

## Transportation Study Update

### Transportation in Chittenden County: What do we need and how do we pay for it?

The Champlain Valley League of Women Voters presented a forum on local transportation issues and their funding hosted by Channel 17/Town Meeting TV, on March 29th. The panel included Chris Cole, Director of Policy, Planning, and Intermodal Development at VTrans, Christine Forde from Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, Meredith Birkett from Chittenden County Transportation Authority, and Charlene Wallace from Local Motion. There are many pressing needs to improve transportation in Chittenden County. The big question is where do the state and local governments get their funds and are these sources adequate and sustainable.

VTrans is the source for state funds and pass through federal money for projects. Chris Cole presented the major state transportation goals for FY 2013:

- Building Bridges to the Future - Accelerated Bridge Program
  - 12% are structurally deficient and/or functionally obsolete (ranked 23rd)
- Preserving our Highways – In 2011, 25% listed in “very poor” condition (Down from 34% in 2009)

- Expanding Investments Across Modes
  - – Rail
  - – Public Transit
  - – Bicycle & Pedestrian Programs
- Mobility, Sustainability & Livability

– Planning transportation investments

for a changing future • Resiliency and Adaptation

– Planning for post-Irene standards in construction and business practices.

Vermont has a \$658.3 million budget to meet these goals. Sixty percent of this budget is from federal funds—the largest source being the federal highway fund \$306 million. This year Vermont will also receive \$84.5 million in federal FEMA/FHWA funds for Irene recovery. Taxes and fees are the primary source of state funds, but surprisingly

motor vehicle fees and the purchase and use tax provide more funds than the gasoline and diesel taxes. Vermont is looking at alternative ways to fund transportation, but no decisions have been made. Chris feels that a miles-traveled tax would need to be implemented regionally to be effective. When asked directly if he thought the current system of funding was sufficient and sustainable, his answer was no.

CCTA is the public transit provider in Chittenden County. Because Chittenden County is considered a “statistical metropolitan area”, the CCTA receives federal funds directly, and these funds account for 39% of its \$12 million annual budget. State funds add 39%, fares provide 21%, local municipalities provide another 20% and 5% comes from other sources. CCTA is linked with other transit authorities and has had great success with its LINK buses that provide commuter service between Burlington, Montpelier, St. Albans, and Middlebury.

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission provides planning services and planning grants to towns and cities in the county. Most of its money comes from federal sources, but it also receives some state and local funds. Its grants are for planning, not construction, but its annual TIPs, Transportation

Improvement Plans, are used by VTrans to select projects for funding.

Local Motion is a member supported organization that promotes people-powered transportation and recreation for healthy and sustainable communities. It has been very effective in obtaining grants and integrating bicycle and pedestrian improvements with other transportation projects.

*The study committee is continuing its work on funding of transportation systems in Vermont. Anyone interested in participating should contact Sonja Schuyler (sonjapeter@comcast.net) or Frankie Knibb (frankieknibb@gmail.com).*