

Dear Essex Town and City of Essex Junction leaders, town and city staff, Essex and Williston Reps, Transportation Chairs Westman and Walker, and House and Senate Transportation Committee Members:

As a Representative for constituents in Essex Town and the City of Essex Junction, I am writing with great urgency regarding the impending wholesale elimination of all public transit routes in our district, if Green Mountain Transit follows through on its plan to end Bus #10 by June 2025. This route elimination would spell catastrophe. To understand just how disastrous it would be to lose the #10--not just for Essex but for our region, allow me to describe its route.

The long loop that is the #10 bus route travels through three communities: Williston, Essex Junction, and Essex Town. In addition, at the Amtrak stop in the City of Essex Junction, and at the Walmart in Williston, riders of the #10 can connect to #2 and #1 buses respectively to reach Burlington.

The #10 starts at some of our region's biggest stores in Williston like Walmart and Home Depot, then to multi-unit dwellings and new workforce housing, heading North up 2A to the Amtrak station in Essex Junction. Then it loops eastward along Route 15 (reaching senior housing and other densely populated neighborhoods that are seeing new housing development applications as we speak, the Essex Experience shops and restaurants, our food shelf, the Essex Free Library, churches, our elementary and middle schools, and the industrial park that includes many innovative Vermont businesses whose workforce counts on the bus, such as Autumn Harp and Glavel). It goes down Sandhill Rd. toward the Winooski River, where it heads west along 117 (with stops at Global Foundries, federal offices, more local businesses and factories) and back to Williston. See link to the route map if you are more visually inclined: <https://ridegmt.com/10-williston-essex-2/>

Losing the SSTA along with the fixed route is also a tragic outcome that would hurt our vulnerable seniors and folks with disabilities who depend on this service for medical appointments and to get around for shopping and visits to the bank and the library.

Furthermore, this route cut would derail crucial housing development that we so desperately need, because Essex Town housing development plans allowed for some permitting exemptions based on their proximity to public transit routes.

For most current information from AOT on the GMT urban transit issues, Senate Transportation got an abbreviated update this week. Click on link at begin at minute 41:05 for the urban transit discussion. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tAl5fRtP8Q>

In watching this livestream, I was particularly grateful to Senate Transportation Chair, Senator Westman, for remarking that the financial numbers alone do not tell the story of how Vermonters will suffer with these route cuts. I hope that my email has helped to illustrate that. And to that point, I recall seeing that the ridership on urban transit routes is made up of Vermonters with low incomes, who tend not to own their own vehicle, and who would not be able to get to work, doctors, child care centers, or to grocery shops without GMT.

Our House Transportation Chair, Representative Walker of Swanton, is also a thoughtful and pragmatic legislator who has been following the challenges of GMT's urban routes for at least the past three years, so I trust that he will understand the importance of this issue.

In sum, I ask that GMT, in collaboration with AOT and the committees of jurisdiction prevent a domino effect of lost opportunities and lowering quality of life:

- our businesses will lose consumers
- local employers big and small will lose workforce
- our vulnerable seniors and disabled SSTA riders will suffer dangerous and medically unsafe levels of isolation
- our households will add more cars to their home fleets rather than teaching youth to ride the bus to and from Essex High School, CCV, or UVM, or to jobs in Williston and Burlington

Sincerely,

Leonora Dodge (she/her/ella)

VT State Representative

Chittenden 23 (Essex Town/City of Essex Junction)

Committee on General and Housing

Social Equity Caucus

Climate Solutions Caucus