

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Southern Windsor County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) represents Volume 2 of the 2009 Regional Plan, and serves as the transportation element pursuant to 24 V.S.A., Chapter 117 §4348(a)(4). It also represents a long-range transportation plan to guide transportation decision-making in support of the Region's Transportation Planning Initiative pursuant to 19 V.S.A., Chapter 1 §10l. It documents a vision for transportation and serves as the basis for determining future transportation investments. The Plan outlines specific steps that can be taken to improve the regional transportation network (see Regional Transportation Network map – **Appendix A, Map 1**) and provide for future transportation needs. Aside from the traditional vehicular modes of transportation, the Plan addresses other modes such as railroads, airports, public transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian travel.

The RTP is intended to be used for the following purposes:

- To serve as the transportation element of the Regional Plan;
- To provide a wealth of information regarding the condition of the existing transportation system in the Region;
- To provide a means to express the Region's transportation planning concerns and priorities at the State and local levels;
- To guide public investment in transportation infrastructure;
- To be consistent with state planning goals (24 V.S.A., Chapter 117 §4302);
- To implement the Transportation Planning Initiative and fulfill the duties of regional planning commissions in accordance with 19 V.S.A., Chapter 1 §10l(b); and,
- To serve as a basis for evaluating transportation programs and projects that impact the Region, including the regional Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP).

This document is intended to guide the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) in evaluating public and private actions affecting the Region's transportation system and is the foundation for the RPC's annual transportation work program.

In 1992, the RPC entered into a partnership with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), entitled the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). The TPI seeks to decentralize transportation planning and encourage participation at the local level in setting transportation investment priorities. This Plan was developed based on the TPI process, and to conform to the general intent of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and subsequent reauthorizations, including the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21), Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and its forthcoming reauthorization.

The RTP is updated every five years or sooner in order to reflect the changing conditions of the transportation system and the changing demands of the Region.

## **A. Southern Windsor County Transportation Advisory Committee**

The RPC established the Southern Windsor County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to advise the RPC on regional transportation issues. Representation on the TAC consists of one representative from each community, an ex-officio representative of the Agency of Transportation and provision for two “at-large” members. The primary mission of the TAC is to develop and update the RTP and the TIP, as approved by the RPC.

## **B. Public Participation and Plan Adoption Process**

The RTP was first developed and adopted by the RPC in 1995 and updated previously in 2005. It was updated again and adopted by a vote of the RPC on Month Day, Year following public hearings and a formal recommendation by the TAC. This Plan was adopted as the transportation element of the Southern Windsor County Regional Plan pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §§4348 and 4348(a).

The RPC sought public participation in the 2009 update of the Regional Plan. In updating the RTP (Volume 2 of 2), the RPC developed and conducted a regional transportation survey (Survey) and various outreach efforts in order to consult with local and state officials, local businesses and the general public. The Survey was conducted in March 2008 in order to get input into the transportation planning process, inform the RPC’s transportation project prioritization process, and evaluate regional attitudes on current transportation issues and priorities. Outreach included focus group meetings, public information meetings on key topics (i.e. freight), and consulting with town officials, businesses, and regional and state agencies. Key findings included:

- Safety of the transportation system is a primary concern;
- The RPC should prioritize system preservation over building new capacity;
- The top three challenges for the Region’s transportation system, listed in priority order, are:
  1. A lack of funding;
  2. Project cost increases;
  3. Deferred maintenance;
- Eighty-five percent responded to the survey indicating that current funding levels are not sufficient. The top four funding options were identified as the best course of action to increase revenues:
  1. Developer cost sharing (Capital budget, impact fees);

2. Additional federal or state gas tax;
3. Additional state vehicle registration fees;
4. Enable alternatives to the gas tax, such as road user fees.

## **C. Regional Transportation Issues**

The regional transportation system needs to be dynamic as the population, economy, land use patterns and traffic demands continue to change over time. This section highlights the key transportation issues in the Region at this time.

### **1. Transportation Funding**

State and Federal Transportation Funds, which are the primary revenue sources for transportation projects, are not keeping pace with inflation and are, therefore, losing purchasing power. Neither the Federal nor State gas tax has been increased for many years. The recent high cost of fuels and the resulting shift to more fuel efficient vehicles and/or driving less, further reduces these revenue sources. This lack of adequate funding poses significant budgetary challenges for Federal, State and local decision makers. When combined with the needs to address the aging infrastructure, this situation is very serious at this time.

### **2. Aging Highway Infrastructure**

The state highway infrastructure in the Region has not changed appreciably since 1970. Funding levels have not allowed the State or towns to keep up with routine preventative maintenance. Currently, many of the roads and bridges are aging and require investment, while traffic volumes and vehicle miles traveled continue to increase. Maintaining the roads and bridges in safe and passable condition is essential for the safety of residents and health of the economy of the Region. Maintenance of the existing highway infrastructure is prioritized over the construction of new roads.

### **3. Rural/Community Character**

The unique Vermont character of the landscape and existing scenic qualities of the roads should be protected. Roads and bridges should be reconstructed as safety and deteriorating conditions require, but the Region's natural, cultural and community features should not be adversely impacted.

### **4. Demographic Shifts**

The population in the Region is getting older which is subsequently changing the demands of the transportation system. As the Region's population over 65 years of age continues to increase as "baby boomers" reach retirement age, personal mobility will likely decline without access to quality public transportation services. Aging drivers will also require other special considerations including more visible signs and road markings, and may demand other facilities including improved sidewalks and more recreational facilities.

### **5. Land Use Development Patterns**

A significant amount of the Region's recent development has been occurring in rural areas with limited transportation options, and has not been well coordinated with the goal of

improving the functionality of the regional transportation system. More emphasis on better coordination between land use development and transportation investments is needed. To do that, the RPC is exploring ways to encourage highway corridor management efforts, access management, traffic calming, and provide model local land use regulations.

#### 6. Access to Jobs / Commuting Options

As the Region's economy has changed in recent years, residents' access to jobs has changed dramatically, now requiring longer commutes and reliable transportation. In order to provide access to those jobs and offer commuter options, efforts should be made to expand and diversify the economy in regional growth centers, and to provide public transit and carpooling access to job centers, including Ludlow, Brattleboro and the Upper Valley. Creating and maintaining the appropriate multi-modal infrastructure to support local businesses is also a primary consideration in this Region.

#### 7. Alternative Modes of Transportation

As the demands on our roads and bridges continues to increase, investments in alternative modes and transportation demand management efforts can encourage a more efficient transportation system, and can help to reduce those demands on highways. Railroads are currently underutilized for freight and passenger services, and require investment to encourage more use. Public transportation is an essential link to services for segments of the population, and provides important choices for commuters. Park-and-ride lots serve the public transportation systems and encourage ridesharing, but improvements are needed to address capacity problems. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are important within villages and downtowns, and as connections between residential areas and local destinations, including schools and recreation areas. Larger towns have difficulty maintaining their pedestrian facilities, and there are limited funding sources for sidewalk maintenance needs. Investments in alternative modes of travel can increase the life of our highway infrastructure and improve quality of life for residents.

#### 8. Tourism

Tourism is an important sector of the Region's economy, and should be enhanced through transportation efforts including effective highway corridor management, intelligent information systems and other traveler information, increased travel choices and intermodal connections.

### **D. Vision for the Region's Transportation System**

This section describes the vision that should guide future development and transportation investments in the Region. It is the vision that the southern Windsor County regional transportation system will:

1. Support a diverse economy and high quality of life for all residents.
2. Provide for the safe, efficient and cost-effective movement of people, goods and services.
3. Address the mobility needs of all residents.

4. Offer diverse travel choices throughout the Region with an integrated and seamless multi-modal transportation system.
5. Strive to provide transportation infrastructures that efficiently and safely handle traffic during natural hazard events and other emergency situations.
6. Preserve environmental, historic, scenic and cultural resources.
7. Integrate land use and transportation in a comprehensive and cooperative decision-making process.
8. Implement a transportation planning process that is responsive to local, regional and state needs, and seeks to engage the public in the decision making process.
9. Promote a funding strategy that realizes the maximum use of all available resources to ensure adequate funding to address the Region's and towns' priority needs of the existing transportation system.