



Communities working together to
Meet Chittenden County's transportation needs

CHITTENDEN COUNTY METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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**CCMPO Comments to the November 2006 Draft VTrans Public
Transportation Policy Plan (PTPP) - December 21, 2006**

Background

As the state's most urbanized area, the CCMPO has long supported the existing public transportation system. Our region's future, based on growth and demographic trends, will rely increasingly on an expanded public transit system. The CCMPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) calls specifically for growth in this system, expanding to more areas, increasing commuter type services, increasing service frequencies and improving links to adjoining regions. The MTP also identified a greatly expanded park- and-ride network to facilitate non single occupant trip-making such as transit.

Growth and long term sustainability of the public transportation system is dependent on finding new ways to financially support this service. As the MTP states,

Achieving Chittenden County's public transit goals requires development of alternative means of operations funding that would ease the burden on local governments and allow expansion of transit services statewide. The current funding structure relies too heavily on the local property tax and discourages new municipal members with financial impediments to joining. Over one third of the costs of operating CCTA comes from local property tax payers in CCTA's member municipalities.

The CCMPO and CCTA have been working to reform the public transit operating financing problem for several years. The latest effort, undertaken by an appointed task force, proposes to create a new Regional Transit District with authority to levy taxes within areas served by transit. This model could be replicated statewide. Legislative changes will be required to make this happen, but without new money and governance structure it is likely that the transit service expansion plans identified in this MTP will be hampered.

Since MTP adoption in early 2005, the CCMPO has refined its public transportation funding stance with the adoption of the following policy in December 2005:

Legislative action is needed to free CCTA from its funding constraints in order to meet the current and growing needs for public transportation service in Chittenden County. This can be achieved by either:

- *Alternative methods to raise revenue locally/regionally and/or,*
- *By additional state funding of public transportation.*

Positive action now will reduce growing congestion and future investment in highway capacity. Failure to act will result in even greater congestion and the need for greater investment in highway capacity than currently projected in the CCMPO's MTP.

Public Transportation in Chittenden County is hampered in its ability to expand necessary services by a lack of access to additional funding, including funds other than the local property tax. The local property tax revenue base is over extended in Vermont and many question the use of local revenues as a source to fund a regional service. Only 5 of 18 Chittenden County municipalities are members of CCTA. No new municipalities have joined CCTA since 1983 due to local funding constraints. Only CCTA member municipalities have access to state and federal general public transportation operating funds.

While commuter services serving primarily residents of communities outside of Chittenden County have been established by the state and CCTA, there has been no additional local public investment to expand public transportation in Chittenden County. This lack of investment in Chittenden County services is compounded by the fact that Chittenden County municipalities, with the exception of Burlington and Williston, have only the property tax as a revenue source to support these services. Williston has access to local sales tax revenues until 2008.

The state, in Title 24 § 5082, declares that "Public transportation is an important matter of state concern, essential to the economic growth of the state and to the public health, safety and welfare of present and future generations of Vermonters." As gasoline and other energy prices increase and our populace ages, this statement only grows in importance.

The CCMPO believes that the service recommendations found in the state's transit providers Short Range Transit Plans must be fully funded within the timeframes outlined in those documents. This can be achieved by either allowing municipalities to raise revenues by additional means beyond the local property tax or through additional state funds. This policy is fully consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Chittenden County Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Even more recently the CCMPO has considered a policy on long term sustainable funding for "New Start" transit projects...

"The CCMPO believes that public transportation is an essential component of our Chittenden County transportation system and the present system is inadequate to meet the need. Expansion of public transportation as the region grows requires a commitment to sustainable funding. CCMPO approval of a TIP that includes funding for a transit "New Starts" service commits the CCMPO, in subsequent TIPs, to promote the continued funding of the operations of this service, unless it is demonstrably shown that the service is nonviable using criteria agreed upon at the start of the service."

General Comment

As evidenced by the above, the CCMPO feels that adequate and sustainable funding is the key to supporting and growing public transportation in Chittenden County and Vermont. Implementation of the CCMPO policies on funding can also directly address the three inter-related goals identified in the purpose and context introduction to the PTPP – reducing greenhouse gas emissions, assisting seniors to age in place, and promoting transportation affordability. The higher levels of transit service made available through new funding sources

can improve air quality, provide higher transportation levels to the elderly and other transit dependent populations, and potentially provide the services at lower costs than single occupant vehicle trips. The PTPP should therefore address the funding problems directly and aggressively. To this end we recommend the following:

Specific Comments

In the Policy Guidance section under Funding, change the wording of this bullet:

- *VTrans will maximize the use of available federal funds in support of public transportation efforts in the state. State funds shall be allocated to public transportation providers for use in their operating budgets to the extent that funds are available.*

To: *VTrans will maximize the use of available federal funds in support of public transportation efforts in the state. State funds shall be allocated to adequately support the operations of the transit providers' existing and future planned service levels, supplementing federal and local contributions.*

In lieu of the proposed change, add a new bullet to this section:

- *VTrans will work with and encourage the legislature to identify and promote public transportation funding alternatives that can be generated at the local and/or regional level.*

In the Intercity Bus and Regional Connections section of the Implementation Plan, to this bullet:

- *VTrans will work aggressively to expand park-and-ride capacity and to consult with intercity bus carriers and other interested parties on priority locations for new capacity.*

Add the following: *VTrans will demonstrate in its recommended annual capital budget and program the increased funding required for park-and-ride capacity expansion.*