



TOWN OF ST ALBANS

EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

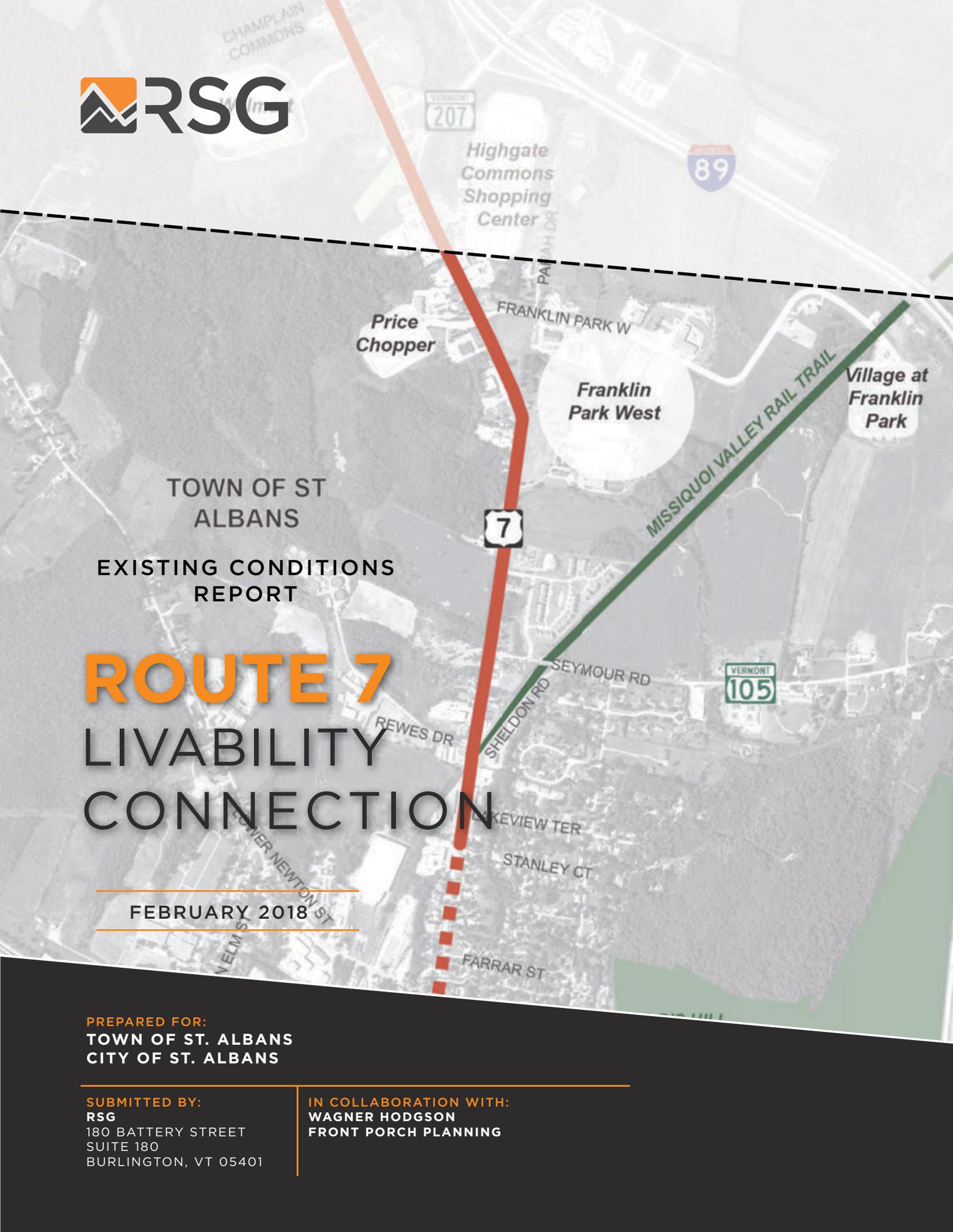
# ROUTE 7 LIVABILITY CONNECTION

FEBRUARY 2018

PREPARED FOR:  
TOWN OF ST. ALBANS  
CITY OF ST. ALBANS

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ENTRANCE TO THE MISSISQUOI VALLEY RAIL TRAIL

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

The Town of St. Albans, in collaboration with the City of St. Albans, contracted with RSG, Wagner Hodson, and Front Porch Planning (the Consultants) to assist with the development of a multimodal implementation plan for the northern section of Route 7 in the Town and City of St. Albans.

### STUDY AREA

The study area of the Route 7 Livability Connection Study is located along Route 7 between Lake Street (in the City) and the Swanton Town Line. This 2.8-mile corridor runs through several distinct land uses and has been split into a primary and secondary study area to focus improvements where they are most needed (see **Figure 1.1**).

The **primary study area** is largely in the commercial-suburban northern part of the Town of St. Albans. It begins just south of the City-Town border and runs north to the Swanton Town Line, passing shopping plazas, the Franklin Park West, and the VT-207 connector to I-89. It is approximately two miles long.

The **secondary study area** is entirely within the City of St. Albans. It comprises the urban downtown and the residential area north of downtown and is approximately 0.8 miles long.

The two study areas meet where the sidewalk in the City ends, at the plaza at 248 North Main Street on the west side of Route 7, just south of Lakeview Terrace. North of this spot, there are no sidewalks along Route 7 in St. Albans City or Town.

In this report and the study as a whole, the primary study area will be analyzed and addressed in more depth than the secondary study area.

#### NOTES:

- The “City” refers to the City of St. Albans
- The “Town” refers to the Town of St. Albans
- “St. Albans” refers to the City and Town collectively.
- The “study corridor” refers to the primary and secondary studies collectively.

Primary Study Area  
  
 Secondary Study Area  




**FIGURE 1.1**  
 STUDY AREA



**Route 7 Livability  
 Connection Study**  
 St. Albans, Vermont



Front Porch Community Planning & Design

# 2

## TRANSPORTATION

### CONNECTIONS

Route 7 is the main street of both the City of St. Albans and the northern-central part of the Town of St. Albans, as well as a channel between the two municipalities. Zooming in, Route 7 and its surrounding streets are connections between homes, jobs, errands, recreation, and entertainment. These large and small connections contribute to the economic and social wellness of people who live and work in or near the study corridor.

As shown in Figure 1.1, major destinations along the study corridor include:

- Shopping centers, including Walmart, Hannaford, and Price Chopper
- Franklin Park West
- Housing developments and single-family homes
- The Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail (a year-round recreational trail)
- Downtown St. Albans
- Bus stops for bus routes that provide access to destinations along the study corridor as well as the Northwest Medical Center and the Community College of Vermont
- Bus stops for commuter bus routes between St. Albans and Burlington, Alburgh, Georgia, and Richford

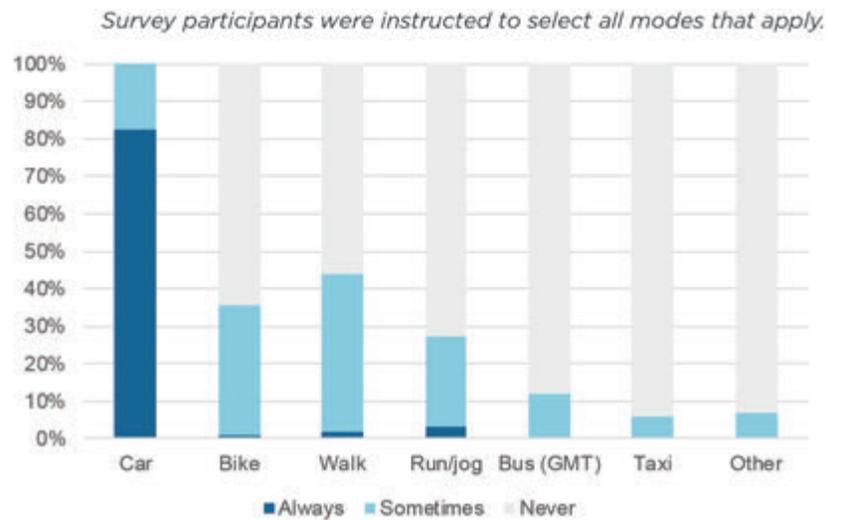
## ROAD USERS

Most people who travel along Route 7 primarily drive their personal vehicles along it, which is evident by the traffic on the road and the number of travel lanes and turn lanes dedicated to vehicles. However, many people also walk, ride a bicycle, and ride the bus along the study corridor. People use these alternative modes of transportation despite narrow shoulders and the absence of sidewalks or formal paths along most of the corridor.

**Figure 2.1** shows how frequently each mode is used by people who travel along the study corridor, according to a survey conducted by Rise VT both online and in-person. It is important to note that many travelers use more than one of these modes depending on their needs of that time.

Each of the modes of transportation described so far have unique needs and desires for roadway design, and oftentimes, the needs and desires of active modes of transportation are at odds with those of vehicular traffic. This means that accommodating these modes together along one roadway can be a challenge. **Figure 2.2**, developed by the National Association of City Transportation Officials, describes general multimodal perspectives.

**FIGURE 2.1**  
TRAVEL MODES USED ALONG THE STUDY CORRIDOR



Data Source: RiseVT, 2017

**FIGURE 2.2**  
MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVES

### PEDESTRIANS

1 People crave activity and variety at street level. Streets with active storefronts, foot traffic design, and human scale design contribute toward an active and economically vibrant community. While activity is of paramount importance to the pedestrian realm, public safety, sidewalk width adequately spaced and apportioned, protection from rain, and shade from the sun together make the difference between a successful street and a barren one.

### BICYCLISTS

2 Bicycle facilities should be direct, safe, intuitive, and cohesive. Bicyclists desire a high degree of connectivity and a system that functions well for cyclists of all skill levels, with minimal detour or delay.

Bicyclists benefit from feeling safe and protected from moving traffic. Bikeways that create an effective division from traffic and are well coordinated with the signal timing and intersection design of the traffic network form the basis of an accessible bicycle network. See [Cycle Tracks](#)

### VEHICLES

3 Motorists want to get to their destination as quickly and safely as possible with limited friction, interruption, or delay. Vehicles typically benefit from limited access, higher speed roads with limited chance of conflict or surprise.

Due to their high speeds and overall mass, drivers feel safest when buffered from other moving vehicles, bicyclists, buses, trucks, and crossing pedestrians. Especially when making decisions at high speeds, motorists need adequate lighting and signage, as well as adequate parking provisions at their destinations.

### TRANSIT

4 Transit service may be measured by its speed, convenience, reliability, and frequency of service. Trains and buses should permit easy loading and unloading, and be comfortable and not overcrowded. The overall level of access and scope of a transit network should be aligned to actual demand, meeting service needs without sacrificing service quality.

Source: National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)

## WALKING, RUNNING, AND BICYCLING

A helpful sample of data that provides a better understanding of the prevalence of walking, running, and bicycling along the corridor is available through Strava, an app that allows people to self-track their activities such as bicycling and running. The dataset only includes those who use this app, but it provides a general understanding of how people perform these non-motorized activities along the study corridor compared to nearby roads. **Figure 2.3** shows Strava heatmaps for activities on foot (which typically includes running or jogging) and by bicycle. Note that people use Strava for both recreational activities and for travel specifically to access a destination.

The bicycling data clearly shows the popularity of the Rail Trail and on-road travel along Route 7 along the entire study corridor. The off-road demand for Aldis Hill Park and connections between the park and the Rail Trail and downtown are also evident.

The running data shows an overall lower level of activity, especially in the primary study area north of the Rail Trail. The intensity of use is more heavily focused within the City, both on Main Street and the nearby network of residential streets.

**FIGURE 2.3**

### STRAVA HEATMAPS FOR TRAVEL ON FOOT AND BY BICYCLE



Source: Strava Global Heatmap, 2017

## A NOTE ON BICYCLISTS

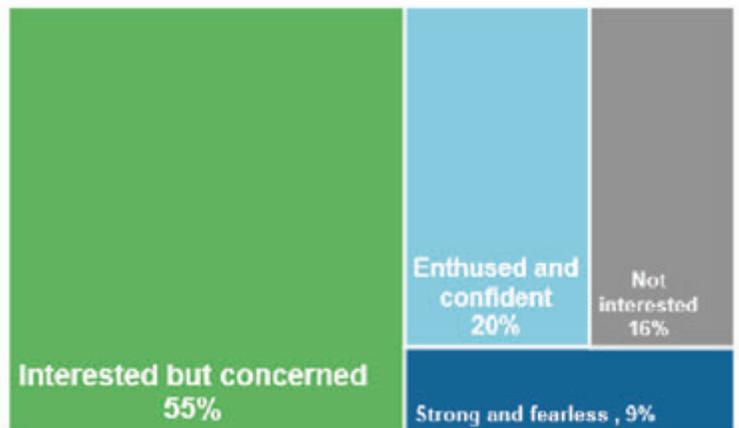
The bicycle mode means different things to different people. There are those who will ride on almost any roadway in any conditions and identify as a “bicyclist”, those who are generally comfortable in varying conditions but prefer riding in designated bicycle facilities, and those who are interested in bicycling more but are currently only comfortable riding on separated paths or quiet neighborhood streets. Every person who took the Wikimapping survey for this project was asked what level of confidence and interest they have in bicycling, and the answers, shown in **Figure 2.4**, reflect a national trend - that over half of travelers are “interested, but concerned.”

**FIGURE 2.4**

### LEVEL OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENCE IN RIDING A BICYCLE

*This chart reflects results from an online Wikimapping survey taken by people who travel along the study corridor. 44 people responded. Definitions in the survey were as follows:*

- *Strong and fearless - I'm comfortable riding in traffic*
- *Enthusied and confident - I'm comfortable riding on most roads but prefer having bicycle lanes*
- *Interested, but concerned - I'd like to bicycle around more, but prefer bicycling on separated paths or on quiet neighborhood roads*
- *Not interested*



Source: RSG, 2017



TWO PEOPLE RIDE FAT BIKES ALONG THE SIDEWALK NORTH OF DOWNTOWN TOWARD THE RAIL TRAIL.

## TRANSIT SERVICE

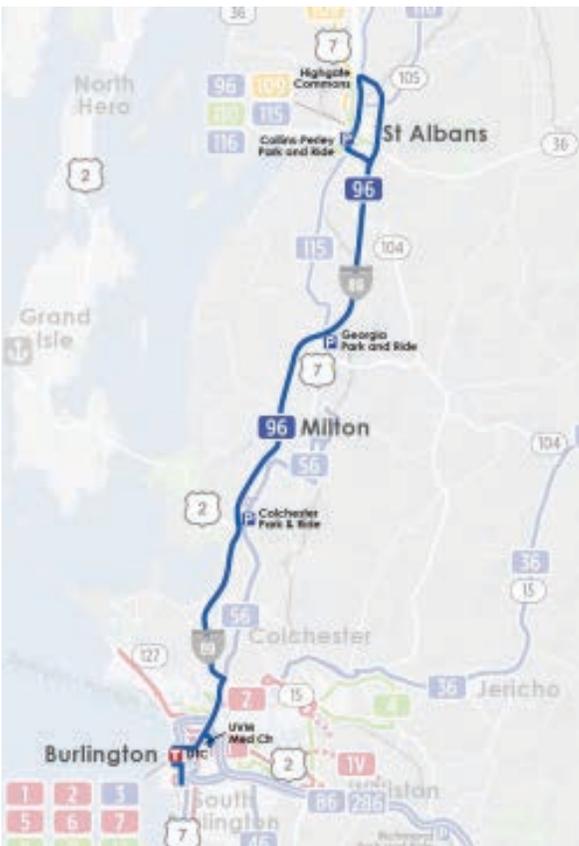
The following are descriptions of the four Green Mountain Transit (GMT) bus lines that stop along the study corridor.

### #96 St. Albans LINK Express

The St. Albans LINK Express is a weekday commuter bus between St. Albans and Burlington. It travels southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening. In the study corridor, it stops at the Highgate Commons Shopping Center and five locations downtown.

The #96 carries 64 passengers per weekday and ranks fifth out of GMT’s 14 commuter bus routes by weekday ridership. 23 passengers board at local stops in St. Albans on inbound trips (nine passengers board at the Collins-Perley Park and Ride Lot.)

GMT is considering several service improvement options for the #96, including simplifying the alignment, consolidating stops in St. Albans, rescheduling PM peak service to capture more riders, and adding a third AM inbound/PM outbound trip.

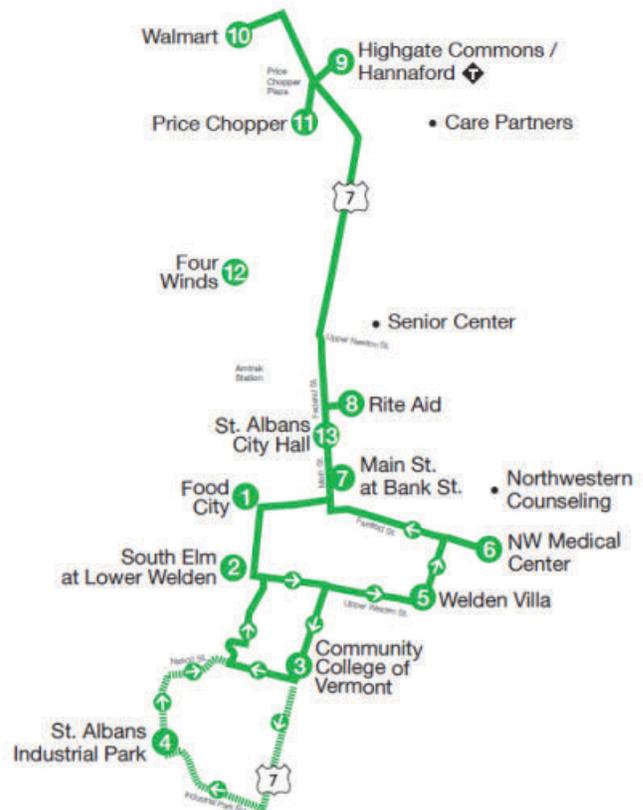


### #110 St. Albans Downtown Shuttle

The St. Albans Downtown Shuttle runs Monday through Saturday approximately once every hour between major destinations around St. Albans, including the Northwest Medical Center, the Community College of Vermont, the St. Albans Industrial Park, and residential areas. Along the study corridor, it stops at four locations downtown, Price Chopper, Hannaford, Walmart, and Food City.

The #110 carries 73 passengers per weekday, with six passengers per trip on average. On Saturdays, it carries 39 passengers total and 3 passengers per trip. By weekday ridership, it ranks second out of GMT’s Rural Local routes.

GMT is considering several service improvement options for the #110, including simplifying the alignment; splitting it into two routes, with a peak commuter route and a midday shopping route; and discontinuing the 6pm weekday trip that usually does not serve any passengers.

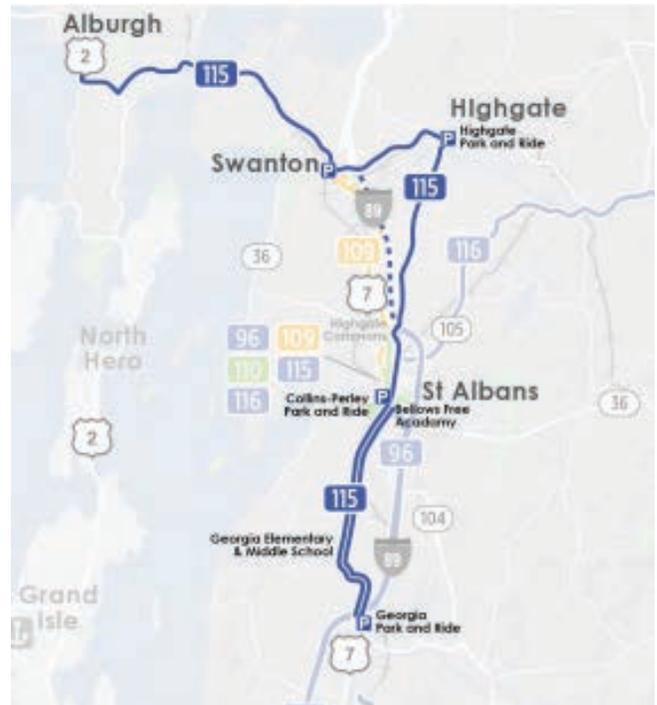


### #115 Alburgh/Georgia Commuter

The Alburgh/Georgia Commuter is a weekday commuter bus that runs southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening. Along the study corridor, it stops at the Highgate Commons Shopping Plaza and at City Hall. Its route is scheduled primarily to serve trips to the St. Albans Industrial Park and Bellows Free Academy; however, Bellows Free Academy is currently planning to provide its own transportation.

The #115 carries 32 passengers per weekday, or 16 passengers per trip.

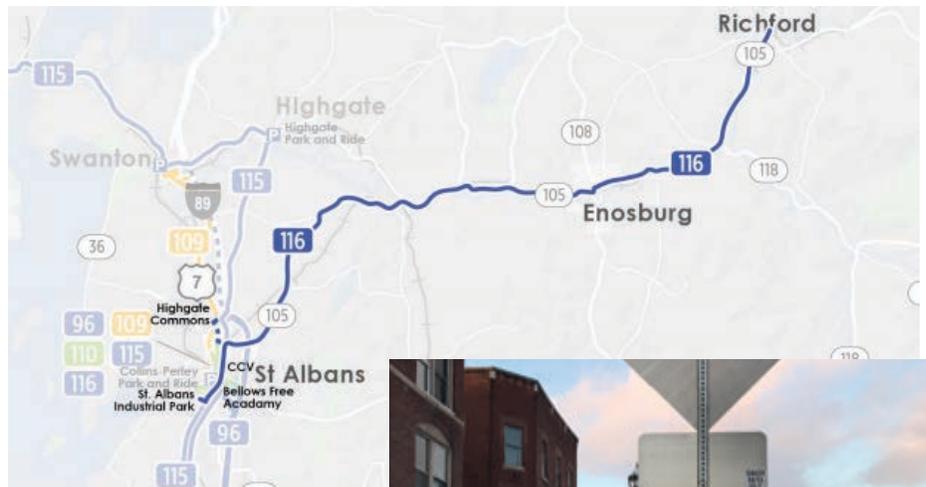
GMT is considering several service improvement options for the #115, including serving all stops as regular stops (not request-only), discontinuing service to Highgate, discontinuing service between Georgia and St. Albans, and rescheduling service to benefit more riders if service is no longer needed by Bellows Free Academy.



### #116 Richford/St. Albans Commuter

The Richford/St. Albans Commuter is a weekday commuter bus that runs southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening. Along the study corridor, it stops at City Hall and makes a deviation during the AM trip to the Highgate Commons Shopping Plaza. Its route is scheduled around work trips to and from the Peerless Clothing Distribution Center in the St. Albans Industrial Park (south of the study corridor).

GMT is considering several service improvements for the #116, including discontinuing AM service to Highgate Commons; passengers rarely use this deviation and it makes the route less consistent and unpredictable.



BUS STOP AT CITY HALL

## COMMUTERS

Census data allows us to understand how people travel to work, where they work, and where they are coming from. The following figures and descriptions summarize census data associated with commuters.

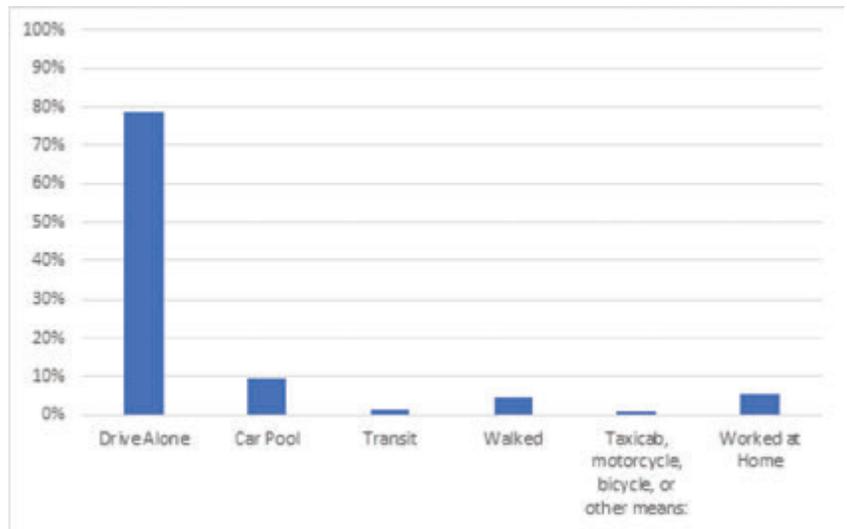
### Modes

The American Community Survey (ACS) estimates how people travel between home and work, known as Journey to Work data. The most recent ACS data (2016), shown in **Figure 2.5**, aligns with the RiseVT survey results and includes the additional travel category of carpooling.

### Employment Density

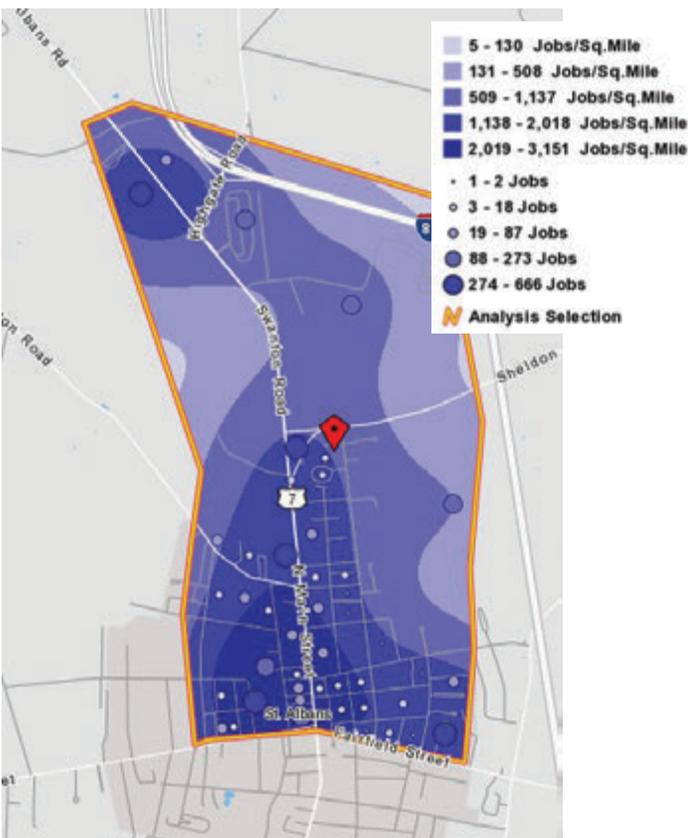
Employment density within the study area, by jobs per square mile, is shown in **Figure 2.6**. The downtown area has the highest rate of employment in the study area, followed by the area around the Town-City boundary and the Walmart. The commercial/industrial area north of VT-105, including Franklin Park West, has a medium employment density.

**FIGURE 2.5**  
JOURNEY TO WORK MODES



Source: American Community Survey, 2016

**FIGURE 2.6**  
EMPLOYMENT DENSITY

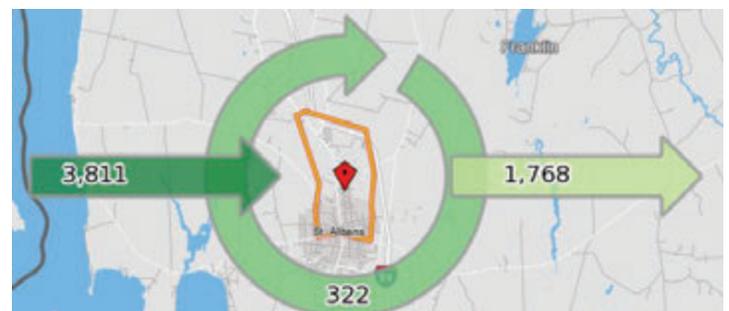


### Inflow and Outflow

The overall study area is a net receiver of employees, with an estimated 4,133 employees in the study area comprising 322 people working and living within the study area and 3,811 people employed in the study area but living outside of it, shown in **Figure 2.7**.

The majority of employees within the corridor travel from south of the study area. Overall, nearly 50% of the commuters travel fewer than 10 miles between home and work.

**FIGURE 2.7**  
INFLOW AND OUTFLOW



## MOTOR VEHICLES

Traffic volume and speed are two variables that impact all modes of transportation. The comfort of pedestrians and bicyclists, the safety of all modes, and the traffic flow of motor vehicles may be reduced when these variables increase.

The study corridor experiences average annual daily traffic (AADT) of between 10,900 and 16,300 vehicles per day. **Figure 2.8** shows the most recent AADT at four data collection points (automatic traffic recorders, or ATRs) along the corridor. Volumes north of Upper/Lower Newton Street are larger than those south of Newton Street by approximately one third, or 4,000 vehicles per day.

The speed limit along the corridor is 25 mph in the City south of Newton Street, 35 mph from Newton Street to just north of the Walmart, and 50 mph north to the Swanton Town Line. Speed data was available at the ATR just south of Farrar Street, which is in the transition zone from 25 mph to 35 mph. This location had an 85th percentile speed of 34 mph in 2016.

**FIGURE 2.8**  
**TRAFFIC VOLUMES AND SPEEDS**



Data Source: VTrans Transportation Data Management System

## MULTIMODAL ACCOMMODATIONS

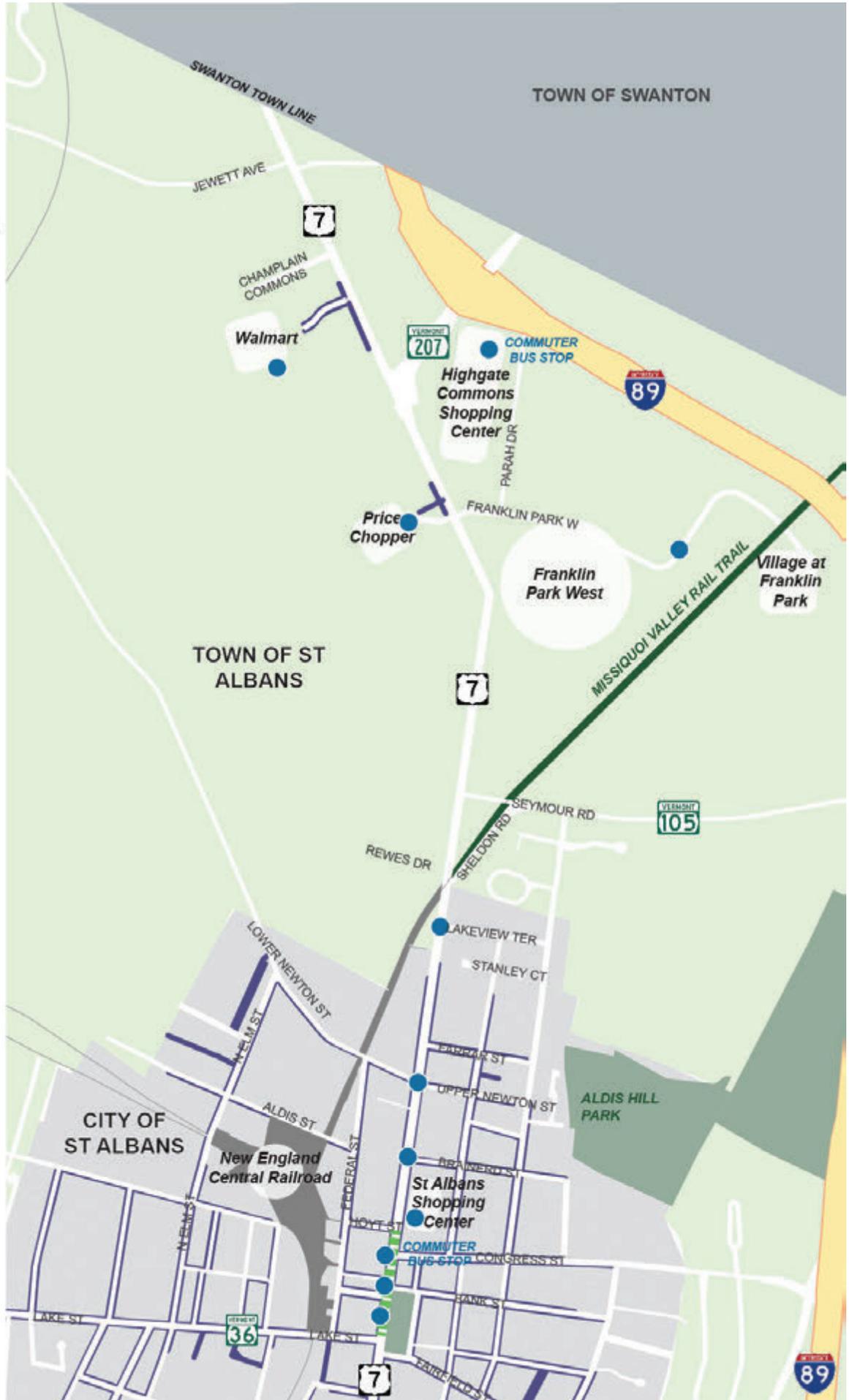
The quality of a roadway for each transportation mode can be measured by certain performance metrics, which attempt to reflect the needs described in Figure 2.2. **Figure 2.9** shows a simplified set of performance metrics for each mode and summarizes how well the corridor is meeting them. Details of multimodal accommodations are described on the following pages, including a map of them in **Figure 2.10**.

**FIGURE 2.9**

### MULTIMODAL CONDITIONS ALONG THE STUDY CORRIDOR

MODE	METRICS	PRIMARY STUDY AREA	SECONDARY STUDY AREA
PEDESTRIANS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks or paths</li> <li>• Marked crossings</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Benches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No pedestrian accommodations except in very short segments around two developments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks on both sides</li> <li>• Crosswalks with curb extensions</li> <li>• Pedestrian-scale street lighting in downtown; utility lighting north of Hoyt Street</li> <li>• Wide roadway to cross</li> </ul>
BICYCLISTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designated, well-maintained facilities, ideally not mixed with other modes</li> <li>• Desired accommodations depends on speed, volume, and number of lanes of roadway</li> <li>• Short driveway and intersection crossings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoulders only; they vary in width and existence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared lane markings south of Hoyt Street</li> <li>• Bike lanes north of Newton Street</li> <li>• No facilities between Hoyt Street and Newton Street</li> </ul>
TRANSIT: INFRASTRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks or paths to bus stops</li> <li>• Lighting, benches, and shelter at bus stops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sidewalks to bus stops</li> <li>• No shelters</li> <li>• Lighting in downtown</li> </ul>	Bus stops in plaza not evaluated
TRANSIT: BUS OPERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of bus stops</li> <li>• Ridership</li> <li>• Frequency of buses and on-time performance</li> <li>• GMT's planned improvements</li> </ul>	The LINK Express to Burlington (bus #96) and the St Albans Downtown Shuttle (bus #110) both have high ridership. GMT is considering adding a third AM inbound/PM outbound trip for the #96 and is considering modifications to the route and schedules to better align with current use.	
MOTOR VEHICLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intersection level of service (based on average delay)</li> <li>• Travel time / queues</li> </ul>	Not evaluated	Not evaluated

- Sidewalks 
- Bicycle Facilities - Shared Lane Markings 
- Bus Stops 
- Recreation Path 



**FIGURE 2.10**  
**MULTIMODAL ACCOMMODATIONS ALONG THE STUDY CORRIDOR**

*Data Source: Northwest Regional Planning Commission*



**Route 7 Livability Connection Study**  
 St. Albans, Vermont



Front Porch Community Planning & Design

## ROADWAY COMPOSITION

The study corridor is composed of six distinct roadway segments, each with a particular combination of roadway cross-section elements and roadside character. They are shown in **Figure 2.11** and described on the following pages.

**FIGURE 2.11**

### CROSS-SECTION LOCATIONS

- 6 Town Edge**  
Cobb Auto to Swanton Town Line
- 5 VT-207 and Walmart**  
Southern VT-207 intersection to Cobb Auto
- 4 Franklin Park and Highgate Commons**  
Danform Shoes to southern VT-207 intersection
- 3 Residential - Commercial Transition**  
Plaza at 248 North Main to Danform Shoes
- 2 Residential (City)**  
Hoyt Street to plaza at 248 North Main
- 1 Downtown (City)**  
Lake Street to Hoyt Street



Route 7 Livability Connection Study  
St. Albans, Vermont

**RSG**  
the science of insight

**WAGNER HODGSON**  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Trust Park Community Planning & Design

**1 DOWNTOWN (CITY) LAKE STREET TO HOYT STREET**



Characterized by a compact urban environment, walkability, small businesses, and proximity to residential streets.

LENGTH: 0.24 miles  
PAVED WIDTH: 61 ft  
TOTAL CROSS-SECTION: 74 ft

- THROUGH LANES One lane per direction
- TURN LANES/MEDIANS None
- SHOULDERS None
- BIKE FACILITIES Shared lane markings
- ON-STREET PARKING Both sides, angled and parallel
- CURBS Yes, both sides
- PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES Wide sidewalk on both sides with brick buffer

**2 RESIDENTIAL (CITY) HOYT STREET TO PLAZA AT 248 NORTH MAIN**



Characterized by large, regularly spaced houses home to one or more families and sometimes a business on the ground floor. Wide green strips and large trees are adjacent to the roadway.

LENGTH: 0.59 miles  
PAVED WIDTH: 37 ft  
TOTAL CROSS-SECTION: 97 ft

- THROUGH LANES One lane per direction
- TURN LANES/MEDIANS Varies; a median, turn lanes, or none
- SHOULDERS None
- BIKE FACILITIES Bike lanes north of Newton Street (to be painted and refurbished in 2018)
- ON-STREET PARKING None
- CURBS Varies, both sides
- PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES 5-foot sidewalk with 25-foot green strip, both sides

**3 RESIDENTIAL-COMMERCIAL TRANSITION PLAZA AT 248 NORTH MAIN TO DANFORM SHOES**



Characterized by a segment of commercial businesses and services with parking lots adjacent to the roadway and a segment with houses on the east side and farmland and undeveloped land on the west side.

LENGTH: 0.89 miles  
PAVED WIDTH: 34 ft  
TOTAL CROSS-SECTION: 34 ft

- THROUGH LANES One lane per direction
- TURN LANES/MEDIANS Occasional turn lane
- SHOULDERS Presence, width, and condition varies
- BIKE FACILITIES None
- ON-STREET PARKING None
- CURBS None
- PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES None

**DEFINITIONS**

**Paved width:** Includes travel lanes, shoulders, on-street parking, and on-road bicycle facilities.

**Total cross-section:** Includes all transportation cross-section elements, including sidewalks and buffers if present.

Image Sources: Google Streetview

**4 FRANKLIN PARK WEST AND HIGHGATE COMMONS DANFORM TO SOUTHERN VT-207 INT.**



Characterized by a wide paved roadway, major shopping centers off the main road via signalized intersections, and commercial plazas and businesses located directly on Route 7.

LENGTH: 0.35 miles  
PAVED WIDTH: 72 ft  
TOTAL CROSS-SECTION: 72 ft

- THROUGH LANES Two lanes per direction (5-6 lanes total, with turn lanes)
- TURN LANES/MEDIANS Left turn lanes or two-way left turn lane; curbed median for 250 feet
- SHOULDERS Yes, 3-4 feet wide
- BIKE FACILITIES None
- ON-STREET PARKING None
- CURBS None
- PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES 325 feet on west side around Price Chopper Plaza

**5 VT-207 AND WALMART SOUTHERN VT-207 INTERSECTION TO COBB AUTO**



Characterized by dispersed businesses with large building and parking lot footprints and a multi-crossing intersection at VT-207.

LENGTH: 0.35 miles  
PAVED WIDTH: 56 ft  
TOTAL CROSS-SECTION: 56 ft

- THROUGH LANES One lane per direction (3-4 lanes total, with turn lanes)
- TURN LANES/MEDIANS Varies; two turn lanes at most
- SHOULDERS Yes; 4-5 feet wide
- BIKE FACILITIES None
- ON-STREET PARKING None
- CURBS None
- PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES 800 feet on west side around Walmart

**6 TOWN EDGE COBB AUTO TO SWANTON TOWN LINE**



Characterized by a narrow roadway, businesses with a green strip between their parking areas and the roadway, agricultural land, and undeveloped land.

LENGTH: 0.39 miles  
PAVED WIDTH: 30 ft  
TOTAL CROSS-SECTION: 30 ft

- THROUGH LANES One lane per direction
- TURN LANES/MEDIANS None
- SHOULDERS Yes; 4 feet wide
- BIKE FACILITIES None
- ON-STREET PARKING None
- CURBS None
- PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES None

Image Sources: Google Streetview

## DRIVEWAY ACCESS

Driveways are locations where private land meets public right of way. They require breaks in curbs, sidewalks, green strips, and other roadway features to allow vehicles to access the land use they lead to. Because of these interruptions of public roadway features and the possibility of vehicles entering and exiting them, the location, spacing and design of driveways play a role in access and safety along a roadway.

The width of curb cuts determines where vehicles can drive, the speed at which vehicles may turn into and out of a driveway, and the distance pedestrians and bicyclists must be outside of their designated space. These variables in turn create a greater chance of confusion and crashes between vehicles and between vehicles and pedestrians and bicyclists. Curb cuts allow vehicles to enter or exit the roadway where they may not be expected and at angles that do not force them to slow to a safe speed necessary for sharing space with pedestrians and bicyclists.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) allows access widths of up to 40 feet for a two-way access and 24-feet for one-way access. A physical barrier of at least four feet should be between two one-way accesses.

Individual commercial driveways and amalgamations of driveways along the study corridor range in width, formality, and spacing. There are numerous curb cuts much wider than the VTrans guidelines. A cluster of these is

around Lakeview Terrace, where curb cuts range from 70 feet to 260 feet in width, shown in **Figure 2.12**. The largest of these includes the skew-angle curb cut for Sheldon Road, shown in **Figure 2.13**.

**FIGURE 2.12**  
NONCONFORMING CURB CUTS NEAR LAKEVIEW TERRACE

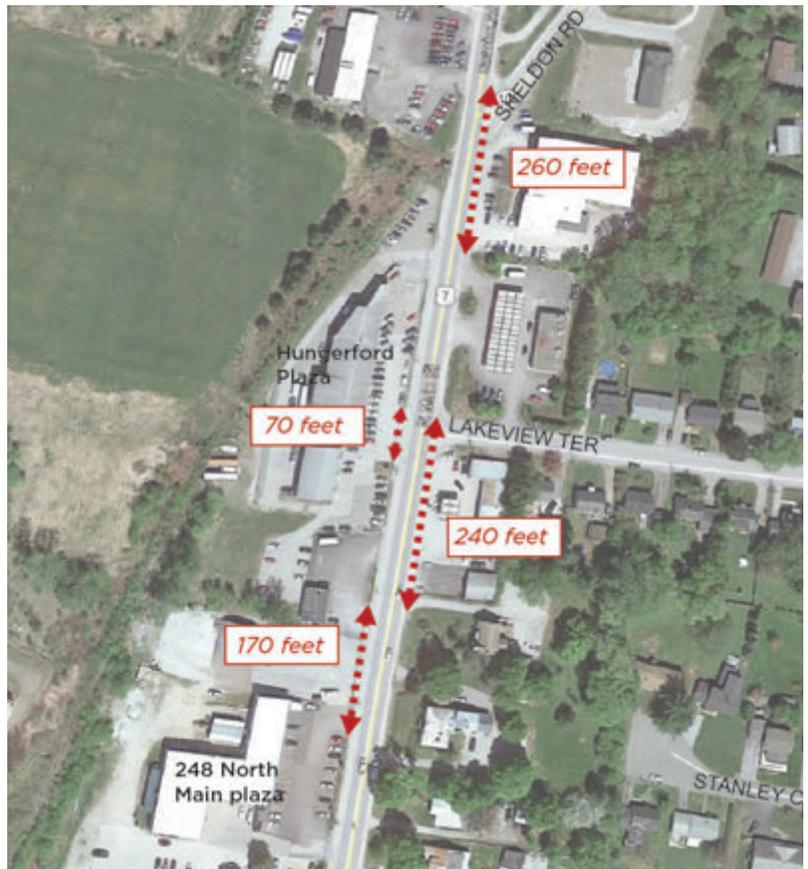


Image Source: Google Earth

**FIGURE 2.13**  
LARGE CURB CUT AT SHELDON ROAD/TERRACE



Image Source: Google Streetview

## CRASH HISTORY

Safety is a goal that all road users have in common, whether they regularly or occasionally access the study corridor, and whether they are on foot, riding a bus, or in a personal vehicle. A safer roadway for one mode typically translates to a safer roadway for all modes.

Based on the VTrans 2012-2016 High Crash Location Report, there are three High Crash Locations (HCLs) along the study corridor, comprising two HCL sections and one HCL intersection. The HCLs have HCL numbers that are based on the ratio of critical crash rates to actual crash rates; a lower HCL number corresponds to a higher actual-critical ratio. The HCLs along the study corridor are:

- HCL Section #17: MP 1.932-2.232 (approximately between Franklin Park West and VT-207)

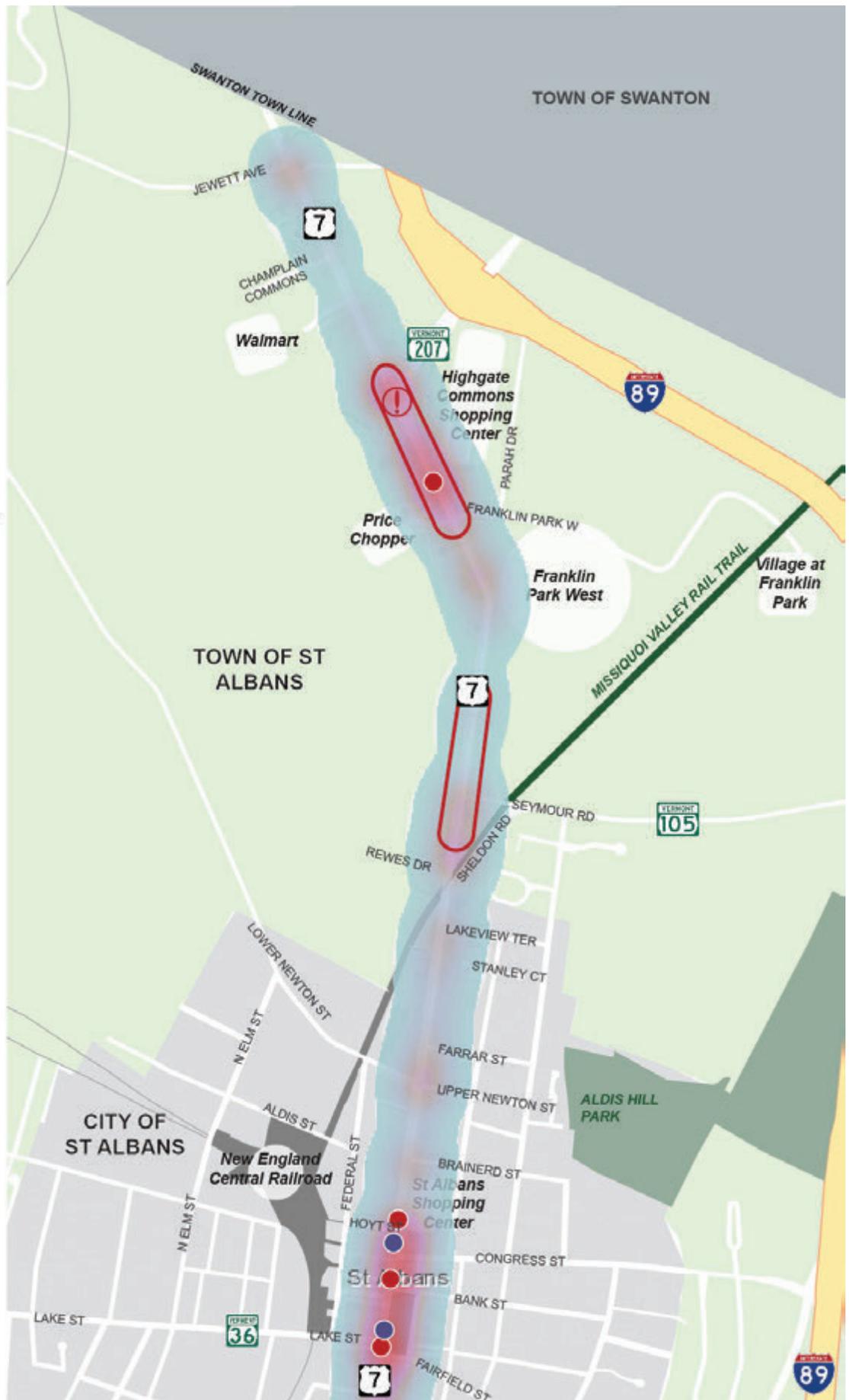
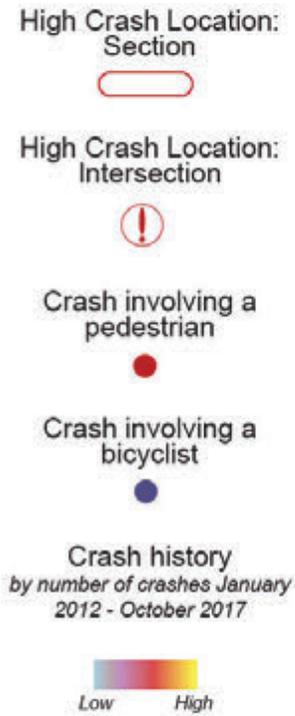
- HCL Section #697: MP 1.232 - 1.532 (approximately between VT-105 and Old Orchard Road)
- HCL Intersection #30: US-7 at VT-207 (MP 2.290-2.310)

In the past five years, there were 77 crashes in the primary study area and 155 crashes in the secondary study area. Approximately one quarter of crashes in each study area resulted in at least one injury. There were no fatal crashes along the study corridor in this period.

**Figure 2.14** shows a heat map of crashes along the study corridor in the past five years and high crash locations.



PEDESTRIANS CROSSING ROUTE 7 IN DOWNTOWN ST. ALBANS



**FIGURE 2.14**  
 CRASH HISTORY:  
 JANUARY  
 2012-OCTOBER 2017

  
**Route 7 Livability Connection Study**  
 St. Albans, Vermont  
  
 the science of insight  
  
 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
 Front Porch Community Planning & Design

## VISUAL APPEAL AND CONNECTION

The existing conditions discussed so far have been largely functional attributes - who is using the study corridor, what their needs are, and how the existing infrastructure is meeting those needs. Visual attributes, including landscaping, placemaking, and wayfinding are also important to consider, as they can affect how welcoming the corridor feels and how people perceive the values and character of the greater community.

The primary study area is commercial, comprises numerous chain businesses, and has been developed in a way that is inherently not visually pleasing and does not provide great opportunity or motivation for placemaking. The soaring utility poles along the roadway compound this aesthetic, and along the most developed stretches, there is very little green space or vegetation on the roadside to balance out the asphalt and concrete. In addition, there is no confirmation that one is in the Town of St. Albans or in proximity to downtown St. Albans, St. Albans Bay, or the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail. Route 7 physically connects these areas but does not visually connect them.

St. Albans City recently installed a wayfinding system along Route 7 reflecting the City's new logo and visual style. There are banners on light posts downtown, signs that identify public buildings, parks, and parking lots, and signs at the border of the City and the Town that welcome travelers into the City and let them know they are leaving the City. There is no equivalent signage for the Town.



Without sidewalks or formal paths, the corridor in a very basic sense does not invite people to enjoy it from a person-scaled perspective; it is currently used to move cars north and south and to help cars easily maneuver into and out of businesses. However, even for drivers, the corridor lacks certain visual cues and a sense of welcoming.

The development that has occurred so far, while not visually appealing or representative of the character of St. Albans, provide necessary services, goods, and conveniences to people in St. Albans and beyond. They won't be replaced or hidden by green space, art, or sidewalks, but the corridor does have the opportunity to be enhanced by such things.

Despite the chain stores and sea of asphalt, this area does have character and the potential for beautification; it just is not shown or celebrated.

### WHAT IS PLACEMAKING?

According to Project for Public Spaces, placemaking “capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people’s health, happiness, and well being.” Using features such as pedestrian-scale lighting, public art, signage, and landscaping, it strengthens communities and indicates to visitors and passersby that they are traveling through a community that is cared about.

### WHAT IS WAYFINDING?

According to the Society for Experiential Graphic Design, “wayfinding refers to information systems that guide people through a physical environment and enhance their understanding and experience of the space... effective wayfinding systems contribute to a sense of well-being, safety, and security.”

WAYFINDING SIGN AT CITY HALL

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Five main issues that can feasibly be improved in the short- to medium-term have been identified based on analysis of the study corridor and public input. They are summarized here:

### 1. LACK OF PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE CONNECTIVITY

- There are no sidewalks or formal paths in the primary study area. This is unsafe and is an access problem for people in wheelchairs, with strollers, and who have trouble on uneven ground. Some areas are absent of street lighting as well.
- In the primary study area, there are no marked bike lanes or indications to drivers that bikes may use the full lane. Shoulders without additional markings or protection are not comfortable for less-experienced bicyclists, particularly along a multi-lane roadway.
- The secondary study area has a quarter-mile segment of sharrows (between Lake Street and Hoyt Street) and a quarter-mile segment of bike lanes (north of Newton Street), but these segments have a third-mile between them with no bicycle facilities. In addition, there are reports from the public that gravel can get in the shoulder/roadway.

### 2. LACK OF PEDESTRIAN ROADWAY CROSSINGS

- There are no marked crossings or pedestrian signals north of St. Albans Shopping Center. There are currently no sidewalks for them to connect, but there are driveways across from each other that offer advantageous curb cuts.
- In the secondary study area, the roadway is wider than necessary, creating a longer crossing distance for pedestrians and encouraging higher vehicle speeds.

### 3. EXCESSIVELY WIDE CURB CUTS

- There are numerous and excessively wide curb cuts along the study corridor, particularly around the City-Town boundary. These are unsafe, uncomfortable, and confusing for all modes of transportation. They create potential conflict points for drivers and bicyclists and wider crossings for pedestrians.

### 4. LACK OF PEDESTRIAN AND BUS STOP AMENITIES

- There are no places to sit and rest or to have relief from the sun or inclement weather along the corridor.
- A lack of pedestrian lighting along most of the corridor is a safety concern and may result in bus drivers not noticing people waiting at bus stops.
- Note that these types of amenities are most appropriate where there are also sidewalks or paths.

### 5. LACK OF VISUAL APPEAL OR CONNECTION

- There are no wayfinding or placemaking features and minimal landscaping along the study corridor, making it an unappealing place to travel in modes other than fast-moving vehicles.





ROUTE 7 IN THE CITY OF ST. ALBANS, LOOKING NORTH FROM CONGRESS STREET

# 3

## CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

State, regional, and local plans and regulations that direct public policy, the pattern of land use and development, and transportation and other supporting infrastructure within the US-7 study area were reviewed as they related to the study corridor and the goals of this study. The purpose of this review is to gain insight into current corridor management practices and to evaluate whether such practices support study goals to:

- Encourage non-motorized transportation and public transit within and along the corridor,
- Support the development of new pedestrian, bicycle and public transit infrastructure along the corridor,
- Provide the framework for implementation strategies that guide funding efforts, and
- Develop a Complete Streets master plan for the study area, focusing on US Route 7.

The following sections include:

1. **Jurisdictional Considerations** – identifying those entities that have jurisdiction along the corridor and their associated roles and responsibilities.
2. **Plans, Policies, and Programs** – describing plans, policies and programs that establish the basis for both development regulation and associated transportation improvements along the corridor and within the study area.
4. **Development Regulations** - summarizing current zoning, subdivision and related regulations that apply to development within the larger study area.

### NOTE:

This analysis borrows from an assessment methodology developed by the Center for Urban Transportation Research, which uses checklists and matrices to compare areas of interjurisdictional coordination, public policy and regulatory standards that may apply within a particular highway corridor. Detailed review matrices are available as a supplement to this report.

## JURISDICTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Responsibilities for land use and transportation planning, development regulation, corridor management, and infrastructure improvements within the study area are shared between several state, regional, and local entities. Authorities, guiding documents, and regulations relevant to the study corridor are shown in **Figure 3.1**.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Vermont Agency of Transportation

VTrans is responsible for long-range and multimodal transportation planning for Route 7, other state highways in the area, and I-89; access management along state highways; and maintenance and infrastructure improvements within highway rights-of-way. Through interagency review, VTrans also has the ability to participate in Act 250. VTrans also issues “letters of intent” under local site plan reviews for projects that require access to state highways; and, as an affected state agency and property owner, may participate in local hearings and appeal local permit decisions.

**FIGURE 3.1**

### AUTHORITIES, GUIDING DOCUMENTS, AND REGULATIONS

AUTHORITY	PLANNING AND GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS	DEVELOPMENT REGULATION	ACCESS MANAGEMENT AND CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS
Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans)	Long Range Transportation Plan, State Transportation Improvement Plan, modal plans, State design standards, access management guidelines, Complete Streets policies	Highway access Act 250 (party) Municipal review (Letters of Intent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US-7 rights-of-way</li> <li>• Connecting state highways</li> <li>• I-89 interchange areas</li> <li>• Transportation Improvement Districts</li> </ul>
Green Mountain Transit (GMT)	Transit Development Plan	No regulatory authority	No independent authority; reliant on partnering municipalities and property owners along US-7
Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)	No planning authority - projects must conform to adopted regional and municipal plans, capital improvement programs	Act 250 (Permits)	Permit conditions (required transportation improvements, mitigation fees)
Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC)	Comprehensive regional plan Regional transportation plan Corridor management plan(s) Supporting plans, studies	No regulatory authority Act 250 (Party)	No independent authority; reliant on VTrans and state permitting processes
Town of St. Albans (Town)	Comprehensive town plan Sidewalk master plan, policy Capital improvement program	Unified bylaws Town ordinances (highway, impact fee) Act 250 (Party)	Connecting town highways US-7-reliant on VTrans, state permitting processes
City of St. Albans (City)	Comprehensive city plan, Supporting plans (Downtown, Growth Center, TIF District), Capital improvement program	Unified Bylaws, City Ordinances (street, sidewalk, water, wastewater) Act 250 (Party)	US-7 (Class I Highway) Connecting city streets

### Green Mountain Transit (GMT)

Green Mountain Transit is the area's regional transit provider, responsible for developing a regional transit development plan in cooperation with regional planning commissions, municipalities, and other public and private partners within its service area. It also manages public transit services in the region under formal agreements with VTrans. GMT has no authority to regulate land use and development within its service area, but instead relies on municipalities to plan for densities of development – and associated transit and pedestrian facilities – that support efficient, cost-effective and rider-friendly transit services.

### District 6 Environmental Commission (DEC)

Under Act 250, the DEC is responsible for regulating major development projects along Route 7, including the evaluation of project impacts on the transportation system, its relationship to existing settlement patterns and commercial strip development, and its conformance with municipal and regional plans and capital improvement programs. The DEC can impose transportation impact fees and require infrastructure improvements necessary to accommodate or mitigate the impacts of a proposed development on the highway corridor.

### Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC)

The NRPC is required to develop a comprehensive regional plan that addresses both transportation and land use. Under the state's Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI), the NRPC also manages a collaborative regional transportation planning program administered through its Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), including the development of a regional transportation plan and associated studies. The NRPC has standing to participate in Act 250 proceedings, but no separate authority to regulate development along the corridor.

### Town and City of St. Albans

The Town and City of St. Albans are primarily responsible for comprehensive planning and the regulation of development within the study area. Each municipality has an adopted plan that addresses transportation and land use, supporting facility or master plans, and a capital improvement program. Each has enacted unified zoning and subdivision bylaws that regulate land subdivision and development along the corridor, and ordinances that control access

to and improvements within connecting street rights-of-way. The City also shares jurisdiction with VTrans for access, maintenance and improvements to Route 7 within its downtown.

At the local level, responsibilities for development regulation are shared between administrative and public works staff and local development review boards. Each municipality has separate standing in Act 250 through its planning commission and city council or town selectboard.

## COORDINATED MANAGEMENT

Effectively integrating development and transportation improvements along the corridor – to promote increased connectivity and to better accommodate all highway users – requires collaborative planning and coordinated management. The Northwest Regional Planning Commission plays a central role in developing integrated regional land use, transportation, and corridor management plans – including the US 7 Corridor Study Update (2007) referenced in reviewed regional and municipal plans. This update of a 1996 study, though now also dated, recommends a number of multimodal roadway improvements along US-7 in the City of St. Albans, the Town of St. Albans, and Swanton.

### Development Patterns

Managing the type, form, and density of development in the vicinity of US-7 falls largely to the Town and City under locally adopted plans and regulations. The NRPC has limited ability to direct development along the corridor, through its work with member municipalities, the review of municipal plans for conformance with the regional plan, and regional participation in Act 250 proceedings. Regional standing in Act 250 applies in particular to projects determined to have a “substantial regional impact” as defined by the NRPC in the regional plan – for example projects that may require significant transportation infrastructure improvements. In these cases, the regional plan may override a local plan in Act 250, if a conflict exists between the two. VTrans also has little authority outside of participation in Act 250 to affect the pattern and density of development along the highway corridor.

## Access Management

VTrans retains immediate control over the US-7 right-of-way in St. Albans Town. The Town has no authority to approve access to Route 7 or to independently require improvements within the highway right-of-way, including sidewalks or bike lanes that would benefit other users. The City shares jurisdiction with VTrans for access management and improvements within the Route 7 right-of-way within city limits. In an effort to more closely align state and local management practices, VTrans issues standards and guidance for highway design, corridor planning, access management, and complete streets that apply to US-7 and other state highways, but are also intended for local consideration

## Development Review

State statutes include some basic requirements governing coordinated state and local review of development projects that access state highways. Current state laws governing highway access (under Title 19) and local development regulation (under Title 24) specify that:

- Access approval from VTrans is required for new land subdivision and development that directly accesses a state highway.
- As a condition of state (or municipal) highway access approval, compliance with all local ordinances and regulations related to highways and land use is required.
- In no case shall reasonable access to a property be denied, except as necessary to be consistent with state planning goals, and to be compatible with state agency, regional or regionally approved municipal plans.
- No deed for the subdivision of land abutting a state highway can be recorded by a municipality unless all subdivided lots meet state access requirements, including any requirement to install a frontage road.
- Applications for local site plan review that involve access to a state highway must include a “letter of intent” issued by VTrans that confirms the agency has reviewed the proposed site plan, is prepared to issue an access permit, and includes any conditions the agency proposes to attach to its permit.
- A municipality must provide VTrans with a notice of public hearing for any requested variance from setback requirements along a state highway.

- VTrans, as a state agency with interest in property, may also qualify as an “interested person” with standing to appeal a local permit.

## Class 1 Town Highway

Route 7 serves as St. Albans City’s Main Street, passing through the heart of its downtown. In this context the highway right-of-way serves a variety of functions and uses in addition to moving traffic – as public parking, pedestrian and storefront space. As such, Route 7 within city limits has been designated by the state as a Class 1 Town Highway, under joint municipal and state jurisdiction. This highway classification is generally limited to downtown and village centers, where land use and development activity is most intense. It benefits the City by offering needed flexibility for streetscape improvements, traffic calming, sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, on-street parking and coordinated infrastructure improvements. It also relieves VTrans of related highway maintenance that calls for special equipment or practices.

To date, St. Albans Town has not petitioned to extend Class 1 town highway status to portions of US-7 north of the city; and the current pattern and density of development along this stretch likely does not yet support a Class 1 designation.

## Management Agreements

Currently there are no formal interagency or intermunicipal memoranda or other agreements specific to the Route 7 corridor for planning, permitting or transportation system improvements. City water and sewer service, extended under separate agreements with the town, support higher density development within the town’s “Route 7 North Sewer District” which includes the study area. Future sewerage allocations in this area are subject to restrictions under the City’s wastewater allocation ordinance.

## Transportation Improvement District

VTrans, in consultation with regional planning commissions and municipalities, has the authority to designate Transportation Improvement District (TIDs). The intent of a TID is to identify, schedule and finance transportation improvements that are needed to accommodate planned growth and development within the district. No TID has yet been proposed for any area along Route 7 to address corridor, interchange or intersection improvements identified in previous plans and studies. TIDs are recommended for consideration in the NRPC’s current regional plan.

## PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Municipal, regional and state agency plans and related guidance documents provide the policy framework for regulating development along transportation corridors within the region, and for recommended transportation system improvements. Several plans relevant to Route 7 and the study area were reviewed including VTrans’ Long Range Transportation Plan and GMT’s most recent Transit Development Plan, both of which are in the process of being updated. The focus of this policy review, however, was on plans specific to transportation, land use and development within the study area:



**Plan for the Northwest Region, 2015–2023** (Northwest Regional Planning Commission, 2015) - the adopted comprehensive regional plan for the region. This plan also incorporates

the region’s long-range transportation plan, under the Transportation Planning Initiative, last issued separately in 2010 (draft). Other studies referenced in the plan, include the US7 Corridor Study Update (2007) were also reviewed.



**Town Plan** (Town of St. Albans, 2012) – now expired. The town is in the process of updating its comprehensive town plan, and the Sidewalk Master Plan (2003) referenced in the

2012 town plan. The Town’s current capital improvement program was also reviewed.



**City Plan** (City of St. Albans, 2017) – the recently updated comprehensive plan for the city. Supporting plans and documents referenced in the plan were also considered as they relate to Route 7, including the Downtown

Master Plan (2009), Growth Center (2010) and TIF District (2012) plans, and the City’s capital improvement program.

The following sections describe how these plans address the Route 7 study corridor and planned growth and development along and near the study corridor.

**Appendix Item** See *Planning Policies & Programs Table*

## ROUTE 7 STUDY CORRIDOR

### Current Conditions

All plans reviewed recognize the importance of Route 7 as the main north-south state highway serving the area, serving through traffic and providing direct access to land in the vicinity of I-89; and are generally consistent in their recommendations for improvements along the corridor. Each plan references findings from the 2007 US7 Corridor Study Update, including the need for bicycle, pedestrian and intersection improvements along the highway, and an alternate route (Federal Street Extension) to alleviate traffic congestion.



**Plan for the Northwest Region**

- Describes Route 7 as one of the state highways that form the backbone of the region’s transportation system
- Does not include transportation data, policies or recommendations specific to the Route 7 corridor beyond references to the 2007 corridor study
- Commission staff noted that goals and strategies specific to the corridor are presented in more detail in the previous Northwest Long-Range Transportation Plan: 2010-2015 (2010 draft), which may still serve as a reference. At the time, safety was noted as a major concern. Key goals and associated strategies included:
  - Maintenance over construction. Implement the Federal Street Extension Project, develop an access management plan, upgrade signals, update the St. Albans Circulation Study, and modify the alignment of the US7/VT105 intersection.
  - Emphasize Alternative Transportation Options. Install sidewalks along the corridor in St. Albans City and Town, improve shoulders wherever possible, implement Route 7 Corridor Study recommendations, and support St. Albans City’s Streetscape Project.

- Reduce Sprawl. Support mixed use, high density development along the corridor within the Regional Growth Center. Strategies include street connectivity, pedestrian accessibility and facilities, access management, and traffic calming improvements.



#### *Town Plan*

- Describes Route 7 as the main roadway connecting north and south ends of Town through the City, while also providing direct access to the Town's planned growth centers
- References corridor study recommendations, including related roadway, bicycle, pedestrian and transit improvements
- Identifies a parcel of land for possible acquisition for the construction of an alternative route west of Route 7 that would also serve the town's North End Growth Center.



#### *City Plan*

- Describes Route 7 as the city's Main Street, serving its historic downtown and designated growth center, and as the city's "commercial axis" supporting its central and extended business districts
- Identifies traffic congestion, including heavy truck traffic, as a critical corridor management issue
- Identifies planning and design work for the Federal Street Multi-Modal Connector Project as a high priority
- Notes that based on previous studies, additional signalization may be warranted (the City currently maintains four signalized intersections along the study route)
- Includes recommendations to require traffic impact studies and to monitor traffic from new development

## Complete Streets

A "complete street" is a street or highway that accommodates everyone – including motorists, walkers, bicyclists and transit riders – regardless of age, ability or preferred mode of transportation. Vermont's 2011 Complete Streets Law (Act 34) requires the state and municipalities to consider all users when planning for, constructing and maintaining streets and highways, in relation to their intended function and context. VTrans in 2012 issued internal guidance for agency use on state highways, with the Vermont Department of Health, Complete Streets: A Guide for Vermont Municipalities, for municipal use.



#### *Plan for the Northwest Region*

- Ensures that the region's transportation network will accommodate all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, freight and public transit users.
- New public and private transportation infrastructure shall be designed and built to interconnect with existing adjacent land development(s) and with adjacent lands that have the potential for future land development. This will ensure more efficient traffic patterns and bicycle/pedestrian movement within the region.
- Incorporates Complete Streets implementation policies by planning area, for consideration in the review of new development, to support regional projects seeking grant funding, and to allow for stronger regional input into state transportation projects. Within the "Regional Growth Area" encompassing the study area these policies include:
  - Sidewalk construction in conjunction with new development and redevelopment projects and along existing roadways
  - Bike lanes along streets with existing and anticipated future high bicycle and vehicle traffic volumes
  - Intersection upgrades to accommodate existing and future anticipated bicycle and pedestrian use
  - Coordination with transit providers to increase or improve routes
  - Year-round snow and ice removal from sidewalks
  - Minimizing access to roadways and narrowing entrances to existing parking lots.



### Town Plan

- Predates available Complete Streets guidance, and therefore does not incorporate related policies or principles.
- Notes that the current road system “does not provide a designated lane for pedestrians, bicycles, and other non-motorized transportation alternatives” (p.61).
- Indicates the need to update and maintain the Town’s Sidewalk Master Plan (2003), to explore creation of new and expanded bike paths and recreation trails, and to coordinate with VTrans to establish sidewalks along state highways.
- Suggests exploring an on-road bike lane along Route 7 that connects St. Albans Bay to the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail and provides access to the town’s North End Growth Center.
- Recommends an incentive-based approach to sidewalk and bike path development in association with new development; but also allows for bylaw updates that require sidewalks in conformance with an updated sidewalk master plan and policy.



### City Plan

- References Complete Streets principles and objectives and recommends pursuing Complete Streets designs “whenever possible”
- Related recommendations include:
  - Repairing existing sidewalks and installing new sidewalks
  - Preserving sidewalk connectivity across driveways
  - Extending North Main Street sidewalks to the town boundary and installing crosswalks
  - Extending sidewalks to the entrance of the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail
- Documents recent and planned streetscape improvements along Route 7, including traffic calming, sidewalk and other pedestrian improvements, and the installation of shared lane markings as part of a 2017 repaving project.
- Calls for participation with adjoining communities in projects that address mutual interests, such as extending sidewalk networks, and for playing a role in the

construction and maintenance of pedestrian facilities outside of city limits that connect to important community resources.

### VTRANS COMPLETE STREETS GUIDANCE

It is the responsibility of the VTrans, under its 2012 Complete Streets Guidance Document, to consider Complete Streets Principles for all projects unless one of the three exceptions listed below is met:

- 1) Use of the facility by pedestrians, bicyclists, or other users is prohibited by law (e.g., interstate system, other limited access highways).
- 2) Outside the scope of the project because of its very nature (e.g., routine maintenance, culvert replacements, sign replacements, traffic signal upgrades).
- 3) The cost of incorporating Complete Streets principles is disproportionate to the need or probable use (based on an analysis by planners and project design teams with consideration given to land use, current and projected user volumes, population density natural constraints, etc.). Local and regional plans shall be consulted to aid in assessing these and other factors.

### Corridor Management

The plans reviewed include few policies or recommendations specific to functional classification, highway capacity, planned levels of service, or traffic generation. Access management is generally noted as a concern in all three plans, but none reference VTrans’ Access Management Program Guidelines (2005) as applied to development along Route 7, or as recommended by VTrans for local consideration. None of the plans reviewed include management recommendations (e.g., an access or corridor management overlay district) specific to Route 7.



### Plan for the Northwest Region

Calls for minimizing access points and increasing connectivity between adjoining parcels



### Town Plan

- Describes the importance of linking transportation and land use, suggests the need to limit access points where feasible, and to require access management plans for some developments.
- Recommends a generally incentive-based approach to access management – e.g., with regard to shared access, and reducing or eliminating existing curb cuts.



### City Plan

- Notes the lack of a comprehensive access management policy or regulations.
- Recommends limiting curb cut widths and requiring traffic impact studies where appropriate.

## Public Transit

All plans reviewed mention the need to promote public transit and to improve and extend transit service along the corridor, but include few related recommendations.

### *GMT Rural Transit Development Plan (2012)*

- The 2012 plan calls for patterns and densities of development – including forms of transit- or pedestrian-oriented development that support public transportation
- Encouraging transit use and access will require coordination and cooperation with municipalities and other agencies in the GMT service area to focus development along existing routes, consider the presence of transit when contemplating future development, and to improve the pedestrian environment of all service areas.
- The 2012 plan also emphasizes that “the pedestrian environment in bus service corridors is an essential element of the overall system” and identifies the need for further investment in park and ride facilities, shelters, benches, bike racks and other passenger facilities – as well as new technologies – to make the system appealing and accessible to a broader base of passengers.
- The *NextGen Transit Development Plan* (in progress) recommends improved transit service that better integrates urban and rural services, and simplifies existing route alignments.

“The future expanded GMTA system that is recommended in this TDP can only be viable if it is planned in concert with future land use decisions that support public transportation. Whether this land use is called “smart growth,” “transit oriented design,” “pedestrian oriented design,” or some other term, it is essential that future development (especially the type that generates demand for public transportation) be focused in a geographical area that is compact and conducive to efficient operations. If public transportation is instead spread too thinly by being asked to serve larger and larger geographic areas infrequently, it will never be able to operate at a level of service that can be attractive to choice riders.

- GMT Rural Transit Development Plan (p.11)



### *Plan for the Northwest Region*

- Supports new and expand existing public transportation services to serve both transit-dependent and transit-by-choice riders.
- New development within regional growth centers (including the study area) shall work with local transit providers to increase routes within the area.
- Calls for development organized around focal points within growth areas, as a characteristic of growth center development.
- Under the energy plan, calls for increasing public transit ridership within the region by 100% by 2050; and to require a public transit stop for all residential and large commercial land developments subject to Act 250 if a stop is not currently available.
- Supports efforts to make regional transit authorities like Green Mountain Transit statutory parties to all Act 250 applications in the region.

### Town Plan



- Notes that transit service within the town is very limited.
- Calls for an analysis of public transit services needed to best serve the town.



### City Plan

- Mentions that there are designated downtown bus stops but no associated shelters or other transit facilities.
- Includes as an objective that city residents have access to a variety of self-transportation and public transit options.
- City regulations and initiatives will continue to maintain a balance of motorized, non-motorized and public transit transportation options downtown.

## PLANNED GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Plans reviewed document recent growth and development trends through 2010, except for the St. Albans Town Plan which relies on earlier census data. Growth trend highlights from these plans are summarized below.

### Past Growth and Population

- Growth and development in the county continue to be concentrated along the I-89 corridor. The regional plan notes that proximity to I-89 supports higher rates of population and housing growth in St. Albans Town.
- In 2010, the City of St. Albans (pop: 6,910) was the largest community in Franklin County by population. The Town of St. Albans ranked third (pop: 5,999) behind Swanton (pop: 6,427) to the north. The combined City and Town population comprised 27% of the county's total population.
- Between 2000 and 2010, the Franklin County's population grew by 5.1% (down from 13.6% in the 1990s). The Town of St. Albans experienced a higher rate of population growth over the same period (12.7%), and the City's population reportedly declined (-9.6%), mirroring a statewide urban trend.
- Population, households, and employment within the region grew through the 2000s, though at slower rates than the previous two decades and more slowly than anticipated in previous plans and studies.

### Population Projections

- The Town Plan projects a local population increase through 2030 (linear).
- The City Plan notes that in 2013, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) projected population declines through 2030. There are no separate population, housing, or employment forecasts included in the regional plan. According to NRPC staff, ACCD projections are generally referenced as needed.
- There are no targeted or planned rates of growth included in adopted plans nor any build-out analyses for planned development. The regional plan recommends the use of indicators or benchmarks to track progress under related goals and objectives.
- The 2007 US 7 Corridor Study Update (though now dated) includes development information specific to the current study area. An average rate of growth of 2% per year was projected for the Town through the planning year (2027) based on a historical 30-year average. This is higher than the average rate from 2000 to 2010 (1.27% per year). This study also includes a near buildout of the study area, based on known and anticipated development projects, which has yet to be realized.

“Franklin and Grand Isle Counties are consistently among the fastest-growing counties in Vermont in terms of population and housing units (U.S. Census). This high growth can largely be attributed to the region's proximity to Chittenden County. As land and housing prices in Chittenden County continue to increase, many people are trading a longer commute for more affordable land and housing and a more rural setting. In this region, it is critical to have the tools and resources in place to plan for and manage the impacts of growth.

– Northwest Regional Plan (p.92)

## State Planning Goals and Smart Growth Principles

As noted in the regional plan, state planning goals “establish the policy framework for land use planning in Vermont” (p.92). All regional, state, and regionally-approved municipal plans must be consistent with state planning goals (under 24 VSA, Chapter 117), including state policies related to land use and development, transportation, and growth management. Vermont also enacted a set of “smart growth principles” initially applied to downtowns, villages and growth centers under related state designation programs. These were incorporated under Chapter 117 planning goals for broader application in 2013.



### *Plan for the Northwest Region*

- Generally addresses state planning goals, and more specifically with regard to maintaining the historic development pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.



### *Town Plan*

- Highlights smart growth principles in detail, especially as applied to development within the “Northwest Regional Growth Area,” which encompasses the study area.
- Generally acknowledges but does not specifically address relevant state planning goals. The plan received regional approval in 2012, indicating that it was then consistent with the goals.
- The 2012 plan predates and therefore does not consider associated smart growth principles – e.g., for application within the town’s proposed growth center, which also includes the study area.



### *City Plan*

- Specifically addresses state planning goals and also references smart growth principles, particularly as relevant to its state-designated downtown and growth center.

## WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

- Maintains the historic development pattern of compact village and urban centers surrounded by rural countryside.
- Develops compact mixed-use centers at a scale appropriate for the community and the region.
- Enables choice in modes of transportation.
- Balances growth with the availability of economic and efficient public utilities and services.
- Supports a diversity of viable businesses in downtowns and villages.
- Provides for housing that meets the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each community.
- Reflects a settlement pattern that, at full build-out, is not characterized by:
  - Scattered development located outside of compact urban and village centers that is excessively land consumptive;
  - Development that limits transportation options, especially for pedestrians;
  - Development that is not serviced by, or requires the extension of municipal infrastructure across undeveloped lands in a manner that would extend service to lands located outside of compact village and urban centers;
  - Linear development along well-traveled roads and highways that lacks depth, as measured from the highway.

[24 VSA § 2791]

## Planned Development

Municipal plans provide the policy basis for the regulation of development under local zoning and subdivision regulations. Project conformance with local and regional plans is also a consideration in the Act 250 review of proposed development.<sup>1</sup> All plans reviewed include policies to concentrate development within local and regional growth centers, and to minimize commercial strip development along major highways – though Route 7 and the access it provides to adjoining land, businesses and I-89 are also highlighted as important for commercial, industrial and growth center development within the city, town, and the region.

All plans reviewed support higher density mixed use development within designated growth centers, and increased pedestrian, bicycle and transit access in these areas – all characteristics that more generally support “livability” – but do not identify the preferred form or density of development. None of the plans address more “nodal” forms of transit-oriented development along the corridor at densities needed to support scheduled transit service, or associated pedestrian connections and facilities, as called for in the GMT Transit Development Plan.



### *Plan for the Northwest Region*

- Defines the “Northwest Regional Growth Area” to include most of St. Albans City and areas of St. Albans Town and Swanton with access to I-89 (Exits 19 and 20). The primary study area is incorporated in the “North Wing” of the regional growth area, as described in **Figure 3.2**.
- Description of future development in the area reflects both smart growth principles and new Act 250 standards (enacted in 2013) intended to support development within existing settlements and designated growth centers, and to limit new strip development outside of these areas.
- Calls for future development in the regional growth area to consist of projects that promote listed growth center characteristics (p.94):
  - Incorporate a mix of uses
  - Provide public spaces
  - Organized around a focal point
  - Promote development that is more dense than that

outside a growth center

- Support existing or planned infrastructure
- Result in concentrated development surrounded by rural countryside
- Planned in accordance with Chapter 117 planning goals and smart growth principles.
- Growth center policies support infill and redevelopment within planned growth areas; targeting economic growth in these areas; ensuring that public investments promote expansion within these areas; ensuring that mixed use development occurs at significantly higher densities within these areas; and that new commercial and retail development is scaled to primarily serve the regional or local market.



### *Town Plan*

- Primary study area included in the “Northern End Growth Center Overlay” described in the Town Plan (“North Wing” of the NRPC’s Regional Growth Area) which, in underlying commercial and industrial zoning districts, is intended to accommodate larger forms of commercial and industrial development along Route 7, in areas with easy access to highways and infrastructure.
- Recommends incentives within the Growth Center Overlay to promote more concentrated, clustered mixed use development in this area – including higher density multiunit residential and planned unit development.
- Does not encourage strip development; but also does not require clustered development.



### *City Plan*

- Recognizes the City as the region’s urban center, and the area’s historic downtown and business center. The form of the city’s built environment is more specifically addressed in supporting master plans and studies for its historic district, designated downtown and growth center, which also establish the basis for recommended design review regulations.
- Given that the City is largely built out, emphasizes compatible, context-sensitive infill and redevelopment within city limits – to include design review within

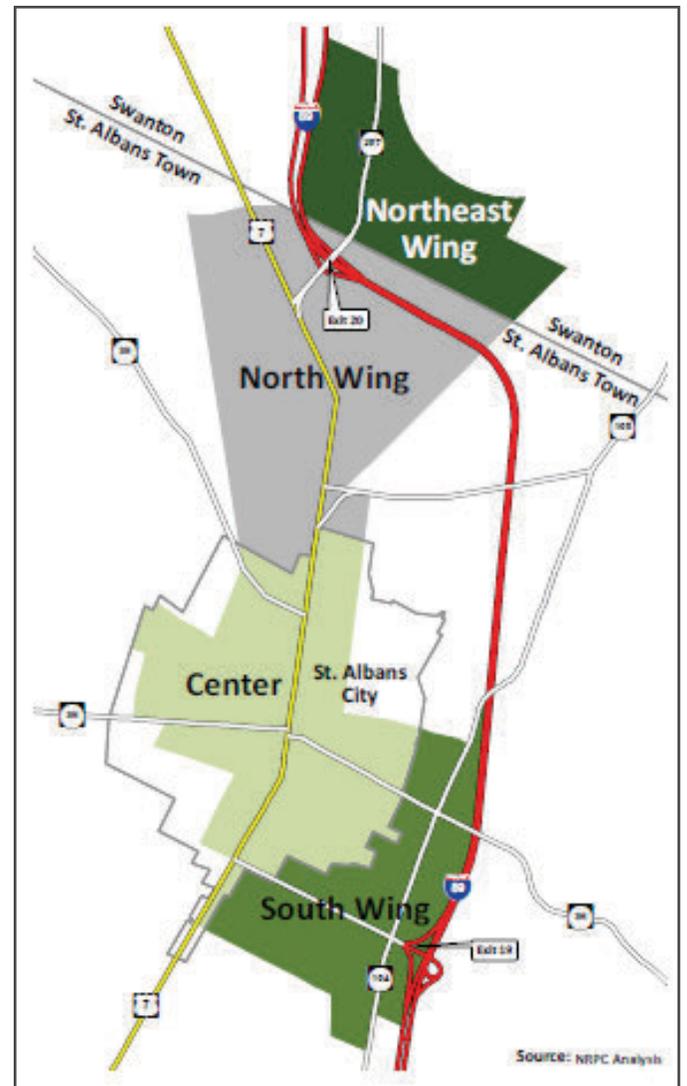
downtown business districts and gateway areas, to ensure that new development is well designed, pedestrian friendly, and compatible with the city’s historic character.

- State-designated growth center does not extend to city limits in order to minimize the potential for strip development in neighboring areas of town.
- Recognizes that development to the north, in St. Albans Town, relies heavily on the extension of city water and sewer infrastructure which has both benefited and negatively impacted the City.
- Recommends that the City pursue coordinated planning and development and contract services with the town, where practical and mutually beneficial.
- Also recommends coordination with adjacent municipalities on land use decisions to reduce commercial strip development on city borders.

**FIGURE 3.2**  
**NORTHWEST REGIONAL GROWTH AREA**

“The north wing has experienced the bulk of recent development in the Northwest Regional Growth Area; however, most of it has been automobile-oriented commercial development in the form of strip malls, fast-food restaurants and banks. Like the south wing, the north wing is influenced by an interstate exit (i.e., exit 20). Future development in the north wing must not continue the existing patterns of strip development and should instead consist of infill development and/or projects that help promote the characteristics of growth centers noted earlier in this section. Pedestrian accessibility, public transportation, mixed uses (residential and commercial uses) and compact high-density design will be necessary to further growth area goals

- Northwest Regional Plan (p.96)



## DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Along the study corridor, the regulation of development is primarily the responsibility of the Town and City. As noted earlier, the two municipalities, the NRPC, and VTrans also have party status in Act 250 proceedings regulating larger development along the corridor.<sup>2</sup>

The Town and City each have unified (combined) bylaws that incorporate zoning, subdivision, and flood hazard area regulations and, in the City, design regulations as well. These bylaws include:

- **Town of St. Albans Unified Development Bylaws (2016)** – most recently amended to incorporate proposed zoning changes recommended in the 2012 Town Plan. The Town’s current highway ordinance and fire code, as referenced in the regulations for public and private streets, were also considered.
- **City of St. Albans Land Development Regulations (2017)** – most recently amended in January 2017. City ordinances pertaining to city streets and sidewalks and the allocation of wastewater system capacity within the study area were also reviewed.

Development regulations in both communities are administered by a zoning administrator and a development review board (DRB) that considers applications for planned unit development and for subdivision, site plan, and conditional use review. Regulations also reference internal application referrals for review by the Town’s public works and fire departments (for access, roads, and infrastructure), the City Manager (for access, streets, sidewalks, infrastructure) and the City’s design advisory board (for design).

Current zoning regulations and subdivision regulations relevant to the study area are described in the following sections.

**Appendix Item** See *Summary Bylaws Table*

## ZONING REGULATIONS

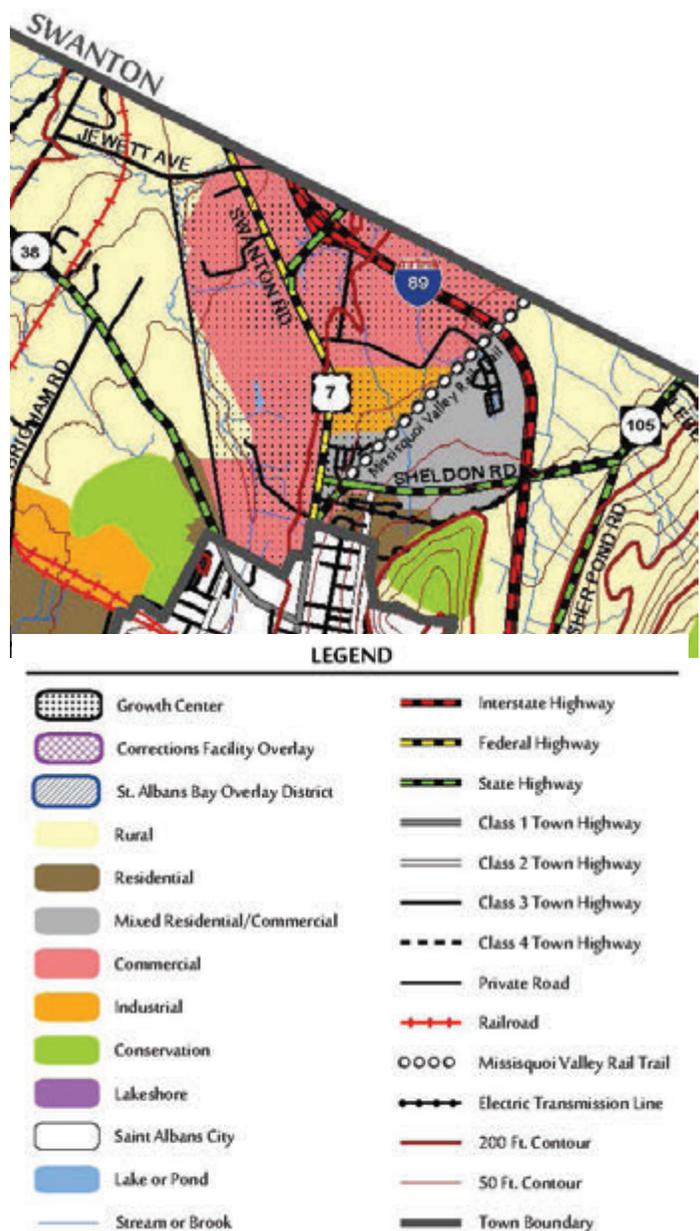
Zoning regulations reviewed include zoning district standards (purpose, allowed uses, dimensional/density standards), site plan review standards, conditional use review standards, planned unit development standards and associated parking standards.

**Appendix Item** See *US-7 Zoning Districts Table*

## Zoning Districts

Zoning governs the type and density of development allowed within designated zoning districts, as shown on official zoning maps. The Town’s zoning districts within the study area are shown in **Figure 3.3**. City zoning districts along US-7 are shown in **Figure 3.4**. District designations along the study corridor in both communities allow for moderate densities of commercial development and more limited forms of residential and industrial development. Zoning districts are described below.

**FIGURE 3.3**  
TOWN ZONING DISTRICTS AROUND STUDY AREA





### Town Zoning Districts (Primary Study Area)

**Commercial District** – comprises most of the study area, with access to I-89 via Exit 20. This district is intended to accommodate larger forms of commercial development that provide goods and services, tax base, and employment. Residential uses are limited to multifamily dwellings. Minimum lot sizes range from 20,000 to 40,000 square feet depending on the availability of municipal water and/or sewer. Planned Unit Development is allowed, but not required.

**Industrial District** – defines an area east of Route 7 that is intended for intensive industrial development and very limited retail development on larger lots (80,000+ square feet). No residential development is allowed in this district. Planned unit development is allowed, but not required. The Franklin Park West Industrial Park is located within this district.

**Mixed Residential/Commercial District** – located east of Route 7 and south of the Industrial District, its northern border largely follows the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail. This district is intended for residential development and “commercial uses that enhance residential living” including, but not limited to offices, banks, convenience stores, restaurants, and retail businesses. Residential uses allowed in this district include single family, two family and multifamily dwellings, at densities of one to four units per acre. Planned unit developments are also allowed, but not required.

**North Growth Center Overlay District** – encompasses the primary study area, including large portions of underlying districts noted above. This district is intended to offer incentives that encourage (but do not require) concentrated, clustered commercial and residential development in areas with access to public thoroughfares and utilities. Sidewalks must be provided in this district as specified in the town’s sidewalk policy (currently under development). District dimensional standards allow for:

- Smaller lots,
- Reduced frontage,
- Increased building heights and lot coverage, and
- Higher densities of residential development (up to 14.5 units/acre).

Incentives (increase building and parking coverage up to

77%) are provided for:

- Elimination of access points on Route 7
- Shared access
- Hosting transit facilities such as a bus stop or state park and ride facility, and
- Extending an existing sidewalk or building a new sidewalk, as identified in the most recent St. Albans Town Sidewalk Policy,

**Residential District** touches but does not extend along Route 7 and falls outside of the regional growth area. This district includes the existing residential neighborhood south of VT-105, which is accessed from adjoining residential neighborhoods in the city.

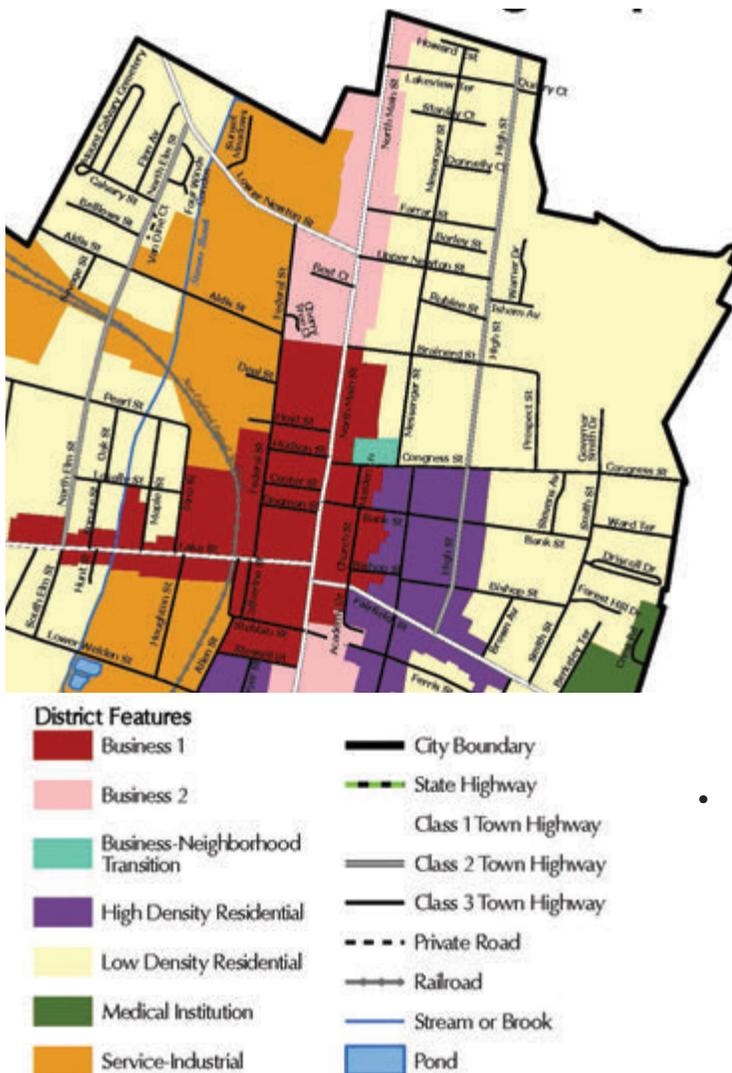
### Related Observations

- Town zoning within the study area does not promote, but allows for commercial strip development along Route 7. Zoning district designations extend beyond the right-of-way, allowing for clustered forms of development off of the highway right-of-way.
- The current regulations offer an incentive-based approach to access management within the study area, however VTrans continues to control direct access to and improvements within the US-7 right-of-way.
- Outside of existing neighborhoods, residential uses within the primary study area are limited to multi-family units (within the underlying commercial district). Under related overlay district incentives, residential uses within the study area could be developed at densities that support increased walkability (at four or more units per acre), and scheduled bus service (at 8 or more units per acre) depending on site layout and design; however the current regulations include no standards specific to the form or layout of development within this district.
- Under town zoning the overall form of development is defined by minimum lot sizes and required setback distances, maximum lot coverage requirements, and maximum building heights that establish the regulatory building envelope. The maximum allowed building height increases significantly within the Growth Center Overlay, from 35 to 65 feet (roughly six stories). Minimum district dimensional requirements may also be modified or waived by the DRB for planned unit development, to provide more flexibility in site layout and

design, and to allow for more clustered, higher density development.

- The spacing of development along town and state highways is largely determined by minimum district road frontage or lot width requirements, especially as applied under subdivision regulations. Minimum frontage requirements under the town's regulations vary from 100 to 200 feet, allowing for a more suburban form of development characterized by standalone buildings separated by side yards, with onsite parking. It appears that frontage requirements are defined in relation to minimum lot area requirements, rather than recommended access separation distances. These standards also affect walkability by establishing a minimum required distance between adjoining buildings and uses.

**FIGURE 3.4**  
CITY ZONING DISTRICTS AROUND STUDY AREA



*City Districts (Secondary Study Area and small portion of Primary Study Area)*

The City has two business zoning districts located along US-7, both of which allow for higher densities of commercial and mixed-use infill and redevelopment. City zoning regulations also include several design review overlay districts that more specifically regulate site layout, access, and building design within historic, central, and transitional business districts and gateway areas.

**Business 1 (Central Business)** - includes the dense, downtown core of the City and the St. Albans Shopping Center (the Rite Aid plaza). Uses allowed within this district include those that benefit from pedestrian activity and access, including first floor retail and restaurants and civic uses. Multifamily housing, including upper story housing, is allowed at a density of 2,000 square feet per dwelling unit (around 23 units per acre). Onsite parking is not allowed in this district.

**Business 2 (Transitional Business)** - north of Brainerd Street along Route 7, including the southern end of the primary study area. A variety of commercial and civic uses are allowed. A variety of housing is also allowed, subject to conditional use review, at a density of up to 5,000 square feet per unit (around 9 units per acre). Off-street parking is allowed in this district. Mixed use planned unit developments are also allowed to encourage more efficient forms of infill development

**Design Review Overlays** - that also regulate site layout and building design along Route 7 include the following:

- DR-1 (Traditional Downtown) – intended to preserve the historic character and walkability of the City's "Main Street."
- DR-2 (Downtown Expansion) – intended to promote compatible forms of commercial and mixed use development.
- DR-4 (Gateway) – regulates the design of development within main entrances to the City

### Related Observations

- Allowed uses and densities of development along the corridor reflect the city’s existing urban character, and generally support an active pedestrian environment and public transit.
- Lot width is measured separately from lot frontage. Minimum required lot widths under city zoning vary from 20 to 75 feet, reflecting a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly urban block pattern of development that generally precludes most onsite parking.
- There are no overlay districts specific to the US-7 corridor in the City, but development along the corridor is regulated under several design review overlay districts, as noted. Related criteria more specifically address site design and layout (setbacks, building orientation and entrances, access, parking, internal site circulation, connecting walkways), building architecture, and associated streetscapes (pedestrian scale, sidewalks, street trees, furniture, signs, lighting, etc.) .
- Downtown streets, including city sidewalks and on-street parking, are maintained by the City as public infrastructure. Connecting sidewalks are required under design or site plan review per the City Manager, or where the residential density exceeds 1 unit/2 acres.

### Site Plan Review

Site layout and design, including site access, traffic and pedestrian circulation, and parking are typically addressed under site plan review. Per statute, site plan review may apply to all allowed development except for single and two-family dwellings.



#### Town

- Applies to all allowed development, including planned unit development, and all subdivisions that require DRB review.
- Applicant is required to submit a site plan that shows access points, parking areas, sidewalks and walkways, and estimates of daily peak hour traffic generation.
- VTrans Letter of Intent required for projects accessing state highways. Direct access to town highways is regulated under the town’s highway ordinance.
- Other access management provisions noted in the



#### City

- Site plan review is defined as either minor or major:
  - **Minor** – projects that involve modifications to parking, landscaping, and screening or new construction on a lot. Applications for minor review require only a site plan showing access and parking.
  - **Major** – projects that involve both new construction and modifications to parking, landscaping, or screening. Applications for major review require the submission of a development plan that shows vehicle access, existing and proposed parking areas, traffic access and circulation, and pedestrian facilities and circulation.

regulations – including access from secondary roads, limits on the number of access points, and shared access with adjoining properties – are encouraged or may be required “where feasible.”

- The DRB may impose “appropriate conditions and safeguards” regarding:
  - Vehicular access to the street network - regarding location, sight distances, traffic control measures, and pedestrian safety;
  - Vehicular circulation, parking, and loading, with attention to safety;
  - Pedestrian facilities, including connections to adjoining streets, onsite circulation and sidewalks;
  - Landscaping, screening and setbacks; and
  - Project compatibility with adjoining uses, structures, and the character of the area.
- Onsite parking requirements encourage but do not require shared parking, or parking that is located to the side or rear of buildings. Shared parking requires conditional use review.
- Associated parking standards are more prescriptive regarding parking lot layout and design and the minimum number of spaces required per use – including the number of bicycle parking spaces required for commercial and industrial uses (one per ten vehicle spaces).
- No specific provisions for on-street parking, off-site parking, transit facilities, parking structures, or transportation demand management.

- Review criteria include a number of considerations and specific standards related to the adequacy of roads and streets. Site plan standards specify that “safe, adequate and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access and circulation shall be provided both within the site and to adjacent streets.”
- Associated regulations limit the number of **access** points (one per lot) in residential districts and the location of driveways in relation to street intersections, for all but single and two-family dwellings.
- **On-site parking** must be located to the side or rear of the principal building or setback an additional 10 feet from the front lot line. Onsite parking (and associated access) is not required in the B1 (Central Business) District on lots less than one acre.
- **Off-site parking** may be considered by the DRB in both business districts, to include shared parking on adjoining lots or within walking distance (400 feet). Additional criteria for the siting and screening of parking lots, and associated pedestrian connections, are considered under design review.
- Regulations do not include specific references to on-street parking, bicycle parking, transit facilities, structured parking or transportation demand management.

### Conditional Use Review

Conditional use review, conducted by the DRB, is intended to address the impacts of development on existing and planned municipal facilities, traffic, and roads and the character of the area (as defined in the regulations and municipal plan). It applies to uses listed by zoning district as “conditional” uses under each set of regulations.



#### Town

- Conditional use review is required in association with site plan review for listed uses and for planned unit development. There are no additional application requirements.
- There are no prescriptive standards or thresholds for use in determining traffic or highway impacts, but the DRB may impose conditions as appropriate to mitigate the undue adverse effects of development, including truck traffic, on local highways.

- The DRB may also require easements or maintenance agreements for required infrastructure improvements.



#### City

- Conditional use review applies to listed uses and planned unit development under the city’s zoning regulations, which allows the DRB to impose conditions to necessary mitigate undue adverse effects of development.
- The DRB may require alterations to access and circulation, parking areas, internal streets and drives, and traffic signals and turning lanes on abutting streets.
- If a proposed development results in a significant drop in the level of service, the DRB may also require intersection improvements, the installation of turning lanes or other improvements needed to accommodate the development.

### Planned Unit Development

Planned unit development (PUD) provisions are intended to offer the flexibility under local regulations needed to negotiate and achieve desired forms of integrated, planned development. PUD provisions allow the DRB to modify or waive underlying zoning requirements for development that meets community goals and objectives – e.g., for open space preservation, affordable housing, or more pedestrian- or transit-friendly subdivision and site design. Under current regulations, both municipalities allow, but do not require, planned unit development.



#### Town

- PUD regulations are intended to provide flexibility in the layout of lots, building sites, roads, utilities and parking areas, in the allowed density and intensity of use, and building design and placement, to allow for clustering, open space, and the efficient use of land. The DRB may waive or modify district standards, in association with subdivision, site plan and/or conditional use review.
- PUD regulations do not currently identify specific types of planned development (e.g., conservation, traditional neighborhood or transit-oriented development) or associated design standards. PUDs may include any mix

of uses allowed within the zoning district, and more than one principal use per lot. Phasing is also allowed, but there are no related provisions for master plans or development agreements. Density bonuses may be granted as incentives for affordable and senior housing, infill development, access management, connecting streets, sidewalks and pedestrian paths, and for public access to recreational resources.



*City*

Under the City’s zoning regulations, planned unit developments are allowed along the corridor in all but the Central Business (B1) District, mainly to encourage more efficient use of land, roads, and public utilities – an important consideration for infill or redevelopment that cannot easily conform to zoning district requirements. Within the Transitional Business (B2) District, only mixed-use PUDs are allowed, subject to conditional use review and subdivision review where applicable. PUD provisions also allow for a 25% increase in the number of dwelling units. There are no associated master plan or phasing provisions.

**SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS**

The Town and City of St. Albans both regulate the subdivision of land, which establishes the overall pattern of development in relation to the existing and planned transportation network – including state highways, local streets, sidewalks, recreation paths, transit facilities, and supporting infrastructure. The Zoning Administrator in both municipalities has limited authority to approve two-lot subdivisions and boundary adjustments without DRB review.

**Subdivisions Subject to Review**



*Town:* For subdivisions with more than two single family dwelling units or lots, subdivision regulations apply to the construction, extension, or relocation of

a road right-of-way. For all other subdivisions, sketch plan and preliminary administrative review by the zoning administrator is required prior to final review and approval by the DRB. Site plan review is required for any subdivision of land that includes a 60-foot (road) right-of-way, common or shared stormwater infrastructure, and all planned unit development.



*City:* Under the City’s development regulations, subdivisions are classified under sketch plan review as either minor or major. Minor subdivisions result in the creation of no more than four lots

with frontage along an existing public or private street, and major subdivisions (requiring preliminary DRB approval) result in five or more lots or include a new public or private street. Planned unit development is also classified as a major subdivision.

**Master Plans and Phased Development**



*Town and City:* Neither the Town or City’s subdivision regulations include requirements for master plans or phased development. Phasing may be

required by the City’s DRB in relation to its adopted capital improvement program.

**Connectivity to Roads, Sidewalks, and Associated Infrastructure**



*Town:* Town regulations address project location in relation to public roads and intersections, and sidewalks as specified in the town’s sidewalk policy.



*City:* City regulations address connections to streets and sidewalks within 2,000 feet of the project.



*Town and City:* Neither set of regulations address pedestrian sheds, bicycle lanes or facilities, or public transit facilities or connections.

**Traffic Impact Studies**



*Town and City:* Traffic impact studies may be required by DRBs in association with preliminary or final subdivision review, as required under sketch plan review. Subdivision regulations do not

specify thresholds – e.g., traffic generation rates – in relation to highway function or capacity or existing or planned levels of service.

### Highway Standards



*Town:* Subdivision regulations reference highway standards under the Town’s highway ordinance. The Town currently requires a 60-foot right-of-way for all new development roads, regardless of function or context. VTrans A-76 standards (roads) and B-71 standards (driveways) are also incorporated by reference. The Town’s fire code includes specifications for cul-de-sacs and turnarounds.



*City:* Subdivision regulations include street design standards and also reference street standards as specified by the City manager. City ordinances reviewed do not include specific street standards, but more generally reference state standards for Class 2 and 3 highways. Cul-de-sacs or dead ends are allowed only where through streets are not possible.



*Town and City:* No regulations reviewed reference Vermont State Design Standards (1997) or incorporate Complete Streets standards.

### Access



*Town:* There are no access standards under the Town’s subdivision regulations; These are instead considered under site plan review, as applied to most subdivisions.



*City:* The City’s subdivision regulations reference access requirements under zoning; access roads, extensions, and cross connections between adjoining parcels may be required.



*Town and City:* There are no requirements under either set of subdivision regulations for frontage roads, shared access to subdivided parcels, or that preclude additional access points to public highways in association with subsequent re-subdivisions of land – e.g., as currently required by VTrans for subdivisions on state highways.

### Sidewalks and Bike Lanes



*Town:* Sidewalks and bike lanes within highway rights-of-way are not addressed under the Town’s current subdivision regulations or highway ordinance. Sidewalks and paths may be required by the DRB in accordance with the Town’s sidewalk master plan or policy (currently under development).



*City:* Sidewalks are required as specified by the City Manager or DRB, or on at least one side of all streets where the development density is greater than one dwelling unit per two acres, unless waived by the DRB.

### Official Map



*Town and City:* Neither set of regulations reference a separately adopted official map that shows the location of planned public rights-of-way or facilities required to be considered in subdivision or site design.

### Performance Bonds or Other Assistance



*Town and City:* Performance bonds or other forms of assurance may be required by a DRB for the construction and maintenance of permitted facilities and infrastructure. In each case, required infrastructure and facilities must be privately maintained unless and until they are accepted by the municipality. Association agreements may also be required to maintain shared infrastructure and facilities. There are no subdivision provisions for separate public/private development agreements – e.g., that specify the timing, shared financing and/or municipal acceptance of required facilities or infrastructure improvements.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Jurisdiction over land use, development, highway and other infrastructure improvements along the US-7 corridor is shared between a number of state, regional and local entities, each having separate but often related areas of responsibility. As a result, interjurisdictional coordination and collaboration is critical, but formal mechanisms for this are currently limited.
- The Northwest Regional Planning Commission, under the state's Transportation Planning Initiative, plays a critical role in integrating transportation and land use planning along the corridor, through its regional plan, transportation development plan, corridor and related studies. The commission however, has no independent authority to regulate development along the corridor. The NRPC has standing in Act 250 proceedings, particularly for development that may have significant regional impacts. As currently defined in the regional plan these include
  - St. Albans City shares jurisdiction with VTrans for the highway corridor within city limits (as a designated Class 1 Town Highway), allowing for integrated downtown development, on-street parking, bike lanes, pedestrian and other public streetscape improvements. Outside of city limits, VTrans controls access to and improvements within the US-7 right-of-way, while St. Albans Town has the primary responsibility for regulating development along the corridor. The town has no independent ability to require sidewalks or other improvements within the corridor that would benefit other users.
  - VTrans and municipalities have standing to participate in Act 250 proceedings, as applicable to larger subdivisions and development along the corridor. Under Act 250 the District Environmental Commission considers project impacts to the environment, community facilities and services, development patterns, and transportation infrastructure; and as a condition of approval, may require transportation improvements or mitigation fees. The Commission has no separate planning function, but is also required to determine project conformance with local and regional plans.
  - Green Mountain Transit is responsible for providing public transit services along the corridor, under contract with VTrans, but also relies on local municipalities for funding, pedestrian connections, transit stops, and for promoting forms and densities of development that support regular transit service. GMT has no regulatory authority or standing in Act 250 proceedings. The regional plan recommends NRPC support for GMT participation in Act 250.
- Municipal and regional plans reviewed address recent development trends, but include little information (projections or forecasts) regarding future development within the study area. It is anticipated that growth and development will continue to be concentrated in areas with easy access to I-89— including the study area — however, development will occur at slower, more incremental rates, following statewide trends.
- All plans reviewed, except for the 2012 St. Albans Town Plan, incorporate more recent “smart growth” principles as relevant to development within local and regional growth centers; and “complete streets” principles as applied to local roads, streets and state highways. The regional plan also includes more detailed Complete Streets implementation strategies by planning area — including the Regional Growth Area — for regional and local consideration. Municipal and regional plans do not reference related VTrans Complete Streets Guidance specific to the US-7 corridor.
- Municipal and regional plans reviewed all reference or incorporate findings and related recommendations from the 2007 US7 Corridor Study Update, calling for better access management and multi-modal transportation improvements along the corridor, to include the extension and installation of sidewalks.
- All plans reviewed support coordinated land use and transportation planning with neighboring communities, through the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, and more directly to address the extension of municipal infrastructure along the corridor, including connecting sidewalks and bike lanes.
- The US-7 corridor and study areas are incorporated in planned growth centers in both municipal and regional plans, which are generally consistent in supporting

higher density mixed use development within these areas. These include the state designated St; Albans City Growth Center, which does not extend beyond city limits (in part to limit strip development along the corridor); the town's North Growth Center Overlay District, which incorporates most of the primary study area and underlying commercial district, and the NRPC's Regional Growth Area, which extends beyond the two municipal growth centers, to also include a portion of Swanton.

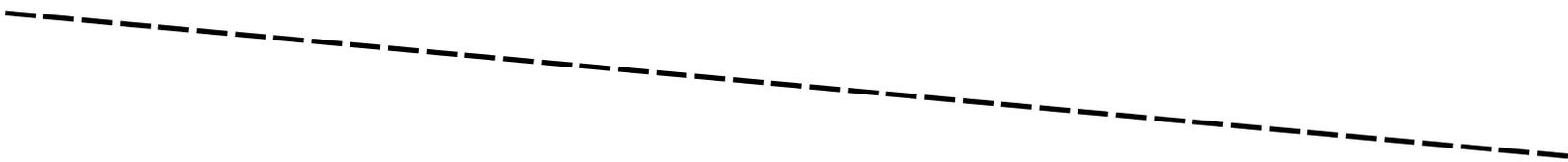
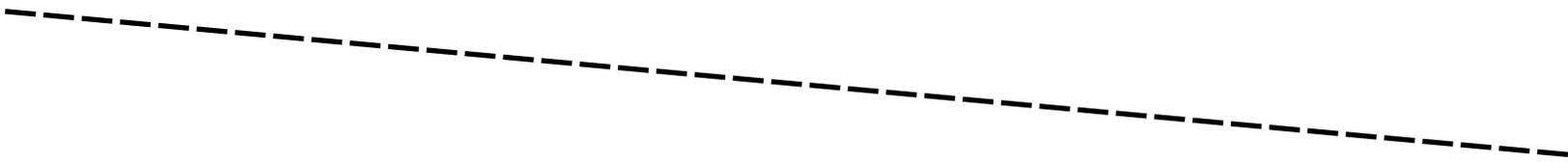
- Related plan recommendations for development within designated growth areas vary in scope, detail and approach:
  - The city plan highlights compatible forms of mixed use infill and redevelopment within the region's traditional urban center, along with supporting public infrastructure and streetscape improvements.
  - The town's growth center overlay is intended to accommodate more clustered forms of larger commercial and multifamily housing development, with incentives for access management, public infrastructure and amenities associated with new development. Strip development is not encouraged nor prohibited.
  - The regional plan also calls for more focused, clustered, mixed use development incorporating smart growth principles within the Regional Growth Center, and specifically recommends against additional strip development along the corridor.
- St. Albans City and Town have each adopted conventional, unified zoning and subdivision bylaws that regulate development along the corridor and within the larger study area. Regulations reviewed are generally consistent with municipal plans – the town's bylaws were recently updated to conform to the 2012 Town Plan, which has since expired.
- Current city regulations define uses, densities and patterns of development along the corridor that reflect a more urban, pedestrian and transit-friendly built environment, consistent with the city's traditional downtown character. The siting, layout and form of development is further regulated under related design review district regulations. The City has also explored more form-based codes.
- Town zoning regulations continue to support larger scale, more suburban forms of commercial and industrial development along the corridor, to provide tax base and jobs; but within the growth center overlay also allow for densities of development and incentives that may support more pedestrian- and transit-friendly forms of development. Town regulations do not more specifically address the form or layout of new streets or development within the study area.
- Planned unit developments are allowed, but not required under both city and town bylaws. Related criteria under each provide for the modification or waiver of underlying district dimensional requirements to allow for more clustered, efficient or compatible infill development, without specifying any particular forms or patterns of development (e.g., conservation, traditional neighborhood, or transit-oriented development).
- Subdivision regulations reviewed include limited access management, street design and connectivity requirements – particularly with regard to establishing the overall pattern of new development or redevelopment. Pedestrian sheds, transit sheds or existing or planned transit routes are not incorporated in development review standards.
- Related municipal policies and ordinances reviewed – including city street, sidewalk and wastewater ordinances, and town highway ordinances, fire codes and sidewalk policies – may also affect the density and form of development along the corridor, and within the larger study area.
- The City and Town each have adopted capital improvement programs that schedule planned capital improvements according to available financing. The town's CIP currently addresses only road improvements, but may be updated to include public sidewalks or rec paths in accordance with an updated master plan and sidewalk policy (currently under development). The city's CIP more comprehensively addresses a variety of public infrastructure, including sidewalks and other streetscape improvements, as approved by voters. Neither municipality has adopted an "official map" that identifies the location of proposed public facilities and improvements for consideration in the review of new development.

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## ENDNOTES

[1] The District 6 Environmental Commission, in its 2008 decision issued for the proposed Wal-Mart in the study area (6F0583), determined that the project was physically located in and contiguous to an area designated by St. Albans Town as its growth center – an existing and growing mixed use settlement – and was therefore in compliance with criterion 9(H) regarding scattered development. This decision however, predates more recent (2013) standards under criterion 9(L) specific to existing settlements and infill strip development which may apply going forward to larger projects in the study area. The commission also found that previous town and regional plans did not provide sufficient guidance – being “only advisory at best” – for consideration under criterion 10 (conformance with plans). The regional plan has since been updated to provide more specific guidance.

[2] For purposes of Act 250 jurisdiction, St. Albans Town and City are both classified as “10-acre towns” – Act 250 applies only to commercial or industrial development on more than 10 acres or, residential subdivisions of 10 or more lots or units. Additional Act 250 exemptions may also apply within the city’s state-designated growth center. Given this scale of development, detailed site plans and traffic studies, and master plans for larger, phased development, are generally required for projects subject to Act 250 review.





**Route 7 Livability Study** St. Albans, Vermont



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