

James M. Jeffords Center's
Vermont Legislative Research Service

¹ (For a detailed study of the state of public transportation in Vermont see the Rockefeller Center report here: <http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/shop/PRS%20Policy%20Brief%200809.pdf>.) Interstate bussing, airport flights, and Amtrak's daily rail service connect Vermont with surrounding states and Canada.² Within the state, mass transit is highly fragmented, with 26 regional transit agencies that represent the 14 counties of Vermont. In addition there are 27 park & ride

Several states have begun to look at intermodal transport as the focal point of an integrated transit system as a way to adequately serve a growing population. Currently, Vermont relies heavily on park & ride structures to facilitate intermodal passenger transportation. These facilities assimilate all existing modes of transit (bike, car, ferry, plane, and train) and have the potential to cut costs and improve efficiency, streamlining travel for passengers. Despite these efforts across different systems, however, there are still many "mobility deserts" regions devoid or lacking in routes and connections. Working to connect these areas is the final step towards achieving a truly integrated system.⁵

Vermont's uneven distribution of population poses another barrier to an integrated, seamless, transit system.⁶ Despite a few high density areas, 66% of the population lives in rural areas, according to the 2010 census. Public transit fails to provide adequate coverage for a large portion of the population. Although recent years have seen an increase in services and routes, irregularities and deficiencies pose significant problems.⁸

Attempts have been made to simplify and unify Vermont's fragmented transportation system. Regional agencies have expanded their routes to encompass new areas. "Go Vermont" is the state's attempt to unify the transportation system. It is a service that provides Vermonters with comprehensive information regarding Vermont transit. It is "a resource for commuters who want to reduce the cost and environmental impact of driving." The program aims to unify the fragmented transportation system of Vermont to provide users a seamless commute using intermodal transportation.¹⁰

Downtown Burlington, Vermont allows free access on one of the Chittenden County Transportation Agency (CCTA) routes—the College Street Shuttle. Burlington's free access is limited to one line of the bus route where Portland, Oregon provides free access on multiple lines. Free access is inclusive of multiple forms of transportation, an act that likely increases ridership.

⁴ RSG Inc., "Upper Valley Intermodal Transportation Facility Study," Report Prepared for The Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, June, 2010, accessed February 7, 2012, <http://uvinter.files.wordpress.com/2009/07/upper-valley-intermodal-facility-draft-report.pdf>.

⁵ Vonu Thakuria, Yaye Malcom, and William Vassilakis, "Next Generation Intermodal Passenger Transportation System: Phase I," accessed February 7, 2012, <http://tigger.uic.edu/~ptintermodal.html>.

⁶ Kahlie Dufresne et al., "Public Transportation in Vermont."

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture, "State Fact Sheet: Vermont," accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/vt.HTM>

⁸ Kahlie Dufresne et al., "Public Transportation in Vermont."

⁹ Vermont Agency of Transportation, "Go Vermont: Connecting Commuters in Vermont," accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.connectingcommuters.org/>

¹⁰ Kahlie Dufresne et al., "Public Transportation in Vermont."

state.”¹⁹ Another mechanism would be for the Governor to issue an executive order to create a coordination committee for the state that can facilitate “flexible and responsive transportation solutions among service providers.”²⁰ Even informal agreements between transportation agencies and organizations have shown to sometimes evolve into legislative or statutory mandates.²¹

Public Transportation Improvements in Other States

Arkansas

The Arkansas Public Transportation Coordinating Council (APTCC) and the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) joined together and worked towards developing plans to increase coordination, integration, and the overall efficiency of transportation systems within the state of Arkansas.²² Their intentions were to improve the public's overall quality of life by increasing access to social service programs in the state. Their projects include "coordination of rural and small urban area services in an area having high need but no existing providers" and to expand the scope of an existing agency to provide general public transportation. Arkansas has taken a collaborative approach to streamlining transportation across counties using what they call Metroplan. It currently represents 25 different municipalities spread out across

of existing vehicles in community programs through shared use programs³⁴ while minimizing overlap in routes and amount of money required to achieve ideal outcomes.³⁵ This project has significantly increased public transportation use and members of the COIC have indicated that they would like to establish need, and implement more of these projects around the state.³⁶ Portland, a city highly regarded as one of our nation's leaders in public transit, features a "Free RailZone" within downtown that allows free access to multiple forms of public transit such as the light rail system ("TriMet") and streetcars (Portland Streetcar).³⁷ Portland, the use of public transportation is growing faster than auto use, as "84% of side users use TriMet over driving" and "Commuters are 20% shorter."³⁸

Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Employment Transportation Assistance Program (WETAP) rid transportation barriers that limit low-income citizens from getting to their jobs or advancing their careers to something that pays better.³⁹ This project is locally concentrated and coordinated.⁴⁰ Local communities are encouraged to determine and overcome their transportation needs using federal funding that allows them to implement successful transportation systems.⁴¹ In sum, this rural state has put pressure on its local communities to take advantage of their resources and federal funding to achieve the best possible public transportation system for its low-income citizens.

Conclusion

Many rural states have achieved virtually seamless transportation systems by assessing the places of need for such implementation and concentrating on using federal and state funding to integrate systems to create the most efficient public transportation systems.⁴² While Vermont does not have a seamless public transportation system currently in place, these states act as a model for what a rural state like Vermont could create to achieve such a goal.

This report was completed on February 15, 2012 by Isaac Moche, Alexander Raymond, and Aaron Haight under the supervision of graduate student Kate Fournier and Professor Anthony Gierzynski in response to a request from Representative Bill Aswad

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