

# Vermont Public Transit Policy Plan (PTPP)

## WHY PTPP?

The Vermont **Public Transit Policy Plan** will quantify Vermont’s transit needs, as well as recommend programmatic and policy initiatives to strengthen the statewide transit system. This plan will lay out a 10-year vision for improved transit service in Vermont and develop policies and strategies to guide the improvement of Vermont’s transit network.

The development of a PTPP every five years is required by Statute (Title 24, VSA, §5089). The first PTPP was published in 2000 and the most recent version was published in 2012. This Plan will be an update to the 2012 PTPP and will serve as a guide for the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and its partners in making decisions on implementing and funding transit projects that facilitate mobility, minimize duplication of services, leverage limited funds, maximize ridership, and improve coordination of services. In addition, the PTPP will meet the objectives of the 2014 Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan, including developing an annual workplan for the Elderly and Disabled (E&D) Transportation Program.

## WHAT’S IN THE PLAN?

The plan will: provide a summary of state and federal regulations, policy framework, and planning requirements unique to transit; provide a current profile of the system; identify current needs; establish recommendations; create a performance framework that will guide future investment decisions and Agency practices; and develop an implementation plan, inclusive of an E&D Program Workplan, that will identify both short and long term strategies and action items to fulfill proposed recommendations.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Public Transit Policy Plan is an 18-month process that began in June 2018 and encompasses five phases of work. Transit policy planning for a state is a complicated undertaking- and the planning process must be flexible. While each phase has a different purpose, there are times during which multiple phases may be underway at once.



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## CRITICAL THEMES & CHALLENGES

- **Aging population**, including detail on demographic trends in Vermont, travel needs of older adults, and potential strategies for addressing those needs
- **Economic trends and opportunities**, including the divide between urban and rural areas in Vermont, and the critical issue of access to jobs as traditional economic models change
- **Technology and information**, including the revolution in transit information, improvement in operations management, and the rise of on-demand mobility and ride scheduling
- **Public awareness**, including the impacts of geography, age and income on Vermonters' awareness of public transit service, the perceptions of public transit, and ways to increase awareness
- **Land use development and housing location**, including rural development patterns, State land use regulation, and strategies for coordinating land use and transportation decisions

## DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

### ADDRESSING AGING VERMONT

#### *Establish Working Committee with the Agency of Human Services*

The PTPP recommends the establishment of a working committee focused on the issue of mobility for older Vermonters. The working committee would be led jointly by VTrans and DAHL and include representatives from other state and regional organizations with a stake in issues of aging.

#### *More Comprehensive Planning for E&D*

The PTPP recommends that VTrans host a statewide E&D meeting and develop a work plan that would be carried out by all of the E&D regions. The goal would be to replicate in all regions of Vermont the data collection process that has been undertaken in Chittenden County and to share best practices having to do with coordination, low-cost trips and volunteer management.

#### *Establish Personal Mobility Accounts*

A Personal Mobility Account (PMA) would allow individuals to make use of demand response transit services for whatever trip purposes they desired. For this program to function, all Vermont transit providers would need to allow for a "client-pay" billing procedure, as private funds would supplement those available from the E&D program.

### EXPANSION OF TRANSIT ACCESS

#### *Spur Growth of Volunteer Driver Programs*

- Create a check box on Vermont vehicle registration forms to sign up as a volunteer driver
- Streamline the background check process
- Establish non-monetary incentives for volunteer drivers
- Increase marketing budget and collaborate with partner organizations
- Share best practices

#### *Expand Access to Healthcare*

Work with hospitals and health centers to expand Rides to Wellness program statewide, incorporating funding from the healthcare sector to make the program sustainable, once it is established that there is a positive return on investment.

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### *Expand Access to Employment*

- Increase awareness of ridesharing options through Go Vermont
- Engage employers in helping to fund job access transportation
- Create the “late bus” for shift workers
- Create partnerships with TNCs where available

### *Expand Local Connections*

Explore feasibility of expanding local connections such as bike share, scooters, microtransit and other types of feeder service.

### *Expand Access to Available Seats in Transit Vehicles*

Transit providers should implement a policy that if a non-eligible rider has origin and destination locations within a short distance, say a tenth of a mile, of where eligible riders on a van/volunteer trip are already scheduled to go, that non-eligible rider should be allowed to ride in the vehicle.

### *Expand Funding Pool Overall*

Seek to increase funding from federal, state, local, private and institutional partner sources.

## **OUTREACH AND RAISING AWARENESS**

### *Continue Investment in Go Vermont*

- Increase marketing and promote links from others
- Create interactive map of bus routes
- Explore new program models and staffing structures for Go Vermont

### *Document Stories of the Value of Public Transit*

VTrans should produce a series of short videos in each of the regions of Vermont with current users of public transit explaining how it makes a difference in their lives. These videos could be incorporated into the Go Vermont website and shown at Town Meetings when local funding proposals are being discussed.

### *Encourage All Transit Providers to Establish an “Ambassadors” Program*

VTrans recommends an “Ambassadors” program be an ongoing initiative for all transit providers. An Ambassador, who could be an agency staff member or a volunteer, would explain how to ride and then be available to ride one-on-one with anyone who feels the need for a companion for the first ride or two.

### *Continue and Expand Partnerships and Activities to Raise Awareness*

VTrans should continue and expand efforts to develop reciprocal relationships with partner organizations so that all parties become more informed about existing and future services offered.

### *Create Informational Brochure: “How Transit Works in Vermont”*

A brochure, that would be available in print form and online, could explain the basics of public transit, including the types of services available, the roles of VTrans and the public and private transit operators, as well as partnerships with human service agencies and other non-profits.

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### *Engage with Public Media to Spur Discussion and Raise Awareness*

VTrans should discuss with VPR additional on-air discussions of public-transit-related topics following the successful appearance in July 2019 on Vermont Public Radio's call-in show, Vermont Edition.

### *Using Technology to Move to Next Generation of Ride Scheduling*

VTrans should pursue a paradigm shift in demand response transportation by expanding the rider interface of the microtransit model to cover all modes of public transit and to handle all funding programs.

### **LONG-TERM LAND USE PLANNING AND INVESTMENTS**

#### *Work with State, Regional and Local Entities toward Transit-Supportive Land Use*

VTrans and others should maintain focus on two objectives in the Long Range Transportation Plan:

- Maintain and strengthen the vitality of Vermont's villages and downtowns.
- Make transportation investments that promote active transportation and reduce social isolation.

### *Invest in Workforce Development to Maintain Transit Provider Staffing*

VTrans should work with colleges and universities, such as Vermont Technical College, to establish programs to train drivers and mechanics. The Vermont legislature should also consider changes to the law so that people who acquire commercial driver's license (CDL) credentials while serving in the military can easily qualify for a passenger transportation endorsement with an appropriate level of training.

### *Support Electrification of the Transit Fleet*

VTrans, working with the transit providers, has begun the procurement of electric transit vehicles. Experience with these initial vehicles on the hilly terrain and in winter conditions will guide future procurements, with the goal of substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transit vehicles.

## **WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?**

All relevant information can be found on the project webpage

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/PTPP>

Draft reports are up for review. The complete PTPP will be open for public comment November-December 2019.

Have additional questions? Contact Project Manager Jackie Cassino (contact info below).

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