduling technology that demystifies transit and makes it an appealing, convenient option.
 - *Fully optimizing the transportation services we have*, such as by filling open seats in rides that are already occurring, using new technologies, growing volunteer driver programs, and enhancing local connectivity and microtransit. This effort must include removing barriers to programs and providers of transit services to

allow for more coordination of funding sources and services to better serve all riders.

- *Identifying a specific funding source to electrify public transit and school buses, for example, by expanding the scope of the existing energy efficiency utilities, allowing utilities to meet Tier III targets through electric bus investment, or other funding mechanisms.*
- *Taking advantage of new technology and micromobility options, and also undertaking planning to integrate bus routes with car and bike share locations, bike routes, and other complementary transportation services.*

Support downtowns, villages, and compact community centers.

When housing, jobs, schools, and services are closer together, people have more transportation choices, which saves them money and reduces GHG emissions. Supporting investments like water and wastewater infrastructure, sidewalks, trails, and bike paths, and housing in smart growth locations helps lay the foundation for a diverse, sustainable transportation system. Supporting full implementation of the state’s 2011 Complete Streets Policy, which ensures that roads are safe for all transportation modes, and people of all ages and abilities, is also essential.

Actions:

- *Increase and expand the Downtown Transportation Fund.* From 1999 to 2019, this successful program awarded 124 grants to 23 communities – over \$11 million in awards leveraging over \$48 million in other investment. In addition to making it safer to walk and bike, these improvements support community revitalization and local businesses. Currently funded at approximately \$300K annually, we propose increasing the fund to previous levels of \$1 million annually. If funding is increased, *expand the program so state designated villages* that have completed the Better Connections planning process are eligible, which helps include more rural communities.
- *Support inter-agency programs that advance smart growth planning,* such as the Better Connections program, by continuing to fund and evaluate this and similar programs.
- *Invest in and support locally-driven placemaking efforts.* “Placemaking” efforts are projects and investments that improve the livability and appeal of our communities, which helps make places more walkable and bikeable, supports local businesses, and strengthens community identity. Examples of “placemaking” include walking and biking trails, pocket parks, community centers, and farmers’ markets. Support enabling legislation to establish a crowd-funding platform for towns to apply for community funded (crowd-funded) projects.

Reduce Barriers to Electric Vehicle (EV) Adoption.

EVs will play an important part in the short-term approaches to reduction of greenhouse gases. We believe that new burdens on EV users and potential EV users could hinder the growth of the EV market precisely when we need to rapidly accelerate EV adoption if we are to reduce carbon emissions, meet the state's established climate objectives, and avoid the most dire effects of climate disruption.

The Public Utility Commission report recently noted that currently, the transportation fund revenue loss from EVs is relatively low, and Vermont loses far more revenue from increased fuel efficiency standards from conventional vehicles than from EVs.

Actions:

- We support the Commission's recommendation to wait for higher EV adoption levels before implementing new taxes, and specifically agree with waiting until EVs represent 15 percent of annual vehicle sales in Vermont.

Other considerations

T4VT acknowledges that the transportation system took a long time to develop, and will take a long time to reinvent. At the same time as making investments in technologies like electric vehicles, Vermont must also work on the *structural* barriers that affect the way we get around: for example, by shifting away from sprawl and toward villages and downtowns, modernizing zoning, redesigning our roads, and reducing the oversupply of parking by changing zoning or implementing pricing.

In our rural state we are not only accustomed to driving, we often have no other choices. T4VT looks forward to helping advance innovative models so that people can access transportation options – including walking, biking, transit, cleaner vehicles, and more – that are convenient, successful, clean, and save money!

Transportation for Vermonters is a broad coalition committed to increasing the affordability, access, and sustainability of Vermont's transportation system.

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