



SIERRA CLUB

VERMONT CHAPTER

Written Testimony to the Vermont House Committee on Transportation.

Submitted by: Robb Kidd, Vermont Sierra Club

Date: Feb 17, 2023

Topic: F 24 Transportation Budget and the Principles in H.101

The Vermont Sierra Club is submitting written comments to the Vermont House Committee on Transportation. As the committee is diligently hearing from multiple witnesses regarding the FY 24 Transportation Budget we want to remind you that the committee's role is much broader than affirming the administration's budget and transportation bill recommendations.

As transportation is the largest contributor of greenhouse gasses in Vermont and as climate-changing pollution continues in Vermont, the legislature can make the greatest impact by working on transportation solutions to reduce emissions now. Secondly, as Vermonters spend over 15% of their incomes on transportation, and some Vermonters spend as much as 50%, Vermont should implement programs that reduce economic burdens so Vermonters can save money and have better quality of life outcomes. All Vermonters should have equitable access to clean transportation.

Experts have determined that vehicle electrification in rural communities would be the quickest way to reduce climate emissions and benefit the economies of rural communities.¹ We are very appreciative of this committee's past work creating and funding electric vehicle incentives and infrastructure. Coupled with the recent adoption of the Advanced Clean Cars II Rules², Vermont has made a great start, but also needs to consider ways to reduce overall vehicle miles traveled (VMT). We must start building a future-proof, resilient transportation network that includes walking, biking, transit, and passenger rail now.

Automotive transportation costs disproportionately impact the economically vulnerable in Vermont, so it is strategically essential for Vermont to work on developing alternatives to the current paradigm. Included in that work is leveraging electric vehicle incentives and electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure for multi-family dwellings, workplace charging, and downtowns. The Sierra Club also supports efforts to advance public transportation ridership, which includes continuing fare-free transit,

¹ <https://www.ucsusa.org/about/news/rural-communities-could-benefit-most-electric-vehicles>

²

https://www.timesargus.com/opinion/commentary/kidd-clean-vehicles-rules/article_882b57cb-cd9b-54fd-b00e-f73d2ca0a4ef.html

expanding routes, and supporting transportation demand management programs.³ Additionally, Vermont must mandate the implementation of Complete Streets principles to ensure safer roads for all users, and require that bike-ped programs receive greater investments.

Progress on sustainability and transit equity requires Vermont to look for long-term solutions on how to finance transportation. Vermont will not always be flooded with federal transportation dollars, nor is the regressive gasoline tax or mileage-based fees enough to pay for the multiple transit needs. Vermont must immediately act on ways to fund all transit options as outlined in the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Transit Finance Study.⁴

Vermont should plan for the future and find sources of revenue now. The Transportation Affordability Act, H.101, calls for the Vermont Agency of Transportation to develop a plan on how to pay for our future investments aligned with its priorities. It calls for creating a legislative study committee to (a) collaborate across the region to consider an equitable transportation cap and invest program and (b) launch a vehicle efficiency price adjuster program to develop funding mechanisms that support the just transition while disincentivizing polluting transportation. To be successful in achieving Vermont's climate requirements and equity goals, Vermont needs to boldly drive solutions and not just ignore these pressing problems and abundant opportunities. .

In addition to the sustainable funding requirements, there are other policies that this committee can adopt to help drive transportation policy beyond the 21st Century. The Vermont Sierra Club hopes that the committee will take a hard look at the following policies:

What's next with electric vehicles?

- Report to the legislature on EV infrastructure gaps and measures to improve accessibility. This includes adopting measures to ensure that incentives are targeted toward users that consume the most fossil fuels.
- Direct the Agencies of Education and Transportation to work with school districts to develop bus electrification plans and coordinate use of federal funding opportunities for school bus electrification.
- Legislate stronger consumer protection measures to ensure EV Charging Infrastructure is working properly and that public charging rates are fairly assessed. Require the Public Utilities Commission to develop rate structure principles for public and residential charging that encourages EV use, and incentivizes off-peak charging that promotes grid and ratepayer benefits.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure access to used electric vehicles for purchase, promote to the public the incentives for income-qualified households to buy a used EV, and make certain that car dealers are not inflating used-vehicle prices.

³ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Section-20-Report-01-07-20-FINAL.pdf>

⁴https://www.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Item5b_Transit_Financing_Report_20211229.pdf

- Ensure that funds designated and created for equity measures are used for the intended purpose, and if the program needs change those funds are distributed to programs with similar equity outcomes.
- Oppose the Vermont Agency of Transportation plans targeting electric vehicles with additional fees. Electric vehicles should not be exclusively targeted to pay for shortfalls in transportation dollars, rather the Agency should be looking at comprehensive long-term funding solutions.

What can be done to increase biking and pedestrian infrastructure?

- Make Complete Streets policies mandatory statewide.⁵
- Increase funding for Bike-Ped Grants to \$10 million.
- Increase funding for electric bicycle (e-bike) incentives, and in particular, ensure it is increased within the Budget Adjustment Act.
- Return funding for Safe Routes to School to increase walking and biking routes near schools.
- Require paved four-foot shoulders outside of fog lines on all state highways in Vermont, and where not feasible, decrease speed limits.
- Make it easier for towns to reduce lane width and reduce speed limits through their town centers than to have to take over that section of highway from the state.
- Map out and promote bike routes to connect with Rail Trails and Mountain biking trails.
- Perform a feasibility analysis of constructing a bicycle route adjacent to Route 5.
- Implement and map out safe, comfortable bike route networks for everyday bicycle commuting to community core destinations in all towns
- Adopt the Idaho Stop rule making it easier and safer for bicyclists to navigate traffic.⁶
- End jaywalking laws, which have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, and have absolved motorists from focusing on pedestrian safety.⁷

How can we help advance transit ridership?

- Increase Mobility Transportation Innovation Grants to \$10 million to incentivize new programs, not just micro-transit.
- Develop a central transit authority to provide a seamless, rider-first regional transit system across Vermont. This could be either a decentralized structure with many operators like the German Verkehrsverbund model too, at the other end, full consolidation under one entity, like Transport for London.
- Continue fare-free transit throughout the state.
- Find new revenue streams to expand transit routes, programs, and access.

⁵ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/what-are-complete-streets/>

⁶ Idaho statute 49-720

<https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title49/t49ch7/sect49-720/#:~:text=49%2D720..s top%20before%20entering%20the%20intersection.>

⁷<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-10-01/jaywalking-decriminalized-in-california-under-new-law>

What broader policies need to be addressed?

- Ensure legislative oversight in developing the carbon reduction strategy plan.
- Legislate authorization to design a multi-state agreement for a transportation cap and investment mechanism centered around equity.
- Improved education outreach to inform all Vermonters about the transportation programs and opportunities in their area. (Expand Go Vermont.)
- Adopt a Vehicle Efficiency Price Adjustment program.⁸
- Evaluate lowering speed limits as a matter of public safety and for reducing carbon emissions.⁹
- Create a “transportation utility”, similar to Efficiency Vermont, to reduce vehicle miles traveled.¹⁰

The Vermont Sierra Club appreciates the committee’s consideration of these important issues and offers our assistance in working with communities across Vermont to solve our climate and economic challenges. For more information, please contact robb.kidd@sierraclub.org

Included in this written summary we included a snapshot of the data from a recent transportation survey of Vermont Sierra Club members. See below

Submitted 2/17/23

Robb Kidd
Vermont Sierra Club
Conservation Program Manager
(802) 505-1540
robb.kidd@sierraclub.org

⁸ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Feebate-Study-Report-10-15-2019-Final.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/why-i-drive-5-miles-under-speed-limit>

¹⁰ <https://vtdigger.org/2021/10/13/richard-watts-to-solve-transportation-emissions-create-a-new-agency/>

Vermont Sierra Club Member **Transportation Survey 2022 Summary**

Regarding walking and bicycling:

- * About 75% of respondents would bike more if there was better infrastructure.
- * Over 50% would bike more with lower speed limits on motorized vehicles. Over 70% “would support slower speeds on some highways and towns to increase safety and better fuel economy”.
- * Only 2.5 % *do not* support having all roads designed with Complete Streets Principles”.
- * About 50 % would walk more with better infrastructure.

Regarding Electric or Plug-in Hybrid Vehicles (EV PHEV)

- * Nearly 70% said that price is what keeps them from buying a new EV or PHEV and 20% will buy one when it becomes affordable for them.
- * Over 60% are “willing to switch to an EV”.
- * Most people charge their EV at home and currently have difficulty finding usable charging facilities when traveling.

Regarding Transit:

- * It’s not clear that Vermonters know what micro-transit/and on-demand ridesharing services such as My Ride in Montpelier are.
- * The list of obstacles confirms what transportation planners already know: Frequent/regular and reliable routes and time lead to greater use.

* Only 9% of respondents are clearly opposed to limiting parking and instead requiring new housing and workplaces be accessible to transit services.



SIERRA CLUB
VERMONT CHAPTER