

**TO: House Transportation Committee**

**FROM: Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies**

**DATE: March 10, 2025**

**RE: Proposal for a Legislative Study on Barriers to Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Development in Vermont**

**Purpose:** The Vermont General Assembly hereby directs a legislative study to investigate the barriers to the development, implementation, and funding of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects in the state. This study shall identify specific challenges faced by municipalities in accessing available financial resources and overcoming regulatory and logistical hurdles.

**Background:** Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is critical to supporting active transportation, reducing emissions, improving public health, and enhancing community connectivity. However, many Vermont communities, particularly small towns, face significant challenges in planning and implementing such projects. Despite the availability of state and federal funding programs, these communities frequently encounter barriers that prevent them from fully utilizing these resources.

**Scope of Study:** This study shall examine the following key barriers:

**1. Funding Accessibility for Small Towns:**

- Challenges in applying for and managing state and federal grants.
- Matching fund requirements and their impact on small municipal budgets.
- Administrative burdens and lack of technical assistance for smaller municipalities.
- Limited number of available funding sources, which further restricts access to necessary financial support.

**2. General Funding Constraints:**

- The existing \$4M in state funding had requests totaling \$20M, indicating a significant shortfall in available resources.
- Federal funding often comes with significant regulatory requirements, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which can substantially increase costs and project timelines.
- Federal funding mechanisms often impose additional requirements that further increase project expenses.

**3. Regulatory and Environmental Constraints:**

- State and federal environmental review processes that delay or prevent project implementation.
- Requirements related to wetlands, floodplains, and habitat protection that impact feasibility.

- Historic preservation and Act 250 implications for bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- 4. **Cost Barriers:**
  - Rising construction and material costs.
  - Costs related to land acquisition, engineering, and maintenance.
  - Coordination with private landowners and businesses for right-of-way access.
- 5. **Aging Infrastructure and Competing Priorities:**
  - Conflicts with existing aging transportation infrastructure needing upgrades.
  - Municipal prioritization of road maintenance over active transportation investments.
  - Limited workforce and contractor availability for bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- 6. **State Right-of-Way and Design Challenges:**
  - Limitations on infrastructure improvements within state highway rights-of-way.
  - Design requirements and safety standards that may not be suitable for rural areas.
  - State permitting processes that slow project timelines.
- 7. **Other Institutional and Community Barriers:**
  - Public perception and resistance to bicycle and pedestrian investments.
  - Coordination challenges among local, regional, and state agencies.
  - Inconsistent planning and land-use policies that hinder multimodal connectivity.

**Study Implementation:** The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in collaboration with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), regional planning commissions (RPCs), and other relevant stakeholders, shall conduct this study and provide recommendations. The study shall include:

- A review of existing funding mechanisms and their utilization by municipalities.
- Case studies of successful and unsuccessful bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- Identification of regulatory and legislative changes needed to address barriers.
- Recommendations to improve technical assistance and capacity-building for small towns.
- Strategies to streamline state permitting and funding application processes.
- An evaluation of the adequacy of existing funding levels and the potential for expanding funding sources.

**Report and Recommendations:** A final report shall be submitted to the Vermont General Assembly by December 31, 2026, detailing findings and proposed solutions to improve the accessibility and implementation of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure statewide.

**Suggested Legislative Language:** An act relating to a study on barriers to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure development in Vermont

## **Sec. 1. STUDY ON BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE BARRIERS**

(a) The Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in collaboration with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT), regional planning commissions (RPCs), and other relevant stakeholders, shall conduct a study to identify barriers to the development and implementation of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects in Vermont and propose solutions to address these challenges.

(b) The study shall examine the following issues: (1) Funding accessibility for small towns, including challenges related to grant applications, administrative burdens, and matching fund requirements; (2) General funding constraints, including the adequacy of current funding levels and the impact of federal funding requirements on project costs and timelines; (3) Regulatory and environmental constraints, including permitting processes, Act 250, and federal and state environmental review requirements; (4) Cost barriers, including construction, engineering, maintenance, and right-of-way acquisition costs; (5) The impact of aging infrastructure and competing municipal priorities on active transportation investments; (6) Design and right-of-way challenges related to bicycle and pedestrian improvements along state highways; (7) Institutional and community barriers, including public perception, interagency coordination, and land use policy inconsistencies.

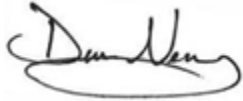
(c) The study shall include: (1) A review of existing funding mechanisms and their utilization by municipalities; (2) Case studies of successful and unsuccessful bicycle and pedestrian projects; (3) Identification of potential legislative and regulatory changes to reduce barriers; (4) Recommendations to improve technical assistance and capacity-building for small towns; (5) Strategies to streamline state permitting and funding application processes; (6) An evaluation of alternative funding models and opportunities for increased investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

## **Sec. 2. REPORT**

(a) On or before December 31, 2026, VTrans shall submit a written report to the House and Senate Committees on Transportation, the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife, and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. The report shall detail the findings of the study and provide legislative recommendations to improve the accessibility, funding, and implementation of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects in Vermont.

**Conclusion:** By identifying and addressing barriers to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure development, Vermont can better support its small towns, enhance mobility options, and create more livable and sustainable communities. The findings of this study will inform future policy decisions and funding allocations to ensure that all communities, regardless of size, can benefit from investments in active transportation.

Sincerely,



Devon Neary  
Chair, Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies