

**Vermont Freight Plan Updates**  
**Freight Plan Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Wednesday, June 9, 2021**  
**10:30 AM**

The second meeting of the Freight Plan Advisory Committee (FPAC), formed to advise the development of the Vermont Freight Plan, was held virtually on **Wednesday, June 9, 2021** from 10:30 AM – 11:50 AM via the Microsoft Teams platform. Approximately 18 participants attended the FPAC meeting.

Dave Pelletier, Agency of Transportation (AOT) Project Manager for the Freight Plan, kicked off the meeting. Dave provided an overview of the agenda and asked the FPAC committee members and project team to introduce themselves. The project team representatives included AOT Rail Plan Project Manager, Zoe Neaderland, and consultant Project Manager Chris Lamm.

Attendees introduced themselves, including:

- Andreas Aepli, CS
- Kevin Andrews, Captain and Chief of Safety at DMV
- Charlie Baker, Chittenden County RPC
- Chris Company, Executive Director, Chair VAPDA Transportation Committee
- Christian Higgins, CS
- Eleni Churchill, Chittenden County RPC
- Kiersten Bourgeois, NE Logistics
- Mary Anne Michaels, VT Rail System
- Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
- Nick Campbell, FHI Studio
- Michel Pariseau, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Norton POE Director
- Dave Pelletier, VTrans
- Sam Davis, CCS Constructors
- Shawna Kitzman, FHI Studio
- Sheldon Ellis, Director of Logistics and Planning, OMYA

Chris reviewed the background of the Freight Plan process and plugged the Freight Plan [webpage](#). He provided a review of the required elements of a State Freight Plan. He went on to explain the focus of this FPAC meeting is review of a draft Needs Assessment and Initiatives. The Needs Assessment was developed through a review of Vermont's freight system performance<sup>1</sup> and emerging trends, issues and gaps. This content was developed based the work that has taken place on the freight plan update thus far, including Technical Memo 1 - Existing Conditions, Tech Memo 2 - Commodity Flow and Economic Futures, and FPAC and other stakeholder input. The Needs Assessment and Initiatives will be posted in Draft Freight Tech Memo 3 - Multimodal Freight Needs and Potential Initiatives in the coming weeks.

Chris Lamm noted that the pandemic recovery in freight activity is staggered. For example, e-commerce is surging but tourism industry is lagging pre-pandemic levels. Freight transportation demand is placing stress on the supply chain industry. Growth in e-commerce leads to uncertainty regarding delivery times.

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<sup>1</sup> Performance measures included in the 2017 Vermont Freight Plan were the basis for this analysis.

The pandemic is influencing population in Vermont's growth in some parts of the state. These trends and questions indicate a need to monitor freight demand within the state.

E-Commerce demand is growing by extraordinary measures, with a spike in 2020 as a result of changes to pandemic-era shopping trends. Some of the activity is predicated by closure of brick-and-mortar retailers. Delivery trends, such as same day delivery, are also influencing e-commerce. Concerns about emissions and climate change are present. There is a need to acquire data to help estimate potential effects of delivery.

Climate change, including emissions and infrastructure resiliency, are a consideration within freight planning. Alternative fuels, electric propulsion development and deployment are influencing fleets. There is a need to develop and densify facilities serving alternative fuels and electric fleets. Resilience of roads, bridges, and another infrastructure is critical. The Vermont TRPT for roads and bridges is underway; the same report for rail is underway.

Technical innovation, such as autonomous vehicle delivery and connected vehicles, as well as logistics data and information. These drive the need to anticipate further development and partner with innovators in the state of Vermont.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) refer to the work underway, including VTrans' ITS Plan, the first virtual WIM in Williston, and other upgrades to online permitting systems.

Size and weight limits of truck fleets are compatible with other states in the region. The New England Transportation Consortium is a "one-stop shop"; however, New York is not a member, but there is a need to streamline efforts between New York and Vermont.

Cross-border delays of commercial vehicles has decreased during the pandemic. There is an ongoing need to continue activities between stakeholders, and to manage mitigating actions as needed.

Chris Campany asked: *Something to ponder: as the freight fleet electrifies, what happens when the grid goes down due to a storm, attack, etc.? Will states need some sort of strategic battery/power storage reserve to get critical supplies into affected areas? In some respects, we could be in better shape because the sun will shine and the wind will blow and batteries will charge, unlike a situation where petroleum refineries and pipelines are critically damaged/compromised.*

Kevin Andrews: *Those interstate weight limits for Vermont are not current. Interstate weight limits are the same as state highway limits.* Chris noted the data was gathered from FHWA, and the team would double check and correct the information in the report.

Freight Workforce is an ongoing, well documented issue. Key factors include aging workforce, the work-life balance issues, pay, training, compliance, and surveillance. There is a need to support development of workforce capabilities and the pipeline of talent.

Freight as a "Good Neighbor" is a consideration to maintain positive relationships with Vermont communities and businesses. Stakeholder discussions are warranted.

Vermont's cloud-based Infrastructure Maintenance and Condition (VAMIS) implementation is underway. Continued funding and implementation is needed.

Another gap/need is comprehensive broadband, reliable and fast internet. This is not unique to rural Vermont. Chris identified the draft Needs Assessment table, which was also shared with participants yesterday. He then opened the floor to comments, welcoming other effects or emerging trends for consideration.

Zoe welcomed Michel to comment. She noted that Vermont has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

*Charlie Baker: As a sub-issue under technology, want to make sure we are monitoring what happens with autonomous vehicles.*

Chris Company noted the lack of housing in Vermont. Vacancy rate is incredibly low. This is “beyond a crisis”. He noted that his work on Climate Council includes consideration of trends related to fuels, including delivery and alternative sources (i.e. future demand for gas stations, EV charging). Chris indicated the data is mostly speculative at this point. Commodity flow data anticipates “business as usual”. Andreas noted that there are national trends, and suggested a potential off-side conversation about data needs.

*Chris indicated: Also, should look at any potential impacts with regards to racial and economic equity. Consider front and back end.*

Mary Anne confirmed that the lack of and high cost of housing, plus the cost of doing business in Vermont are other key planning factors. Good infrastructure is critical.

Progressing on with the presentation, Chris introduced the package of initiatives. Some are proceeding from the previous freight plan, and others are new initiatives, such as Climate Change and Resiliency package and Technological Innovations. He welcomed feedback on the package.

New York State has advanced to dredge the Champlain canal to full depth. Andreas asked if there is a demand to connect Lake Champlain with the Hudson River. Traffic from the 70s/80s indicate most of the load was aggregates and fuel. Andreas also asked about the ferry system, and whether that works for freight.

Chris Company asked there is need to use canals or if there is growing demand for water transport to mitigate climate change. Andreas noted that water transport is the most climate friendly mode, but in the U.S. we are limited by the Jones Act.

Kevin Andrews suggested the Highway Operations package consider the implications of travel due to maintaining or improving infrastructure.

Zoe noted that goods movement is related to a broad network of factors. Dave followed up by inquiring if the organizations represented have experienced recent issues.

Kiersten indicated that the workforce issue is constant. The lack of CDL drivers; the milk hauling 24/7 is another compounding factor. The concern spans from the Northeast Kingdom to Middlebury and beyond. Mary Anne Michaels indicated the supply chain is in “a funk”, but it’s challenging to pinpoint while we’re still in a pandemic. She hopes for better outcomes and trends after this year ends. The biggest need is affordability.

Chris Campany: *For our region at least, I don't think much of the general public or local policy makers really think about freight, even with the presence of C&S and major forest products industries in the region, and rail and the interstate running along the Connecticut. Hard to get folk to engage and plan for it when it's not on their radar. And we can nudge, but that's not going to keep it front of mind. There is a need for public information about HOW freight works. The public requests rerouting truck traffic from Route 9 to the Mass Turnpike to reduce truck traffic on the former....* Dave confirmed the need for public education regarding how freight supports the Vermont economy.

Mary Anne noted that many people complain about freight nuisance, but the supplies, including salt for roads, grain for livestock, and fuel to heat homes is necessary.

Chris noted the evaluation of initiatives and the next steps. No comments received. There will be another Freight Forum once draft recommendations are created.

Chris Campany: *Are y'all contemplating the utility of an in-person forum?* Dave confirmed that the team is not, as we are wrapping up the plan within the next few months and the team has successfully managed the outreach virtually. The team asked for help advertising the July 13 Freight Forum\*, before concluding the meeting at 11:50 AM.

*\* This event will be rescheduled. The team will announce the new time and date when determined.*