



Vermont Businesses
for Social Responsibility



SIERRA CLUB
VERMONT CHAPTER

March 28, 2022

Subject: Climate Advocates Transportation Priorities for 2022

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation,

We would like to share with the Senate Committee on Transportation thoughts from representatives of the Conservation Law Foundation, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, Vermont Conservation Voters, Vermont Sierra Club, Vermont Natural Resources Council, and Vermont Public Interest Research Group on implementing the Climate Action Plan, and the path forward for the FY 2023 Transportation Bill and the transportation/climate items in the FY 2023 Budget.

Below, we highlight the transportation priorities we believe are critical to advance this year to put us on a path to meet the legal requirements of the Global Warming Solutions Act (the Solutions Act) and take a significant step forward to help address the climate crisis. It is also important to underscore that, because of circumstances outside of the control of the Vermont Climate Council, the adopted Climate Action Plan lacks a significant regulatory or policy tool in the transportation sector to achieve stepped and certain Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reductions in line with the Solutions Act's requirements. That makes expanded and significant investments in equitable transportation transformation programs even more essential in Fiscal Year '23.

The House made a strong commitment to clean transportation investments in the passage of the Transportation Bill and the Budget Bill. These investments put us on a path to meeting Vermont's required climate reductions.

Support the Proposal's in H.736 and H.740

We recommend and respectfully urge the Senate to maintain the House's commitment to the following:

Electric Vehicle (EV) incentives, which are made available to low-income and middle-income Vermonters. Programs should be designed to maximize federal and state dollars to achieve our climate emission reduction requirements. We support the language in H.736 (the T-bill) and H.740 (the budget) to:

- Expand the incentive programs for new Plug-In Electric (PEVs), MileageSmart, Replace your Ride, and the Electric Bike program, funded as requested in H.740. The Climate Action Plan calls for a robust investment in these incentives this year – and into the foreseeable future. Importantly, the T-bill includes language directing these funds to be deployed in FY23 as much as possible and tying them to the pace needed to achieve the requirements of the Solutions Act.
- The FY 2023 Budget and FY Transportation Bill appropriates money to Vermont's electrification incentive programs to meet Vermont's carbon reduction requirements. Specifically, this includes:
 - Incentive Program for New PEVs: \$ 12,000,000
 - Drive Electric: \$2,000,000
 - MileageSmart: \$3,000,000
 - VT Replace Your Ride Incentives: \$3,000,000
 - eBikes: \$1,000,000
 - eRecreation: \$1,000,000
- Ensuring broad access to incentives to drive uptake and, ultimately, grow the used EV market. While it is critical to address equity with low-income incentives, to reach our carbon reduction requirements, incentives must be readily available for those most likely to purchase EVs. The more EVs purchased now will help grow the available used high-efficiency vehicle and EV market.

Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSE) investments, which are needed to provide reliable charging at workplaces, schools, downtowns, and multi-unit dwellings. To utilize ARPA funds, charging at public attractions, parks, and fishing access areas are proposed to expand access.

- As passed by the House, EVSE grants are made available for workplaces, multi-unit dwellings, and various public locations, which will advance the critical work of making EV charging available for renters and not just homeowners so that EVs are a viable option for all Vermonters and visitors. Specifically, the FY 2023 Budget and FY Transportation Bills appropriate:
 - \$6,250,000 – Level 3 EVSE along the State highway network; -
 - \$10,000,000 – Level 1 and 2 EVSE at workplaces and multi-unit dwellings and Level 1, 2, and 3 EVSE at public venues and attractions; and -
 - \$3,000,000 – Level 1 and 2 EVSE at State parks and fishing access areas.
- Like the EV Incentives, these funds must be deployed rapidly - ideally, during fiscal year 2023 - and H.740 includes language that directs the Agency of Transportation to spend these funds at the pace necessary to meet the requirements of the Solutions Act.

Mobility Transportation Innovation (MTI) grants, which are important to continue to promulgate and adequately support micro-transit, transportation demand management, and other programs to reduce vehicle miles traveled.

- We support the \$500K passed by the House to continue this program in the fiscal year 2023, but hope both chambers will prioritize higher levels of investment (see below).
- While electrifying our vehicle fleet is key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the short term, these grants will form a foundation for a more sustainable and equitable transportation system over the long term.

Zero-Fare Transit in Urban and Rural Communities

- Urban zero-fare transit for FY '23 is proposed as a \$1.4 million dollar appropriation in H.736. However, it excludes LINK Express routes. We would prefer that all routes remain zero-fare through FY23, but support continuing it for routes defined in the Transportation Bill as passed by the House.
- Vermont must follow through with the recommendations of the 2019 Report on Methods to Increase the Use of Public Transit in Vermont by funding zero-fare transit in both urban and rural communities.

Additional Policy Considerations for the FY23 Transportation and Big Bills

We urge additional support and consideration for the following recommendations not currently in either the FY' 23 Transportation Bill or Budget.

Transit Services

- Shift money to fund and support transit routes to replace routes that were cut due to lack of ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Electric Transit Buses, which need to be funded to reach the goals of the bus electrification plan.

- The Agency of Transportation assured the House Committee on Transportation that they would be applying for electric transit bus grants through the Low and No Emissions Grant Program. In the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Low and No Emissions Grant Program has received more funding than ever. We support language that ensures that the Agency is dedicated to applying for and receiving these funds.
- Grant applications for the Low and No Emissions Grant Program should ask for funding commensurate with either scenario in the Public Transit Electrification Plan. Adopting scenario 1 would mean 100% of transit bus replacements would be electric. Scenario 2 is less aggressive, but if implemented 10% of the state fleet would be all-electric by 2025, 50% of GMT's fleet would be all-electric by 2026, and 100% of the statewide fleet would be all-electric by 2050.

Electric School Buses, which need language introduced that ensures Vermont's school districts are not underrepresented in obtaining funding.

- Include language that maximizes federal funds like the Clean School Bus Grant Program.
- Delegate grant writing to VEIC through the Agency of Natural Resources to ensure school districts have the capacity to compete with larger and better-funded schools across the country.

Mobility Transportation Innovation (MTI) grants

Grants need to be substantial in order to ensure innovative programs are successful, staffed, and sustainable. We support H.552's \$10 million dollar appropriation - with larger grants for micro-transit implementation, and flexibility to support other innovative programs that reduce the use of single-occupancy vehicles as well.

Bike and Pedestrian policies and investments, which are needed to ensure Vermonters can safely travel and reduce their vehicle miles traveled.

- Maximize paving of state priority bike corridors.
- While the Transportation Bill does increase funding for bike and pedestrian programs - as well as an increase in shoulder widening - the House Transportation Committee did not have the time to debate policy reforms, therefore H.736 does not adequately address the concerns in making streets safe for all users.

Policies to Prioritize for Future Fiscal Years

1. Creating an equitable Vehicle Efficiency Price Adjuster.
2. Strengthen and modernize Complete Streets standards.
3. Requiring pedestrian and bicycle safety measures, like widening shoulders.
4. Codifying all programs that support the Climate Action Plan - like vehicle incentives, charging grants, and MTI - in statute, rather than session law.

Most of these proposals are included within the Climate Action Plan, so we hope that they remain a priority as the Senate proceeds forward with the FY' 23 Transportation Bill and Budget.

We appreciate your time and commitment to addressing climate change. We also look forward to having a more lengthy conversation with your committee on how we can manage the predicted transportation funding shortages in the near future.

Sincerely,

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