

Notes from Champlain Valley LWW Meeting with
Senator Dick Mazza, Senate Transportation Committee
October 10, 2012

The meeting was an informal roundtable question and answer session.

Question: What is status of FEMA funding?

Ans: The state expects to get the \$8.4 million for state projects. The enhancement grants to municipalities may be half of what was anticipated, but not sure of status.

Question: We are studying the funding of transportation and are interested in your thoughts.

Ans: The new federal Highway Bill is the same as the last bill. This has been the case for the last several years. The funding for transportation needs a complete overhaul. Federal government does not want to raise the gas tax. There is no political will to raise the tax. In his opinion, a 5 cent increase in the federal tax would solve the funding problems with the current federal spending levels.

He mentioned the current interest in natural gas fueled trucks – diesel is currently \$4.25 per gallon, equivalent natural gas would be \$1.60 per gallon. A switch to natural gas will require a fueling network like gas stations.

In Vermont OMYA and Pike Industries are going to use natural gas. A private company to supply compressed natural gas has been formed by Neil Lunderville, former VTrans Secretary.

Vermont is adding “plug-ins” for electric cars.

Question: Could a reduction in the oil depletion allowance provide money to transportation?

Ans: Doesn't think it would happen.

Question: Vermont Funding

Ans: Last year the state had a \$113 million paving budget, and included 100 bridge rehabilitation projects. Some covered by FEMA and Stimulus sources of federal funds.

Question: Alternatives to gas tax for funding

Ans: Much talk of a mileage tax, but he thinks it would have to be implemented at the federal level. The Vermont delegation is working on increased funding and changes to current system.

Question: Re: gas tax – flat rate or a percentage. Vermont currently has a flat rate.

Ans: A percentage tax has been discussed, but legislature has been worried about a loss of revenue if gas prices go down. He does not think legislature would raise gas tax this year.

Other forms of transportation:

Ans: Rail

State is committed to more rail service and freight use. A track improvement program has improved tracks so 70 mph for AMTRAK. State has been working for several years to get passenger service through to Montreal, but the hang-up has come from Canadian labor unions that want a switch to all Canadian crews at the border. The border crossing issue has come up recently. Vermont proposed the “airport” model where passengers clear customs when they get to their destination. State wants to see a western route from Burlington to New York. He sees progress in the negotiations and is hopeful that service to Montreal can be restored.

Ans: Special transportation needs

C.I.D.E.R in Grand Isle County is a good program and an example to follow. It has an executive director and has busses. It relies almost completely on volunteers for the driving. Drivers also provide transportation in private cars and will be reimbursed for mileage. Many volunteers don't claim the reimbursement.

Ans: Bike and walking

All reconstruction projects now need to have a shoulder to provide space for bicycles and walkers. Bicycles are big business – many bike tours—so state wants to encourage this. Some have called for registration fees for bicycles, but he does not think it will ever happen. Too cumbersome to implement for the amount one could expect to get from the program.

Ans: Airports

Industry looks for airports when deciding on a site. Burlington Airport provides good service. State has upgraded the state airports at Rutland, Newport, and Barre/Montpelier. Airport upgrade was a factor in bringing two new industries to Newport. Jay Peak corporation put up a significant amount of money for the Newport improvement.

Ans: Public transportation

CCTA has been very successful with its intercity routes. State is committed to encourage more inter-city transportation.

Ques: What is responsibility of developer to provide for access by public transportation? Two recent development – Vermont Association for the Blind, and the Tilley Drive Medical Complex were placed where there were no bus routes.

Ans: Thinks the problem has been addressed by the Tilley Drive complex – medical offices will help patients get transportation – SSTA or other. Need to be more sensitive to unintended consequences for development

Ques: Support for new ways to do business to avoid the need to drive like?

Ans: Vermont Interactive television has been a great success for meetings. State agencies are now required to use it. Chittenden County needs another site to meet demand.

Ques: What are your other thoughts on transportation funding?

Ans: He would favor block grants to states instead of the current system of project and program funding sources. He thinks the system often increases costs by program requirements. For example, to get funding from some paving projects, new guardrail is required, without regard to current condition of the guardrail.

He said he really enjoyed discussion transportation issues with this interested group.