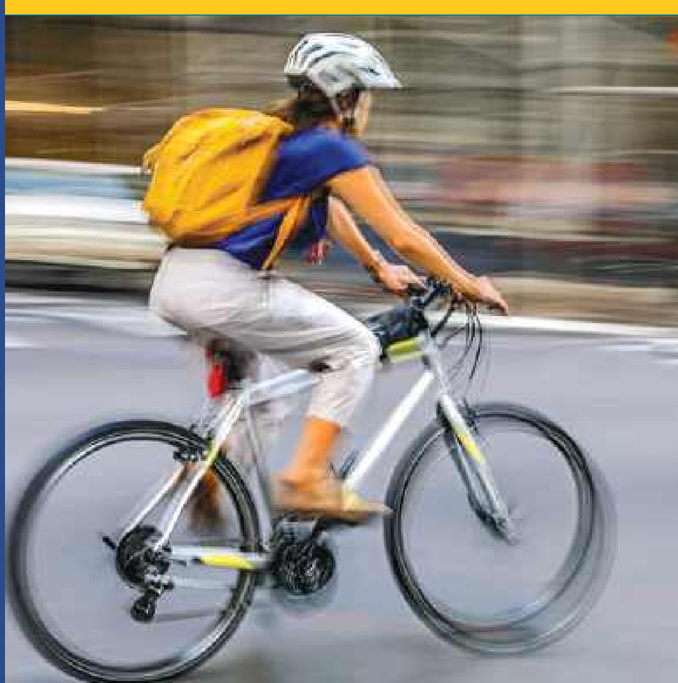
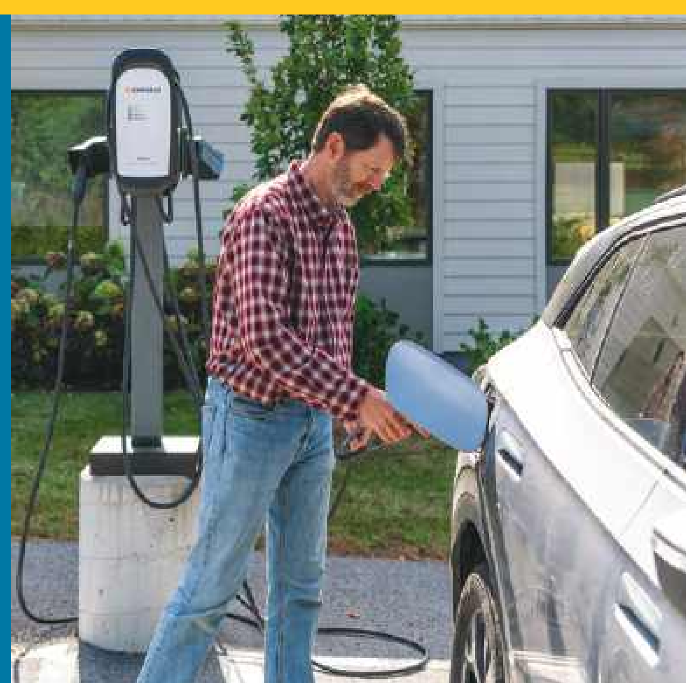
VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

VNRC

Vermont
Environmental Report

Transforming Transportation:
A Climate and Community Resilience Solution





Fall 2025

VNRC

VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

Publications

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VNRC's mission is to promote a healthy environment and resilient communities for all Vermonters today and into the future.

VNRC is the Vermont affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

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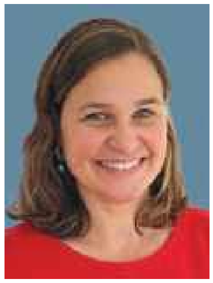
Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

When my first child was born, my family realized we were going to need to go from a one-car family to a two-car family. Our budget was tight—I work for a nonprofit and my husband is a teacher, so we didn't have a lot of money to spare. Where we were living at the time meant we couldn't get to our jobs, our child's daycare, and run our necessary errands without a second vehicle.

This was one of several reasons that motivated us to move to Montpelier—where we had many more options to walk, bike, and hop on public transit. It was a huge relief to realize we could get by with one car. It became abundantly clear to me how important it is for Vermonters to have a variety of transportation options and access to the benefits of vibrant community centers where essential services are available without needing to get in a car.

In this issue of the *Vermont Environmental Report,* we dig into Vermont's transportation future. This matter impacts every Vermonter's quality of life and budget – we all need to get around. Many Vermonters live in very rural areas, and so in this state, we are tasked with improving options for those who need to commute long distances while also building infrastructure in town centers that can reduce our reliance on fossil-fuel powered transportation—a significant contributor to our state's climate pollution, about 40% as of 2022.

A transition to cleaner and healthier transportation options can be a big boost to our collective well-being. There's a lot we can do to improve access and affordability for how we get where we need to go, whether that's investing in smart growth housing development, helping people buy clean electric vehicles that cost less to operate and run, or creating more opportunities to walk, wheel, bike, and hop on public transit.

In the following pages, we provide an update on threats from the federal government that are undermining our transition to electric vehicles and other clean energy solutions while highlighting what Vermont is doing to respond. We also discuss our updated Climate Action Plan and how it lays out a variety of clean transportation priorities and strategies.

Inspiration in these dark times is critical, so we dive into stories from communities that are creating better ways for people to get around without a vehicle. Vermonters are building better walking paths, improving the safety of roads for bikes, pursuing rural public transit options, and supporting compact housing development that makes all of these options easier to access.

At a time when so many core Vermont values are under attack, it's heartening to see how much we can still do through improved transportation solutions to help enhance our local community members' quality of life, save them money, and cut pollution.

Check out our program updates to learn more about what we've been up to on climate action, clean water, healthy forests and wildlife, and sustainable communities, and read on to learn about a range of state and local actions VNRC is taking to help Vermont become more resilient—and what you can to help.

Together, we are making a big difference for Vermonters!

Lauren Hierl
Executive Director, VNRC

Why Cost-Saving and Pollution-Reducing Vehicles Matter So Much

Bobbi LoCicero

When it comes to energy costs and considerations, how Vermont does – or doesn't – lean into more affordable electric vehicles (EVs) will have huge economic and environmental implications for both Vermont families and the planet.

Vermont's rural nature means that most Vermonters must rely on a vehicle to get them to work, school, the doctor's office and beyond. That reliance makes transportation the largest source of the state's climate pollution, ringing in at a whopping 40%. As we work to support alternatives to car transportation, we must focus on dramatically reducing fossil-fired transportation pollution. Prioritizing this strategy offers a huge economic benefit for families and businesses.

Vermonters spend over $2 billion a year on fossil fuels—with more than 75% of those dollars leaving Vermont to pay for price volatile and imported fossil fuels. For some lower-income households, the high cost of the fossil-fueled status quo can also be a budget buster. The average Vermont household earning below $40,000 per year spends about 22% of their income on transportation. Comparatively, households earning over $150,000 per year spend just 11% on their income on transportation costs.

Helping lower-income Vermonters access and afford a cleaner vehicle could have huge economic savings for household budgets. That's because, over the lifetime of a vehicle, it costs far less to own and operate an electric car than a gas-powered one. A new analysis by the Energy Action Network found that a dollar spent on fuel for an average gasoline car will only propel the vehicle 7 miles, while a dollar spent on electricity for an EV moves the car 2–3 times farther. Combined with maintenance savings, the lower fuel costs of EVs typically result in $6,000–$10,000 lower lifetime costs as compared to gas vehicles, even without any EV purchase incentives.

But as our need to lean into cleaner, less costly energy technology grows, there's been damagingly shortsighted cuts to key investments at the federal level. With one swift action—the 2025 federal reconciliation bill—dirty, expensive fossil fuels have been propped up and subsidized while electric vehicles and other clean energy incentives are being abandoned. Effective vehicle electrification programs at the state level, like EV purchase incentives and Mileage Smart, have also ended—leaving Vermont with no state incentives for electric vehicles. Mileage Smart, for example, was a tremendously successful program that had significant climate and equity results by helping low-income Vermonters access and afford cleaner cars.

This federal and state government shift away from clean transportation is the exact wrong approach.

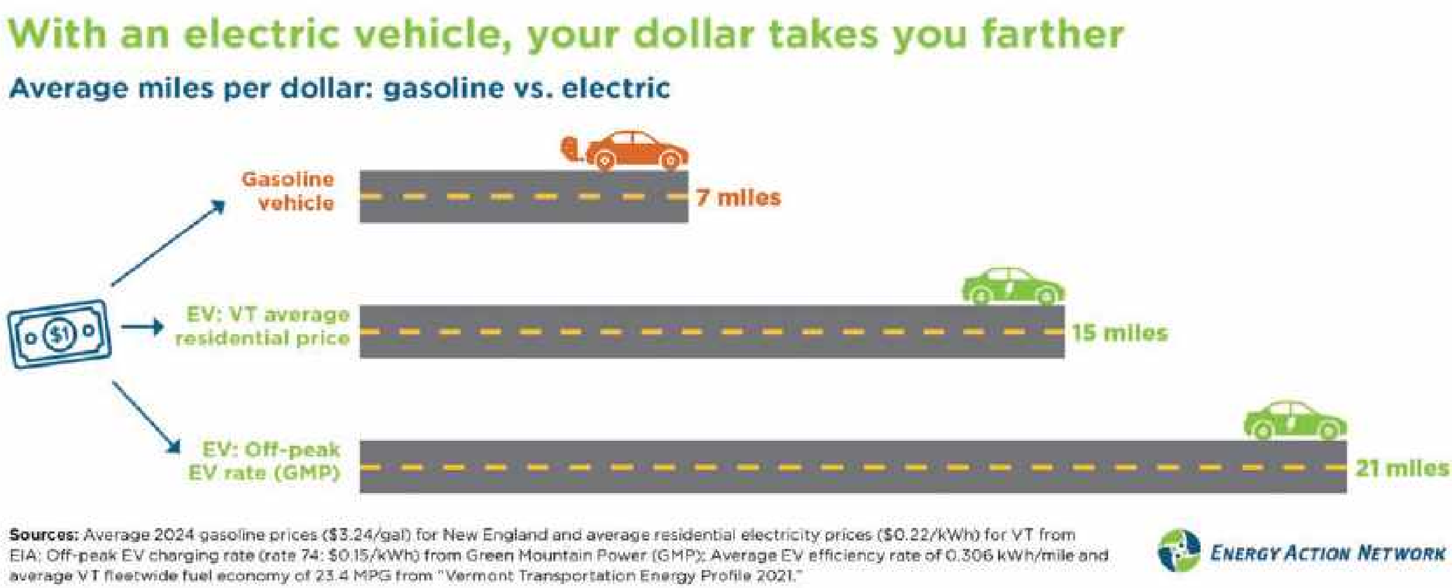
Here are a few of the growing list of attacks on climate, clean energy and transportation programs that have happened since January 2025.

Climate, Clean Energy and Transportation Rollbacks of 2025

- **Vermont Rollback:** Governor Scott paused enforcement of the Advanced Clean Cars II and Advanced Clean Trucks rules that Vermont adopted in 2022. These rules stated that Vermont would follow California's Zero Emissions Vehicle (ZEV) regulations mandating all new light-duty passenger vehicles sold in the state must be ZEVs by 2035.

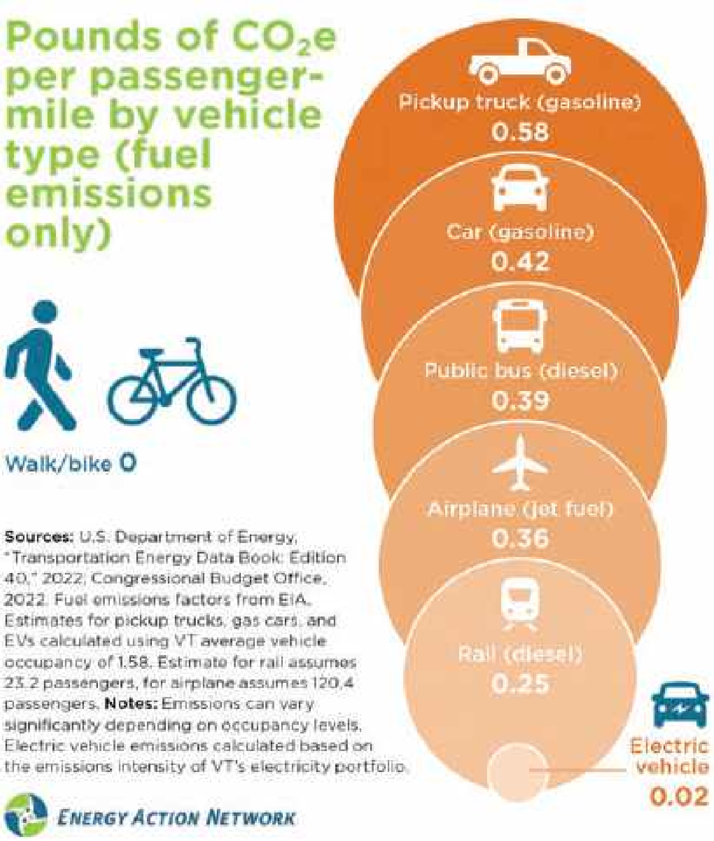
  What this could mean: fewer electric vehicles on the market and available to Vermonters. If vehicle manufacturers are no longer required to deliver far greater numbers of EVs to states like Vermont, Vermonters would have less access to cleaner, less costly vehicles.

- **Federal Rollbacks:** President Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill" took a sledgehammer to clean energy and transportation programs. Among dozens of damaging provisions, the sweeping policy bill doubles down on fossil fuels through subsidies and other support for gas, oil and coal, including opening public lands to oil and gas drilling. It also completely eliminated the 30% federal investment tax credit incentive for



electric vehicles and curtailed the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund program which was poised to allocate billions to states and other jurisdictions for projects that reduce emissions, including electric vehicle infrastructure and fleet electrification.

- **Proposed Federal Rollbacks:** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is working to repeal the 2009 Endangerment Finding, which concluded that greenhouse gases endanger human health and welfare. The finding underpins all Clean Air Act climate regulations. Its repeal would threaten to upend most major federal tools to address climate change and make it harder for any future president to enact new regulations. This proposal is coming at a time when the high cost of climate inaction has become abundantly clear – with floods decimating communities, droughts decimating farmland, and hurricanes and wildfires growing in catastrophic intensity.



What this could mean: if successful, this repeal could disincentivize auto manufacturers from making more fuel-efficient vehicles, which would drive up the costs for consumers who would need to buy more gas, more often. It would also mean more highly polluting vehicles on the road. The repeal could also mean some of the dirtiest, single sources of climate destabilizing carbon dioxide in the United States – fossil fuel-fired power plants – could continue to operate or even be brought back online.

The federal retreat from clean energy incentives and programs will slow clean technology investments at the very same moment we should be ramping up our commitment. If successful, the efforts to repeal foundational regulatory tools – like the Endangerment Finding – could have deeply damaging, durable consequences for the habitability of our planet for young people and future generations. As other global leaders lean into clean energy, it will be imperative for U.S. states and cities to step up, and step in.

Vermont's Commitment to Progress: The Global Warming Solutions Act and Vermont's Climate Action Plan

Thankfully, in Vermont there's a legal framework in place that recognizes and responds to the obligation of each state to do its part to cut planet-heating pollution. In 2020, the Legislature enacted the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) which sets science-based targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creates a mandate for action on resilience, adaptation and a fair and inclusive transition cleaner, more affordable energy technologies. A newly updated Climate Action Plan (CAP) was adopted by the Vermont Climate Council before a July 1, 2025 deadline. With its top 10 recommendations, 52 priority recommendations and over 200 other actions aimed at meeting the charge of the GWSA, the plan outlined cornerstone efforts to reduce transportation pollution, foster more mobility options and help reduce household and business transportation costs. And while this work just got harder because of recent federal action, pushing clean energy and climate progress remains critical.

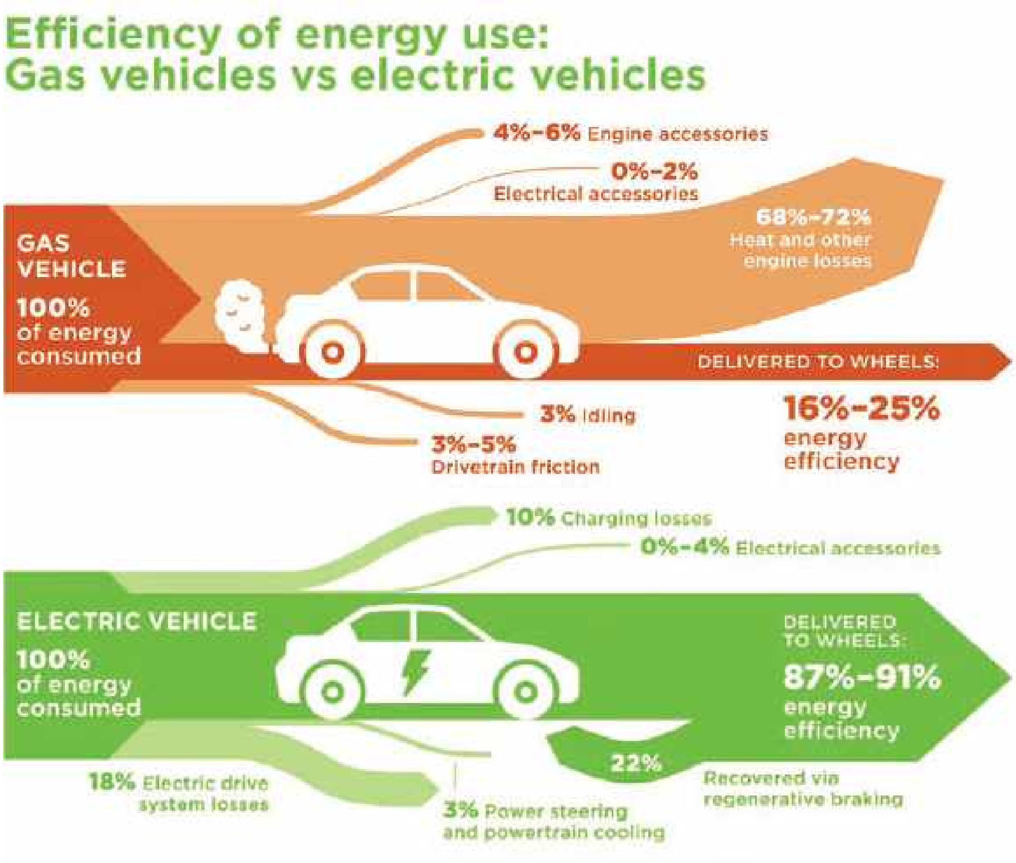
For transportation, the Climate Action Plan called for:

- Continuing to participate in and to defend emissions performance standards for vehicles, including the Advanced Clean Cars II and Advanced Clean Trucks programs.

Defending emissions performance standards would take the shape of requiring automakers to deliver a gradually increasing percentage of zero-emission vehicles into the Vermont market, eventually putting the state's car and light truck sales on a pathway toward 100 percent new electric vehicle sales by 2035. In addition to cars and light trucks, manufacturers would be required to produce and sell an increasing percentage of zero-emission trucks and buses annually through 2035.

- Continuing to support transportation electrification by supporting the availability, accessibility, and affordability of EVs and reliable EV charging options.

The CAP recommends a suite of policies and programs to advance the use of EVs in Vermont broadly, and to make EVs affordable for lower-income Vermonters in particular. Recommendations include ensuring long-term consistent funding for EV incentives to low- and moderate-income vehicle purchasers; and the equitable deployment of fast-charging and Level 2 charging stations, in line with the Vermont Agency of Transportation's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment Plan.



Source: Fueleconomy.gov, 2024. **Note:** Estimates shown are for combined city and highway driving.

Energy Action Network

- Expanding public, active, and shared transportation options and supporting smart growth development strategies that foster communities where people have more options – other than a car – to get them where they need to go.

The CAP recommends a range of programs and policies that can reduce emissions, improve public health, and provide improved mobility options to Vermonters. Avoiding car trips, reducing car trip lengths, and/or replacing car trips with clean and energy efficient transit, biking and walking options, carpool and rideshare programs and other nonsingle occupancy vehicle strategies have economic, equity and public health benefits – while also delivering climate emissions reductions.

One of the biggest, overarching recommendations of the CAP was for Vermont to continue to explore and pursue a multi-jurisdictional cap-and-invest program covering transportation fuels and emissions.

Cap-and-invest programs place a declining cap on greenhouse gas emissions from certain polluters and puts a cost on those emissions. The money raised can then be invested in programs to help Vermonters transition to clean alternatives like EVs. Revenues can also be used to address any potential increased costs, including through direct payments to lower-income Vermonters in particular. Other states like California, Washington, and Oregon have statewide programs in place, and New York is crafting a cap-and-invest program now. Vermont can learn from these experiences in other states and look for a policy solution that would best meet our state's needs.

What's Next?

Despite federal and state funding and programmatic cuts, the hard work that went into building the Climate Action Plan (CAP) is lasting. What we have is a framework for the future that will set Vermont up to make strides toward climate resilience. We must keep shepherding forward policies and solutions to create an electrified and more affordable transportation system because clean energy and energy independence is smart economics. We must implement the CAP recommendations to create a thriving and financially solvent today and tomorrow.

Who is T4VT?

Transportation for Vermonters (T4VT) is a coalition of individuals, organizations, businesses and institutions that work across sectors to achieve a sustainable, accessible transportation system for Vermont's cities, small towns and rural communities. VNRC co-founded T4VT in 2017 to advocate for a well-funded, accessible, and equitable transportation system for the good of Vermont communities and our climate.

What Is T4VT Working On?

Fair funding for public transit and active transportation

Only about 1-2% of Vermont's transportation budget goes to bike and pedestrian projects, and 4-5% for public transit—and investments are not keeping pace with Vermonters' needs. Multi-modal opportunities to get to work, school, health centers, and beyond help residents save money, reduce climate emissions, improve public health, and help get people where they need to go when they can't drive.

Promote compact development and reduce vehicle miles traveled

Guiding growth in and around our downtowns and village centers reduces the need to drive by creating shorter distances between homes, jobs, and amenities. It also facilitates investments in safe streets and infrastructure for walking, biking, and public transit. Planning for transportation alongside new housing is critical to reducing traffic congestion, lowering climate emissions and household costs, and increasing mobility options for those who cannot or choose not to drive.

Funding and Support for Electric Mobility

Providing lower-income Vermonters financial support to purchase electric vehicles and e-bikes—as well as the necessary infrastructure upgrades to go with them—not only helps curb transportation-related climate emissions (VT's largest source of emissions), but helps to provide clean, lower-cost alternatives. E-bikes have also proven to be an important, accessible mode for folks with disabilities or who otherwise cannot drive.

Visit www.t4vt.org and follow @transportation4vt on Instagram to learn how you can get plugged into T4VT events and advocacy opportunities.

Bobbi LoCicero

Waterbury LEAP member Duncan McDougall plugs his EV car outside of the Children's Literacy Foundation in Waterbury, Vermont.

Walking, Biking and Riding into Vermont's New Transportation Era

Bobbi LoCicero

By Elizabeth Hewitt

About a decade ago, Mark Anders, senior transportation planner of the Bennington County Regional Commission, got a call from an elementary school principal in Bennington. She'd noticed a discrepancy in absence rates among students who lived in two nearby affordable housing complexes.

Students from Orchard Village tended to be absent more often than their classmates from Willowbrook—despite that Orchard Village is only about a quarter mile further from the school. But, Willowbrook kids needed only to cross a street. Orchard Village students had to walk along a very busy road.

Anders came up with a plan: a boardwalk traversing the wetland that separates the two complexes. Working with the Vermont Agency of Transportation, and with support through the state-run, federally funded Bike and Pedestrian Grant Program, the trail opened in 2021, giving residents not just a path to school, but also to shops and services.

This path is part of a growing network of multi-use trails being built out across the southern Vermont town, an effort drawing on everything from federal dollars to local volunteers with loppers. The goal is to make Bennington as easy to navigate as possible for all people—not just motorists.

"My dream would be to make the town so walkable and bikeable for kids, then that would benefit everybody," Anders said. "Everybody would use all the awesome paths and safe streets."

Bennington is just one of many Vermont communities that have made strides toward becoming more friendly to getting around without a car. Now, as the state moves to a new land use planning system under Act 181, with an eye to developing much-needed housing, planners and advocates are working to ensure that transportation is incorporated into housing projects from the beginning as an asset, not treated as an afterthought.

Helping more Vermonters get around without cars

Rural and mountainous, Vermont is heavily dependent on cars. State residents drive an estimated 20% more than the average driver in the U.S. The state has moved toward adopting more electric vehicles: about 18,000 EVs are on the road now, a steep increase from 3,700 in 2020. While electrifying vehicle transportation is a major part of the strategy to reduce Vermont's transportation climate impact, that is complimented by an effort to build out infrastructure to support getting around by foot, wheels, bike and bus. That also helps serve the third of Vermonters who don't drive, a category that includes children, older adults, people with disabilities, and people who choose not to.

"Walkable places reduce climate emissions and other threats to environmental and public health—and they're in high demand," says VNRC Sustainable Communities Program director Kati Gallagher. "Through local and regional land use planning and corresponding investments, we can make choices today that will impact whether or not our communities will be locked into expensive, polluting car dependency into the future."

Momentum around other types of transportation is growing in the state. A survey by the University of Vermont's Community News Service found at least 111 infrastructure projects implemented since 2019 that help Vermonters get around without a car, ranging from flashing beacons that make crosswalks more visible, to miles-long paved bike paths that connect towns.

Much like the Bennington paths, the research found these projects are often sparked by needs of neighbors in a specific location. But realizing them involves coordinating expertise and resources across municipal, regional, state and federal levels.

A few state initiatives focus on active transportation: Bike and Pedestrian Grants and the Transportation Alternatives Program managed by VTrans, and other programs run by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. According to Christina Erickson, executive director of active transportation advocacy group Local Motion, these statewide programs have helped many Vermont communities make progress. Yet, she notes, budgets for active transportation tend to be small, which leaves a long wish list of projects that have yet to be realized—despite the fact that costs tend to be much lower than other infrastructure upgrades.

Bobbi LoCicero

Nationally, non-car transportation projects got a boost under the Biden administration, explains Stevie Pasamonte, senior transit organizer at the National Campaign for Transit Justice. But in 2025 the Trump administration moved to curtail infrastructure projects with climate goals, in some cases slowing payments on promised funds, or even clawing back money that was already distributed.

In bigger municipalities, which have more of an infrastructure budget, projects may be able to continue on local support alone. But in smaller and rural communities, federal dollars can make up a large share—or even all—of the budget.

Yet from big cities to rural countryside, Pasamonte argues, transit is an urgent issue. Without a car, many people struggle to get to medical appointments or grocery shops—a challenge particularly acute in communities with aging populations, like Vermont. There's another big benefit of stronger connections by bus, wheel, foot and bike, Passamonte notes: owning a car is a huge expense for many Americans.

"In this moment when people are struggling financially, one huge burden that we could be taking off of their plate is transportation costs," Pasamonte says.

As the federal landscape looks more uncertain, one approach is to look local, Pasamonte says. That could be finding ways to raise funds independently of the federal government. Washington, D.C., in 2022, started charging higher fees for heavier vehicles, which take a bigger toll on roads and are more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. In Vermont, South Burlington designates a penny on the tax rate for bike and pedestrian paths. Bennington uses a similar mechanism to raise funds for parks, which have been used to complement transportation projects like the expansion of a path along the Walloomsac River. A new skate park where the city's rail trail meets the riverwalk has been a huge hit, explains Bennington Community Development Director Shannon Barsotti, because most of the traffic comes directly from the paths.

"It's kids on their little bikes, scooters, skateboards," she says. "They're not driving there."

Another way communities are acting locally is by forming citizen committees.

The rise of the bike/walk committee

Once a month in Essex Junction, a group of citizens meet with city planner Michael Giguere to talk about the needs of cyclists and pedestrians in the Chittenden County city. This is the Essex Junction Bike/Walk Advisory Committee, a panel convened by the city to focus on issues related to navigating the community without a car.

Bike/walk committees are emerging across the state, in many different forms. Some, like in Essex Junction, are sanctioned by the municipal government; others are independent advocacy groups. In whatever form, these groups help communities identify and prioritize active transportation projects.

Giguere, for instance, learned from a member of the committee about an intersection on a route drivers use to avoid the city's central five-corners junction—which also happens to converge with where many young children walk to elementary school.

That prompted Giguere and his city colleagues to visit and redesign the intersection. They ended up using plastic posts and street paint to both give pedestrians more space to wait, and to shorten the time it takes to walk across the roadway. The city road crew even trotted out a snow plow in late spring to test out the new wider turn radius.

John O'Brien, who chairs the bike/walk committee, was impressed by how quickly one committee

Bobbi LoCicero

The Amtrak train pulls into the Waterbury Vermont train station.

member's concern led to that change. He sees that as one of the strengths of the panel: the committee helps make sure active transportation stays on the city council's radar.

"Improvements to pedestrian and bike infrastructure ultimately benefit all forms of transportation," he says.

For Giguere, the committee serves to broaden his perspective—something especially valuable as the city builds out new housing. Essex Junction has new developments in the works, and is a pilot community in the statewide 802 Homes initiative, which aims to ease the process for homebuilders with ready-made designs and a streamlined approval process. "It broadens my horizons and makes sure that I'm considering a broad range of perspectives, especially from the people that are going to use this infrastructure," he says.

This citizen input is so important, planners say, because the most successful projects grow out of how people are already walking and biking through communities.

In Bennington, planners have developed projects by observing where school kids cross busy intersections, or picking up on an unsanctioned path renegade residents started. Even the boardwalk that connected the housing complex to the school had organic roots: residents had improvised a bridge through the wetland using a board and a shopping cart.

"The really good projects are where something's trying to happen," says Anders, of Bennington County Regional Commission.

State and local collaboration

For communities whose central arteries are also state-owned highways, adopting active transportation can be a challenge. While a town has broad leeway to create bike lanes or crosswalks on municipal roads, that authority gets murkier at the highway.

That's where VTrans has been working to collaborate with local communities on infrastructure planning and design, implementation, and maintenance, explains Matthew Arancio, who as VTrans regional planning manager, oversees efforts to coordinate between federally funded transportation planning, the state, and regional planning commissions.

In Rutland, when VTrans was coming through on a decennial repaving of routes 4 and 7 in 2024, the agency worked closely with the city to reconfigure the lanes of these two major roadways. When repainting the freshly paved roads, the number of lanes was reduced from four to three—one in each direction with a turning lane in the middle. That created more space for cyclists and pedestrians.

The key to this kind of collaboration, according to Arancio, is for municipalities to have a long-term plan, with a clear vision for integrating transportation on state and local roads. "The state can move the big things into place," Arancio says. "It's up to the municipalities to move what they can into place, too, to create the system and create the network of multimodal transportation infrastructure."

That type of long-term planning proved key in the central Vermont town of Waitsfield, where state-owned Route 100 serves as Main Street. After a pedestrian fatality in 2020, explains Mad River Valley Planning District executive director Joshua Schwartz, VTrans teams worked closely with local government to improve safety in the community—including expanding the low-speed zone, and trialing signs in the middle of crosswalks.

"One of the challenges for municipalities is knowing how to navigate these different processes," Schwartz says. But by developing connections with VTrans contacts, it became easier to make changes quickly.

From a local perspective, Schwartz says having long-term plans already crafted was invaluable to make a list of priorities.

He also stressed the importance of strong communication with VTrans. "Relationships are the key," he says.

Transportation as a feature, not an afterthought

Historically, in Vermont, roads have been planned based on their classifications: an arterial road—a high-traffic route that connects key areas—should be a certain width with certain characteristics.

But, according to Arancio, that system didn't prioritize where those roads were located.

Now, VTrans is finalizing a new method of transportation planning that will instead emphasize how the land around the road is used. For example, people have different needs along a road that passes through a town center than they do from one in a predominantly rural area. Under this new approach, Arancio says, state and local planners will be able to draw from a "menu of options" for each road based on its context.

This new approach comes as Act 181 is overhauling the state's land use policies, a process that will have major implications for how new housing will be developed.

And transportation, explains Erickson, of Local Motion, is a key part of that conversation.

"It's harder to add infrastructure in further-out areas," says Erickson. "Where larger housing projects are going in should be closer to town centers, where it's easier to connect a variety of transportation options."

Those challenges are already being seen from the greater Burlington area to the rural Northeast Kingdom, where Rural Community Transportation recently changed two fixed-route bus lines to micro-transit, an on-demand ride service that functions a bit like Uber. While communities lose the regularity of a bus route, RCT Director Caleb Grant explains that the service works well in dispersed areas. For instance, residents of Lamoille Community House—a shelter opened in 2024 about two miles north of Morristown—use it to get to appointments and run errands.

In serving such a rural area, Grant sees how transportation costs are often neglected in early stages of housing plans. But while real estate may be cheaper further out from town centers, the higher costs of transportation hit residents and transit providers, he explains.

"Have that conversation now before you buy

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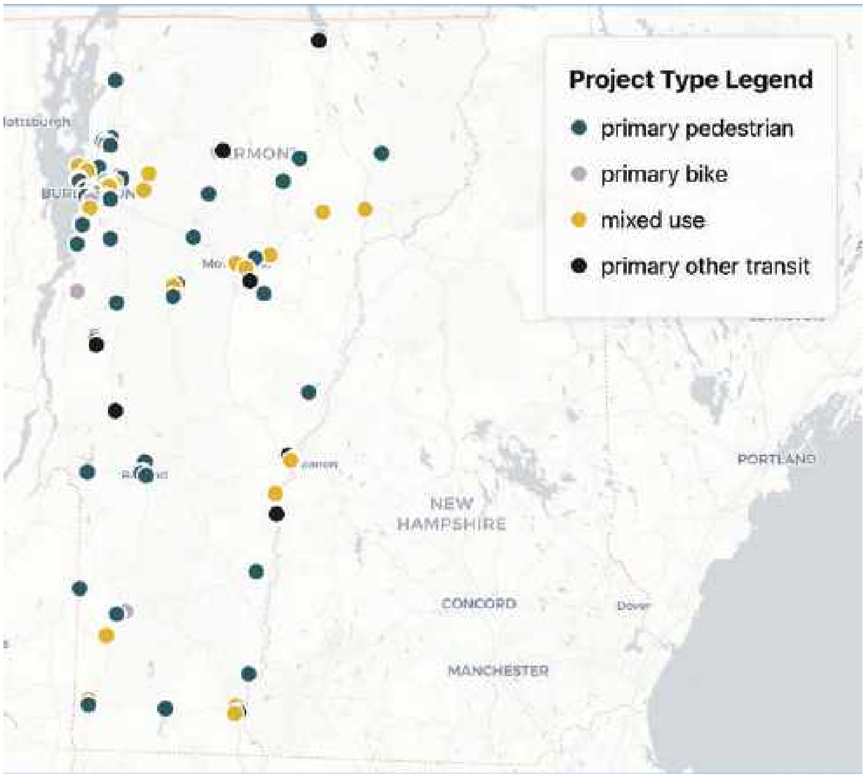

Researchers with the University of Vermont's Community News Service catalogued more than 100 infrastructure projects that support transportation without a single occupancy vehicle constructed around the state since 2019. Projects include crossing infrastructure, multi-use paths, road reconfigurations for bike lanes, and more. Research by Elizabeth Hewitt, Visualization by Benjamin Cooley

Clean Energy & Climate Action

This program works to advance conservation, efficiency, renewable energy, and transportation solutions that reduce fossil fuel use and save Vermonters money.

VECAN: In our Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network (VECAN) coordination role, we provide regular communications, including a content-rich email newsletter. We have undertaken bi-monthly webinars on timely topics and have also been working closely with community energy leaders and partners to explore opportunities to expand energy navigation services in Vermont which provide free 1-on-1 technical support to help households make well-informed, cost-effective clean energy investments. Another successful annual VECAN Conference was held on Saturday, November 1st at the Lake Morey Resort, drawing over 200 local leaders, energy experts, policy makers and academic allies, as well as author Bill McKibben. Access the day's rich content and Bill McKibben's keynote at vecan.net/conferences/vecan2025/

Vermont Climate Action Plan: By the July 1, 2025 deadline, an updated Climate Action Plan (CAP) was submitted. The 2025 CAP was developed, as required by law, to ensure that Vermont outlines the strategies needed to reduce planet-warming pollution, reduce energy burdens and help communities adapt to the impacts of a climate-changed world.

Portable Solar: VNRC helped launch a campaign alongside State Senator Anne Watson, VPIRG, and Bright Saver to pass legislation enabling plug-in solar in Vermont. Utah passed similar legislation earlier this year

VNRC and allies, including Ben Edgerly Walsh of VPIRG speaking here, launch a portable solar campaign in Montpelier this fall. Photo courtesy of VNRC staff

with unanimous bipartisan support, and we're aiming to make Vermont the next state in the nation to pass similar legislation that will help unlock the financial and environmental benefits of small-scale solar power for more people. With energy costs skyrocketing nationally, strategies that enable Vermonters to access clean and cost-effective technologies are more important than ever.

Clean Water & Dam Removal

This program works to protect and enhance the quality of Vermont's streams, rivers, lakes and ponds, wetlands, and groundwater.

Dam Removal: In summer 2025, we kicked off the deconstruction of two dams, one in Ripton, Vermont known as the Breadloaf Dam on Brandy Brook, and the Youngs Brook Dam in West Rutland. The dam removal sequence always begins with the mobilization of heavy equipment, construction of site access routes and equipment staging, and the implementation of flow bypass and erosion control measures. Once a dam is removed, restoration of waterway channels follows and often planting of native seed mixes and native trees and shrubs. With these dam removal projects, VNRC has the dual goals of restoring critical habitat by reconnecting river functions such as transport, deposition, and flow and creating resilient aquatic ecosystems that can help mitigate the effects of climate change. Currently VNRC has prioritized a dozen other dam removal projects in various stages of review, spaced throughout the Lake Champlain Watershed. We also continue to lead the Vermont Dam Task Force, a statewide cooperative

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effort among federal and state agencies, private organizations, research scientists and individuals dedicated to restoring rivers through the assessment, prioritization, and facilitation of dam removal. Learn more at: freevermontrivers.org.

Flood Safety Act: The Flood Safety Act is a set of policies that protects wetlands and rivers and is designed to enhance flood resilience in Vermont. Wetlands act as a natural sponge and so serve as a critical mitigation factor in flooding events. Preserving Vermont's wetlands and natural riverways is key to creating resilience in the face of major weather events. The Flood Safety Act will also help ensure that new infrastructure is not built in harm's way in our river corridors, and also provides a funding mechanism for the deconstruction of aging and derelict dams. These measures will improve public safety and ecological health. VNRC worked hard to get this bill passed and we continue to provide resources to build out these flood resilience policies and make them work in our communities. In the face of ongoing attacks on wetlands, we will continue to defend our right to clean and safe waterways by working to make sure that Vermonters realize the benefits that we were promised when the Flood Safety Act was passed.

Toxics Prevention

PFAS and Neonic Restrictions: Headway was made this year on reducing the impact of PFAS forever chemicals on Vermonters' health and the environment when the legislature expanded the state's existing ban to additional product categories. PFAS are newly banned from firefighting gear, dental floss, cleaning products, and fluorinated containers. The state's neonicotinoid (neonic) ban also moved forward with the July 1, 2025 deadline for rulemaking. Vermont's phased-in neonic ban is a significant step forward in addressing the harm these pesticides cause to pollinators and our environment. VNRC plans to explore other potential restrictions on toxic pesticides that are contaminating Vermont's water and soils.

Removal of the Breadloaf Dam in Ripton, Vermont over summer 2025 has led to the restoration of the natural flow of Brandy Brook. Photo courtesy VNRC staff

Healthy Forests & Wildlife

This program works to maintain and enhance the ecological and economic vitality of Vermont's forests, including promoting healthy wildlife populations.

Landowner Guide: VNRC, in cooperation with Vermont Coverts, Vermont Woodlands Association, the Fish & Wildlife Department, the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and other partners launched a project to offer free stewardship and conservation assistance to forest landowners. The program is offered at no cost and provides tailored guidance to new landowners based on your goals for owning forestland. Private forest landowners are key to maintaining the health and integrity of our forests. Since approximately 85% of Vermont's forests are privately owned, the management choices that landowners make today will shape the future of our forests, and the wildlife that rely on them. With this in mind, this initiative will equip landowners with the knowledge, support, and resources they need to be the best possible stewards of their forestland.

Implementing Act 250 Modernization (Act 181): In recent years, lawmakers have adopted notable policies and investments to promote well-planned housing development while also providing increased protections for critical habitats and fragile ecosystems. Act 181 includes a Tier structure, with "Tier 3" designating critical natural resource areas in the state. As of now, Tier 3 appears likely to include significant natural communities, habitat connectors, and headwater streamsA Tier 3 designation aims to protect sensitive environments that

lack other state-level protections. The state is also identifying areas of future growth, particularly for housing development, in "Tier 1A" and "Tier 1B" areas. So far, the Chittenden, Northwest and Rutland regions have submitted their proposed "Regional Future Land Use Maps" for consideration by the state's Land Use Review Board. Other regions will be rolling out their maps in the coming months. VNRC will be weighing in with our input on how well the maps adhere to smart growth principles.

Sustainable Communities

This program works to promote and protect Vermont's smart growth development pattern of compact settlements – with options for transportation, housing, and employment – surrounded by farms, forests, and natural areas.

Land Use Changes for Housing: The HOME Act (Act 47 of 2023) and Act 181 (2024) made significant changes to land use laws in Vermont to encourage housing development, specifically more affordable and multi-unit housing in and around our community centers. In 2025 the rollout for Act 181 began with the update of regional land use maps and a new, location-based Act 250 system. These land use maps strive to set better standards for local and regional planning to meet smart growth goals. VNRC will be tracking this process through 2026 and providing input to ensure these goals are being met.

Transportation for Vermonters: This spring, the VNRC-coordinated T4VT Coalition delivered a petition to legislators signed by almost 1,000 Vermonters calling for investments in public transit. The Coalition is continuing this work by expanding their partnerships and legislative allies, strengthening the message that a robust, sustainable transportation system that serves all Vermonters is good for our environment, our communities, and our wallets.

Smarter Growth: VNRC is working with AARP-VT and the Preservation Trust of Vermont to organize on-going conversations to re-envision how Vermont's smart growth principles can better meet the moment when it comes to climate impacts, equity, and more.

Small Grants for Smart Growth: Our small but mighty grant program has awarded three grants to inspiring community initiatives so far this year: a design charrette for housing in Bridport, a community festival celebrating South Burlington's Climate Action Plan and new City Center, and a visioning process to reimage the Downtown Rutland Plaza.

Vermont's New Transportation Era
continued from page 8

that plot," Grant says. "Oftentimes it justifies a larger initial investment in more premium real estate that is closer to amenities, rather than offsetting that cost to the future residents and transportation providers."

Vermont's walkable, bikeable, ridable future

Carefully considering locations for new housing doesn't just help make it easier to plan and run efficient public transportation services—it also makes it more convenient for community members to get around without a car in general.

In South Burlington's developing Market Street neighborhood, for instance, pedestrian infrastructure was planned so that it both allows residents to do grocery shopping locally by sidewalk, and to catch the regular bus services to other parts of the region.

Denser housing also helps the so-called "last mile" problem—that gap between a transit hub and where someone has to go.

Shorter distances and good infrastructure make it easier for Vermonters to opt to leave a car at home. For example, bike lanes and bus-stop bike lockers are leading more Winooski, Burlington, and Essex Junction residents to ride their bikes to catch a bus to work.

All of these factors also support quality of life, physical health, and mental wellbeing among residents—as well as working toward broader goals of making communities more affordable and greener, explains Gallagher, of VNRC.

"When communities have a choice of how to get around, they can rely less on personal vehicles, cutting back on transportation-related climate emissions and household costs," says Gallagher. "By promoting compact, mixed-use development, we can curb low-density sprawl, which consumes vast tracts of farm, forest and undeveloped land—and make biking, walking and transit more viable and efficient."

Passengers board the Amtrak train in Waterbury, Vermont. Bobbi LoCicero

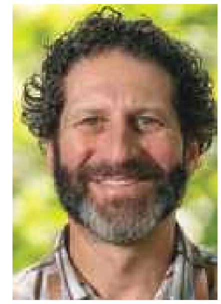
News & Notes

Staff Acknowledgements

Over Summer 2025, we've welcomed new staff member **Stephi Drago**, Ecological Restoration Fellow.

Hear their thoughts: "Since starting with VNRC, I have learned a tremendous amount about the dam removal process. This position has helped me grow as a restoration professional and gain more knowledge on project management and river ecology. I have been impressed at how effective the organization is at making real, impactful change throughout the state of Vermont, on the ground and through environmental policy and advocacy. I've greatly enjoyed my time at VNRC so far, and look forward to continuing my work with the organization."

Welcome Baby Gallagher! We are thrilled to announce that Kati Gallagher, our Sustainable Communities Program Director, gave birth to Adrian Gallagher this spring. Welcome Adrian to the VNRC community!



From the bottom of our hearts, we want to thank our former Forest & Wildlife Program Director and General Counsel **Jamey Fidel**. This August, Jamey left VNRC after 23 years of stellar work to dive into his next adventure as the Vice President for Vermont at the National Audubon Society. At VNRC he tirelessly dedicated himself to conserving forests, wildlife habitat, and ecosystems in Vermont, as well as serving as a legal advisor for our organization. We will deeply miss having Jamey at VNRC and we wish him all the best in his new role.

As Jamey noted in August before his departure, "I am so grateful for my experience at VNRC. I have worked with three wonderful executive directors (Elizabeth, Brian, and Lauren) and a diverse and incredibly talented staff. VNRC is simply an amazing organization and I couldn't be more proud of everything we accomplished together."

Thank you to our interns! This year we welcomed three excellent interns: **Helena Zuckerman**, 2025 Legislative Intern (Jan-May 2025), **Eric Grimes**, 2025 Mollie Beattie Intern (May-Aug 2025), and **Hannah Gilmer**, Community Engagement Intern (Jun-Aug 2025). Your energy and hard work was deeply appreciated by the entire VNRC team. We wish you the best of luck on your next venture!

Member Highlight

Beth Humstone, recipient of the 2025 Arthur Gibb Award, has dedicated her career, volunteer time, and financial support to enhance Vermont's communities through smart growth planning and protecting natural resources. We are honored to have Beth as a part of the VNRC community. We are deeply thankful for all of the time and energy she has invested in growing sustainable communities here in Vermont.

Beth Humstone receives her awards at the 20205 VNRC Annual Celebration, flanked on her left by Vermont Housing and Conservation Board Executive Director Gus Seelig, and to her right by VNRC Executive Director Lauren Hierl.

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