

We -The Sustainable Montpelier Coalition, are delighted to have helped launch this effort, because we believe that such shared, on demand, service will become a crucial component of a sustainable future system of transportation for everyone.

Our organization began with a goal for Montpelier of working towards a more energy efficient land use in a town where 65% of the downtown is currently mis-allocated to parking lots. Our vision is to reduce parking demand downtown by getting cars out of town and people into town without their personal cars. The emerging technology of micro transit seemed like the best option for doing that,

We started this effort In 2018 when we hosted a series of community transportation round tables exploring options for changing parking demand. The emerging service of microtransit seemed like the best option for doing that. So we were delighted in early 2019 when VTrans formed a Microtransit Working Group to explore the potential of a pilot project here in Montpelier.

The Sustainable Montpelier Coalition was then invited to be the community partner in that micro-transit working group . Our volunteer task was to coordinate national research, provide a Market Analysis and offer a draft Rider Engagement and Marketing Plan. One of key findings from our national research was that communities which invest in robust rider education and engagement have a stronger service introduction.

At the start of the 2020, AOT provided a white paper, Microtransit in Montpelier, to the Legislature, and at the end of the last session - which helped result in the decision - to move forward with a pilot project-

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Once we were assured the pilot project was going to happen, we recognized that, to make it successful, we needed to include the whole community in the design and planning of the effort. It became

our task to build a robust community engagement process that would provide local commitments to growing the new service.

We organized what is now known as the MyRidea Community Advisory Group MRCAG which had its first meeting just about a year ago. Two days before everything shut down, as a matter of fact.

This Advisory group included members of the original VTrans Microtransit working group. We wanted an expanded community base so we then recruited other local organizations that have a clear interest in getting their members and client base around - affordably and conveniently. Today the group has over twenty members - who are needed to execute a strategy that ensures a broad base of support for building ridership and providing rider feedback. We have expanded the list of associated partner groups to 70, to whom we reach out to monthly. This provides a major institutional commitment growing MyRide.

To give you some idea of the depth of the community ownership that has arisen through this advisory group, they wanted to make sure their ideas were included in naming the service. The pilot project needed its own brand identity. We had a voting process that generated suggested names and everyone participated in a couple of rounds of voting, including Ross and Senator Perchlik. The winning name was MyRide by GMT, or just MyRide for short.

The Legislature's decision to create the MTI funding opportunity then became crucial to our continued involvement in this project. For us, a small local non profit, the grant offered the financial support needed - for the labor intensive work required to build new ridership. As Ross MacDonald and Dan Currier will tell you, SMC created a highly detailed work plan for how to accomplish our goals.

Today, while our overall goal remains the change in land-use - in Montpelier's downtown - along with reducing greenhouse gases, our immediate focus has become the challenge of getting people actually using the service. This is a truly challenging task in the middle of a pandemic, as you might well imagine.

As the MTI process became competitive last year, of our proposed \$95,000 budget, VTrans was only able to provide a

\$48,000 grant. This was sufficient to us started on the proposed public education and engagement work. It is our hope that additional funding will be made available to finish the proposed work plan. This will allow us to provide useful reports to be shared with other Vermont communities that we hear are increasingly interested in supporting their own microtransit service.

VTrans made it clear that their priority was to make sure the current system's riders were accommodated. That meant that our first step was to work with the Advisory Group and GMT in crafting a survey of current riders prior to the launch. SMC staff and volunteers conducted this survey onboard local buses, and GMT made the survey available online through Survey Monkey. The results of the survey clarified the current riders' needs.

Approximately. 25% of the riders used the service daily for work or school while just over 50% of the riders used the service 1-3 times a week for shopping, medical or personal business. We found that half of the riders had a smart phone or home computer, so they could use the app. The survey helped us to tailor our outreach to include everyone in the current rider group. We now have a strong sense what were the opportunities and what were the areas of resistance to the effort.

With the findings of the survey, we deepened our approach to planning the public engagement process in partnership with GMT. We worked together to design signage, schedule outreach and engagement efforts at Community lunches, the hotels now housing the homeless, the Food pantry, etc etc. We discovered how challenging the transit provider's tasks are to accommodate so many diverse and pressing rider needs. Our effort was all about -meeting people where they are.

On Jan 4th MyRide launched in Montpelier. Here is Mayor Anne Watson boarding the bus for the inaugural ride to her job teaching at Montpelier High School.

At the same time we had staff and volunteers working at the local public housing units, at the Transit Center and even in front of Wal-Mart/Berlin Mall. They helped people understand the new system while getting them registered and on board.

For several weeks we continued this high level of engagement providing individualized outreach with current riders . - while, at GMT, Jamie Smith was working with call-in riders to help them reserve rides. It was intensive work. We are still doing outreach although now although there is diminishing demand for assistance from current riders. However, because of the range of special needs present, many of the current riders are still confused by the new service or feel that shifting their predictable bus schedule for on demand scheduling creates a burden. Nobody promised us this would be easy.

Our goal remains to get a lot more people shifting to shared transit from the use of their personal cars. In preparation for coming months, as more people are vaccinated, SMC is working towards implementing an education campaign. As soon as COVID circumstances allow, we are hoping to have a higher profile public launch for State workers returning to their offices and seniors who will feel comfortable being in public. As the City opens up we will be there to build a truly valuable and innovative public transportation service.

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We have done some work in comparing our first months with other places experience. In Salem MA they launched an on demand service in December. Via was in charge of the promotion and they had a greater number of sign ups. Salem is 8 times larger than Montpelier. But in the first months, it turns out we are actually having comparable ridership, just from the focus on current riders. Hopefully, by the end of the summer, with COVID receding, new riders will start using the service and our collective goal of increase riders will be evident.

We are grateful for the MTI money to help support this vital education and engagement campaign. -SMC hopes our work can be used as a "road map" for other communities.

We realize that this is a unique effort in which SMC brings a new perspective of the community's need along with the the long range commitment to climate and economic resilience-

As fewer people use their cars we can begin to free up land downtown now yoked to a commitment to parking lots, such that it can then be turned to higher and better uses.

Over the long term, we foresee a future shared transportation system that will be used by a lot more people than currently served. Such a service will, of course, demand more resources. Over the next year SMC together with VTrans and GMT will explores such a next step vision based on the our growing success of MyRide. We hope to return to you with a plan for transitioning from the pilot to a broader, comprehensive plan for your consideration.