



# VERMONT FREIGHT PLAN & RAIL PLAN UPDATES

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 4 | SPRING 2021

*Freight activity ensures your grocery store shelves and refrigerators are stocked.*

## “Last Stop!” Vermont Rail Plan is Completed

The 2021 Vermont Rail Plan is now available online. After inviting comments on the draft updated materials in January, VTrans received many thoughtful, helpful suggestions from various stakeholders. These comments were useful in developing the final version of the stand-alone executive summary, plan, and appendices.

After review by VTrans staff and the Vermont Rail Advisory Council, the updated Vermont Rail Plan was posted in April. The Federal Railroad Administration is reviewing the document for Federal compliance.

Thank you to everyone who participated in Town Hall meetings, submitted comments, or otherwise

participated in the process!

The Vermont Rail Plan and all supporting documents are available [here](#).

If you have questions about the Vermont Rail Plan, contact Zoe Neaderland at [zoe.neaderland@vermont.gov](mailto:zoe.neaderland@vermont.gov).



*Rail Plan Cover*

## “Hammer Down!” Work to Develop Vermont’s Freight Plan Proceeds



The Vermont Freight Plan identifies freight system issues and needs, and subsequent policies and strategies to guide freight-related transportation investments in Vermont. The Freight Plan update is being guided by a Freight Plan Advisory Committee and outreach to public and private stakeholders.

To date, the effort has identified components of the multimodal freight transportation system, evaluated commodity flows and economic drivers of freight demand, described performance of the system, and identified initial needs and deficiencies.

Gathering input from various stakeholders through meeting with the Freight Plan Advisory Committee, one-on-one interviews with major freight shippers and carriers, and events such as the Vermont Freight Forum, is producing more insight and helping VTrans to identify more needs, issues, and opportunities from the freight system users’ perspective. Over the next few months, VTrans

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will develop a draft Freight Plan, gathering input and comments on the draft, and preparing a final version of the Freight Plan. You can track progress on the Freight Plan development, review Technical Memos, and find other information on the Freight Plan Update [webpage](#). If you have questions about the Vermont Freight Plan, contact Dave Pelletier at [dave.pelletier@vermont.gov](mailto:dave.pelletier@vermont.gov).



## Provide Input on the Freight Plan

Imagine dropping a pin on a virtual VTrans-hosted map to easily provide feedback about freight transportation in Vermont. Now you can!

VTrans developed an interactive map for planning initiatives, first rolled out in Fall 2020 to support the Rail Plan. The map shows Vermont's railroads, airports, national highway system and commercial truck volumes, as well as other interesting aspects of the freight network. The tool solicits ideas for improvement, and continues collecting feedback for the Vermont Freight Plan update. Visit [bit.ly/VTFreightMap](https://bit.ly/VTFreightMap) to explore and share your thoughts.

## Vermont Freight Forum Participants Discuss Issues and Needs

VTrans hosted a virtual Vermont Freight Forum on May 6, 2021.

The Freight Forum brought together 28 freight stakeholders, representing businesses that move, ship, and/or receive freight, VTrans staff, regional planning commission staff, and interested members of the public.

The forum included presentations and interactive audience polling to engage the participants and to solicit valuable input that will be incorporated into the Freight Plan.

Participants weighed in on questions, such as the following:

- How does freight support your business?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your business?
- What is your outlook regarding the economic recovery from the pandemic?
- What technological advancements are likely to affect the ways your business ships, receives, or moves goods in the next 5–10 years?
- What are the key gaps and needs in Vermont's freight transportation system and freight-related public policies?

Watch a recorded video of the Freight Forum or read a summary of the event [here](#).

If you have questions, contact Dave Pelletier at [dave.pelletier@vermont.gov](mailto:dave.pelletier@vermont.gov).



*One of the biggest takeaways of the Freight Forum? Think big and plan accordingly to prepare for a shifting climate reality.*



## E-Commerce Demand Surges During Pandemic

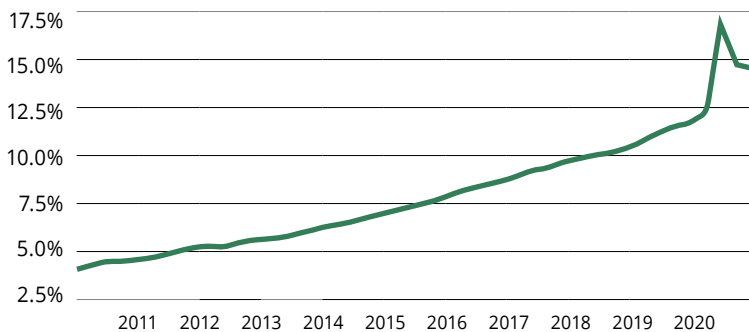
While much of the world hunkered down during 2020 to stem the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers turned to web-based retail to order food, home goods, clothing, and many other products. The result? E-commerce sales increased by 44% between 2019 and 2020.

The e-commerce share of retail sales surged in Quarter 2 of 2020, during the initial surge of the pandemic. As more retail stores began reopening later in the year, brick and-mortar stores reclaimed some market share, but ended the year with a much smaller share than they had pre-pandemic.

Consumer demands during the pandemic have placed strains on the international logistics system, particularly as many shippers, ports, warehouses, and other facilities keep up with demand, while managing their labor force and maintaining safe operating protocols during a pandemic.

These issues are impacting the capacity of the freight system and increasing rates. Many e-commerce retailers and carriers, including UPS, FedEx, and Amazon, are investing in additional fulfillment, sorting, and shipping centers, as well as vehicles and drivers, to facilitate the delivery of e-commerce orders to consumers' doorsteps. In some cases, vacant retail storefronts are being converted to facilities that distribute e-commerce retail orders.

### E-Commerce Retail Sales as a Percent of Total Sales



Source: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/ECOMSA>

## Electric Freight Vehicles



Electric-powered trucks and commercial vans are being used for some short-haul and last-mile delivery applications. Widespread use of electric trucks for longer trips could be on the horizon. Key challenges include the cost of ownership to fleets, which is likely to come down over time, and the number of electric fast-charging stations available to commercial vehicles across the country. Federal and state incentives, including the [Vermont Diesel Emissions Reduction Grants Program](#), aim to help fleets with the cost of acquiring alternative fuel heavy duty vehicles.

Last-mile deliveries of e-commerce orders are generating delivery vehicle traffic and associated emissions. These trips are replacing some passenger vehicle trips from homes to stores that would have occurred otherwise. The net effect of e-commerce on emissions has been studied, with different conclusions reached depending upon the analysis methodology. E-commerce delivery can result in a net-reduction in trips and emissions, especially if delivery carriers can shift to electric vehicles or other lower-emissions delivery modes, and if consumers order responsibly.

Consumers can help to reduce the carbon footprint of their e-commerce purchases by:

- Researching production and sourcing information;
- Reducing the number of delivery trips to your home by keeping a virtual shopping list or filling a virtual "shopping cart" with many items before ordering instead of ordering one item at a time, or by prioritizing fewer shipments or packages instead of speed when selecting shipping options; and
- Shipping fewer returned items.