



# SIERRA CLUB

## VERMONT CHAPTER

### **Robb Kidd, Conservation Program Manager**

**NOW IS THE TIME** to pass legislation in Vermont that protects the public health of communities, ensures equitable access to transit service, and acts on slashing climate emissions. Sixty members of the Vermont Legislature introduced the Transportation Innovation Act, a few weeks ago to do just that.

This bill must pass in order for Vermont to reach its climate goals. Our state has set a legally binding target for reducing emissions 26% below 2005 levels by 2025. That means emissions need to be 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80% below by 2050. Meeting these climate commitments means addressing the state's top source of climate pollution – transportation. Vermont has an opportunity and a responsibility to get things right; however, we can't get there while simultaneously dramatically increasing the amount of money the state spends on paving state roads to \$158 million (32% increase, \$38 million).

If Vermont is committed to tackling the climate crisis, it should be best reflected in the priorities of the Agency of Transportation budget. Is Vermont going to be innovative, or will it be a dinosaur living in the age of dirty fossil fuels? Following the tireless efforts to adopt the Vermont Climate Action Plan, the legislature must proactively act and pass its yearly transportation budget to include policies that accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles, support infrastructure for safe biking and walking, and invest in public transit to build a transportation future that is accessible, equitable, and climate-resilient.

The Innovation Act starts off with big investments to rapidly transition to vehicle electrification. Vermonters are overly dependent on personal vehicles, and in order to reduce emissions at the scale required of the climate crisis, Vermont must electrify its cars, trucks, and buses. Although the average life cycle cost of an electric vehicle (EV) is lower than that of a gas-powered vehicle, we realize many Vermonters can't afford to purchase new cars, hence the investments in electric vehicle incentives to assist low- and middle-income Vermonters. Both the Innovation Act and Governor Phil Scott's budget proposes over \$20 million in incentive programs; nevertheless, we must ensure that we maximize the federal dollars towards these programs that are compatible with our climate goals and that these programs are adequately funded.

A vehicle purchased today will stay on Vermont's roads for at least 10 years, so Vermont needs to start phasing out gas-powered vehicles now. We cannot afford to have these vehicles on Vermont's roads spewing climate and air pollution on our roads for decades to come.

To meet the demand, we must strategically expand the state's high-speed charging network, but also look to where Vermonters will mostly charge their vehicles. Working Vermonters spend most of their days at their places of employment. Expanding access to charging at businesses and schools will open up access. A proposed grant program to assist businesses with charging infrastructure can help employers attract workers driving pollution-free vehicles. H.522's commitment to \$11 million in seed funding will ensure charging access to all Vermonters.

But it's not just about electrifying personal vehicles. Vermont needs to systematically replace all-state fleet vehicles, and transit and school buses too. While the Agency of Transportation has just released a bus electrification plan, the current governor's budget falls short on providing funds; on the contrary, the Innovation Act proposes creating a \$16 million grant program, including \$8 million for school districts to slash noxious diesel fumes and keep our children's daily commute to school from poisoning them (and their bus drivers). States such as Massachusetts and

transit authorities in Washington D.C. are pledging to go 100 percent electric, there is no reason why Vermont can't as well.

Nonetheless, electrification is not going to get us completely there. Vermont must continue to foster support to programs and policies to reduce vehicle miles traveled, lowering reliance on driving from A to B. The Innovation Act supports making communities pedestrian- and bike-friendly and strengthens Complete Streets policies. It supports investments in transit access by continuing fare-free transit and supporting innovative programs such as micro-transit, commuter rail, and transportation demand management.

Transitioning our transportation system to zero-emission technologies and accessible transit options will not happen overnight. Vermont needs steady, bold, consistent progress if we are to meet our climate, equity, and public health commitments. The Innovation Act is an undertaking that is exactly what is needed to create jobs, revitalize communities, fix historical inequities, and get our economy back on track.

Reimagining and electrifying our transportation systems will result in cleaner air, increased access, and improved health and well-being for all Vermont residents, which is why we need to see the Transportation Innovation Act pass this session. Now is not the time for thinking small and making excuses for why we can't be bold in building the future we need.

An equitable clean transportation future is possible for Vermont; the technology is here, so we need our legislators to act with urgency and take the necessary steps to bring it about. The last few years have shown us we don't have a single day to waste.

Robb Kidd  
Sierra Club Vermont  
Conservation Program Manager  
[robb.kidd@sierraclub.org](mailto:robb.kidd@sierraclub.org)