

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 Education Program • Vermont Energy Investment Corporation • Vermont Natural Resources Council • Vermont Public Interest Research Group

February 9, 2021

Representative Michael Marcotte, Chair
House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
Via email

Chair Marcotte,

On behalf of Transportation for Vermonters (T4VT) – a broad coalition committed to increasing the affordability, access, and sustainability of Vermont’s transportation system – I am writing to enthusiastically support the enabling and funding of the Better Places Program. We support Better Places because it provides important opportunities for both economic revitalization *and* transportation – both of which Vermont and Vermonters very much need in this moment.

T4VT believes that strategic investments in a sustainable transportation system can help increase access to opportunity, support local businesses, improve people’s health, reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and boost community vitality. Investments in our community centers in particular – our downtowns and villages – are key for providing a variety of transportation choices, since the layout of these areas makes it easier to walk, bike, or take transit.

We support the Better Places Program because it funds locally-driven efforts to create human-scaled places that support community vitality, spur economic activity, and make it easier to get around.

Community-generated “placemaking” projects – whether parklets, experimental bicycle and pedestrian improvements, or outdoor spaces for restaurants and other businesses – improve the livability and appeal of our communities. Small improvements like these can make places more human-scaled – that is, more comfortable to get around on foot or by bike – which creates a welcoming environment and sense of place that supports local businesses, and strengthens community identity.

We believe that these types of investments are particularly important as we begin to emerge from the pandemic, and that they can catalyze longer-term successes for transportation, housing, and businesses.

Placemaking investments can help restore people’s comfort being out in their communities, by making outdoor spaces in particular more welcoming, walkable, and accessible. This in turn will

support downtown and village businesses at a critical time as they work to recover from COVID-19.

Less tangible, but equally important, is that these spaces play an essential role in allowing people to connect and reconnect, building community connections and social capital – the very assets that help us weather challenges and move ahead with renewed vision.

In the longer term, these and additional investments will reinforce these places as centers of our community, allowing businesses to thrive, attracting residents, and providing active, clean transportation choices.

We also believe these investments will provide an opportunity for communities to innovate.

While many communities wish to undertake revitalization efforts or changes that support biking and walking, it can sometimes be difficult to know where to start, or to generate buy-in – it can, after all, be difficult to know in advance how a particular change will make a place feel. The scale of these grants, the crowdfunding approach, and the opportunity for quick build, pilot, and other projects, means that Better Places projects can help communities figure out what is right for them in order to make longer-term changes.

The Better Places Program is an exciting opportunity to catalyze transportation, placemaking, and other community innovations. It supports innovation and makes smart use of our state's resources, and comes at a time when our downtowns and villages are ready and eager to rebuild. T4VT is pleased to support it.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your work on this, and your service in the Legislature.

Sincerely,

Kate McCarthy, AICP
Coordinator, Transportation for Vermonters
Sustainable Communities Program Director, Vermont Natural Resources Council

Cc: Rep. Charles Kimball, Vice Chair
Amy Todisco, Committee Assistant