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To: House Transportation Committee

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Subject: Follow-up from Committee Discussion on 2/20/2026

This summary is an overview of the Better Connections Grant Program as a follow up to the Committee Discussion on *Learnings from Regional Planning Commissions*.

- Better Connections is an ongoing partnership between the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT), the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) that seeks to align state and local investments to increase transportation options, build resilience, and strengthen economic vitality in Vermont's community centers through planning grants. The program was developed in 2015 out of a Smart Growth America Study, [*Strengthening Vermont's Economy by Integrating Transportation and Smart Growth Policy* \(2013\)](#) to increase coordination between state agencies to the benefit of municipalities. Better Connections was codified in State Statute during the 2023-2024 Biennium ([19 V.S.A. § 319](#)) just shy of a decade after its founding.
- The program is administered by AOT with additional staff support provided by ACCD's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and ANR's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Only communities located outside of Chittenden County are eligible to participate in the program.
- Better Connections is a competitive grant program that awards funding to two municipalities on an annual basis. The projects promote Smart Growth at a municipal level by developing master plans that focus on transportation and community development. Communities may opt to apply for additional funding provided by DEC through the Clean Water Initiative to investigate stormwater mitigation within the project area. The program staff provide significant technical assistance to municipalities throughout the duration of the grant including participation in steering committees, attendance at public meetings, and a review of all proposals & documents

that are generated. The final master plans identify funding streams and develop an implementation plan for recommendations that are made. The program strives to connect recommendations with future funding opportunities provided by AOT, DEC, and ACCD as well as private and non-profit sources.

- The funding for the program is provided by AOT through its federal State Planning and Research (SPR) budget. As a federal funding source, it has an 80/20 match requirement.
 - ACCD, through its Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) funds, provides a 10% state match to reduce the cash match that a municipality must contribute from 20% to 10%.
 - ANR has appropriated and encumbered 100% state Clean Water Initiative (CWI) funding to ACCD for the Better Connections Program; this is additional funding does not require a match.
 - ACCD passes the MPG & CWI funding to AOT biennially through an interdepartmental transfer. The funding is carried over by AOT until each project is complete.
 - From 2019 – 2023, as a recommendation from the Health in all Policies Task Force (HiAP) the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) was able to provide funding to the program for quick-build health projects at the end of the Better Connections planning effort.

- In the past ten years, the program has assisted twenty-four (24) municipalities across Vermont to develop visions that incorporate multimodal transportation planning, economic development, and clean water infrastructure. For more information, please visit the website: [Better Connections Grant Program](#) and to view past recipients please view the story map: [Completed Better Connections Studies](#)