

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Agency of Transportation receives federal grant to research COVID safety for public transit

Barre, Vt. – The Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT) today announced that it has received \$581,201 from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to conduct a research project on COVID safety for public transit.

The grant awarded to AOT will fund efforts by Vermont transit providers to find solutions to cost-effectively and efficiently sanitize public transit vehicles to combat the spread of surface and airborne viruses. This project will test the efficacy of two UVC lighting products (far-UVC and UVC) to stop the spread of COVID-19 compared to current cleaning protocols. UVC lighting shows promise as a measure to kill viruses but is largely unproven in real-world transit operations. If effective, results will inform statewide procurement of the technology.

“If the technology is effective, there will be a tremendous benefit of reducing the risk of exposure to those who depend on public transportation to access jobs, medical care, and services as well as drivers,” said AOT Public Transit Manager Ross MacDonald. “This new sanitizing method could also increase public confidence in the safety of using public transit for those who can otherwise drive, thereby increasing ridership and strengthening the public transit system for those who depend upon it.”

Fixed route ridership in Vermont has dropped by 50% since the pandemic and is not anticipated to reach pre-COVID levels at least until a vaccine is readily available. AOT is committed to increasing public transit ridership and making service more accessible to those who depend upon it, while also reducing reliance on personal vehicles to decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Improving the safety of public transit vehicles is critical to build public confidence and ridership.

This funding is part of the Public Transportation COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program, which was established to support strategies that develop, deploy, and demonstrate solutions that improve the operational efficiency of transit agencies and enhance rider mobility during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency.

AOT will purchase and install far-UVC and UVC lighting units in buses and cars, and conduct public opinion research to determine whether this technology increases public confidence in transit. The Agency's Public Transit Program will work with Dartmouth College and selected Vermont transit providers to design and implement the project. Full-size buses and cutaways (smaller vans) operated on fixed routes will be used. Volunteer drivers, who

provide on-demand service in rural areas, will also participate in the project. Dartmouth will design and implement the research project, and establish protocols for collecting and analyzing samples to determine the quantity and type of pathogens found. A third-party evaluator will determine if the project is a success and document findings to regional and national audiences.