

Transportation for Vermonters

AARP VT • American Lung Association in Vermont • CarShare Vermont • Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association • Green Mountain Transit • Local Motion • Renewable Energy Vermont • Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club • Vermont Clean Cities Coalition • Vermont Energy Education Program • Vermont Energy Investment Corporation • Vermont Natural Resources Council • Vermont Public Interest Research Group

Investing in Sustainable Transportation to Promote Recovery and Opportunity

Transportation for Vermonters believes that bold investments in a sustainable transportation system can improve people's quality of life, support the economic recovery we need, and shift us toward a cleaner transportation system in order to address the climate crisis.

When COVID-19 upended our economy, our transportation system was impacted, too - in some ways for the better (less driving, lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions); in other ways for the worse (reduced transit ridership and service). Furthermore, the intense, necessary focus on racial justice and equity, along with the stark inequity of 2020's economic upheaval, have made even more clear that we must transform our transportation system so it works for everyone.

The need for a clean, equitable transportation system is not new: Despite successes like increased transit, more sidewalks and bike facilities, and investments in livable communities, almost 50% of Vermont's GHG emissions still come from transportation (the majority from personal vehicles). And far too many Vermonters still lack affordable, convenient, reliable transportation to schools, jobs, healthcare, and other services. This disproportionately affects people of color and people with lower incomes, as well as the many people who simply don't drive (children, people 65+ or with disabilities, those who choose not to).

Since transportation is essential for people's quality of life at all ages, economic opportunity and health, and the state's economy, we must create a more sustainable transportation system. This system must be *diverse and interconnected*, allowing for the seamless integration of modes. It must also be *affordable and convenient*, and serve people of all ages and physical abilities. Such a system promises to *reduce car dependence*, while simultaneously improving mobility for those who do not own vehicles, whether by choice or necessity. Improving choice and reducing car dependence is key to addressing both *climate change and social inequities*.

We stand at an important moment where change is not only essential, but possible. Despite the challenges we face today, this is an important moment for shifting how we get around. The Global Warming Solutions Act (Act 153) provides a framework for investments in solutions, including transportation solutions, that reduce our GHGs. The Transportation and Climate Initiative could provide funds to shift Vermont toward a cleaner and more equitable transportation system. The upcoming revision to the Comprehensive Energy Plan is another opportunity.

We recognize that the Legislature is facing a complicated reality, which includes immediate and dire needs for people and businesses. However, given that the pandemic has heightened the need to reshape and improve our transportation system so it works better for all Vermonters, we hope the Legislature will seize this important opportunity to do so.

With this in mind, we respectfully offer seven key actions the Legislature can take in 2021.

1. **Make fare-free transit permanent.** Fund transit agencies to continue fare-free operations, and ensure sufficient overall transit funding to avoid reductions in service. Fare-free service allows for socially distant and simplified boarding, reduces the financial burden on people who rely on transit, and will help rebuild transit ridership.
2. **Continue funding the Mobility and Transportation Innovations Grant Program.** Enabled in the 2020 Transportation Bill (Act 121) and funded at \$300K, these grants promote innovative mobility solutions that reduce auto dependence, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve mobility and access for transit-dependent Vermonters.
3. **Establish the Better Places program.** Local “placemaking” projects help make places more walkable and bikeable, support local businesses, and promote economic recovery. Build on the recent infusion of philanthropic support for this concept by supporting legislation that enables towns to apply for community, “crowd-funded” projects.
4. **Establish a Replace Your Ride Program.** This would offer incentives to lower-income Vermonters to scrap a high-polluting vehicle and switch to cleaner transportation, such as a new or used electric/plug in vehicle, e-bicycles or motorcycles, or vouchers for public transit, shared-mobility, or private ride hailing.
5. **Continue and increase funding MileageSmart and Plug-In Electric Vehicle (EV) incentive programs, established by the legislature in 2019.** These programs provide incentives for low and moderate income Vermonters to purchase high-efficiency vehicles and EVs.
6. **Make substantial and sustained investment in a range of infrastructure.** Sustainable transportation options like walking, biking, and driving and biking electric can only succeed with the right infrastructure, including EV charging stations, Complete Streets, transit amenities like bus shelters with seating, and designs that make roads safe for non-drivers.
7. **Pursue a strong and equitable Transportation and Climate Initiative.** This must include a process and parameters for ensuring that revenues are invested in relevant clean transportation solutions, particularly for people - those with low incomes, people of color, rural areas - often left behind by today’s system. Funds must be protected.

We also urge the Legislature to use our transportation budget as a tool for change by allocating or even reallocating funds to sustainable transportation options. With transportation as the source of most of our state’s GHG emissions, we urge the Legislature to prioritize the investment of any federal stimulus funds in ways that lay the groundwork for a more sustainable, equitable transportation system. In addition, looking beyond the strategic investment of special funds, we must begin to change the way we invest by allocating or reallocating funds within the transportation budget to sustainable transportation options.

Transportation for Vermonters is a broad coalition committed to increasing the affordability, access, and sustainability of Vermont’s transportation system.

Contact information: Kate McCarthy, T4VT Coordinator, 9 Bailey Avenue, Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 223-2328, x. 114 / kmccarthy@vnrc.org
<https://vnrc.org/smart-growth/transportation-for-vermonters/>