

## Climate Action Input Session: Transportation

Thursday, November 7, 12:30-2:00pm

### Summary of Input

*hosted by the Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee  
of the Vermont Climate Council*

#### **Overview**

The Vermont Climate Council is updating the state's Climate Action Plan. Subcommittees of the Council are holding a series of virtual public meetings to get input on their initial ideas for the update.

This document summarizes input during a session on November 7, 2024, focused on reducing climate pollution from transportation with an emphasis on vehicle electrification, clean fuels and public, active, and shared transportation. Approximately 70 people attended the 90-minute Zoom meeting. A participant list is included below.

This document is not a transcript of the session, but rather an overview of themes and ideas that participants provided verbally, in the chat, or subsequently over email to Vermont's Climate Action Office.

The session began with a presentation of emerging ideas from the Transportation Task Group of the Council's Cross-Sector Mitigation Subcommittee.

- View presentation [slides](#).
- Watch the Transportation Input Session [recording](#).

#### **Summary of input**

##### **High-level summary**

At the end of the input session, participants were asked to answer the question, "what themes are jumping out?" Using a Menti link, they offered the short phrases as responses, which are grouped below.

*Many comments focused on investing in and obtaining funding for reliable public transportation*

- Invest in public transit!

- Invest in public transportation options.
- Strategic & specific investments needed for shared & active transportation
- Need for cultural change to promote increased use of public transit!
- Implement a strategy from one of the many public transit funding studies that have been conducted to sustainably fund public transit
- Stable funding for public transit.
- Focus on transit and active transportation, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction.
- Make public and active transportation the easiest, most affordable options!
- Microtransit in urban areas to supplement the reduction of fixed routes
- Continue to invest in innovative ideas in public transportation
- Funding of transportation policies have to be on par with our climate and equity goals.
- Don't rely on federal programs to meet transportation goals
- Clearly convey available \$ to make change versus base transportation budget simply maintain what is there

*Other comments focused more specifically on active transportation alternatives*

- If you build it, they will come. We need bike infrastructure across longer corridors.
- All kids should be able to walk or bike to school.
- Walkability and downtown/village vibrancy is a critical piece of climate resiliency combined with more convenient passenger rail connections between population centers and first/last mile transit
- VTrans taking the lead on adding bike lanes when repaving
- Support sustainable modes not single occupancy vehicle infrastructure

*Several comments focused on issues associated with electrification, including charging*

- Charging stations for multi-family and at short intervals on roads around the state
- Intentional public charging locations that limit barriers for renters to access
- Investing in EV incentives AND making the process to access them as simple/streamlined as possible
- We need to invest equitably in electrifying vehicles and reducing VMT by funding other modes.
- Make switching easier!
- Overburdened/outdated electrical grid

*Participants had other key takeaways as well*

- Focus on consumer economics
- Focus on policies on rural super users to lower greenhouse gases the most. Many of these people are lower income.
- Please also keep in mind to look at all sides of each story and make sure that your policies do not turn into regressive taxes or high cost compliance or more pollution.
- Investments in lowering energy consumption will save real dollars
- Equity and accessibility!
- Look to renewable diesel for heavy duty & off road vehicles.
- Barriers to adoption.
- Explore increasing the gas tax - increases revenue for these projects and taxes the thing you want to reduce.
- Prioritize people over driving!

### **Detailed summary by theme**

Below is a more detailed summary of input provided verbally during the conversation, in the chat, and from subsequent emails, grouped by theme.

#### *Concerns and possible solutions related to affordability and how to support low-income communities*

- The goal of affordability is crucial.
- Hopefully, policies won't be implemented so quickly that Vermonters can't participate.
- What is envisioned for the deaf community in this transition to electric/ hybrid vehicles and how will they afford it? Many in the community are low-income and do not own homes.
- Need to broaden the target audience beyond low-income folks to include retirees who are dependent on social security income to survive.
- Although there are ways to buy electric vehicles through subsidies, many are still worried about charging and many subsidies come with regressive tax breaks.
- Need to ensure policies don't have unintended consequences.
- Upgrading large old apartment buildings to heat pumps is expensive and in some cases not possible. The costs would go to the tenants and this would make rent rates go through the roof.
- Many of the Vermont EV incentives have lapsed. These must be reinstated and funding needs to be secured to create similar and other incentives. Low and middle-income households need to be able to afford fully electric transportation, and such incentives are crucial to making that possible.

- Many Vermonters are struggling to afford food – there are serious financial barriers to adoption of heat pumps or electric furnaces.
- Used vehicle tax credit of \$4,000 is available at the time of sale. No need for tax liability.

### *Solutions for multi-family units and renters*

- Burlington Cohousing has 32 multi-family units and two level-two chargers that work with Burlington Electric Department (BED) for off-peak charging.
  - Burlington Cohousing has 9 affordable units through CHT among its 32 units. One of those CHT residents owns an electric car – need to shift the perception because electric cars can be affordable using incentives, trade-in, and holiday dealer sales and because some can be leased for low monthly payments.
- Offer incentives for buying the chargers and assistance and getting them installed.
  - For landlords, incentives for offering multi-family units level two chargers if they are to run off of a common meter.
- Burlington has a good residential incentive program through BED but not being able to charge residentially using a common meter is a challenge. Need to be working with a company that has the software to support what BED needs to see that charging is being done during off-peak hours.
- The State needs to focus on building out charging infrastructure, and in particular charging that serves residents of multi-unit housing, especially in more densely populated areas. I live in South Burlington, in a 60-unit condo high rise with a basement garage having assigned parking spaces for residents. It is impossible to create individual charging in-garage for EV owners living in this kind of setup, and difficult, complicated, and very expensive to install Level 2 chargers outside of the building in either roadside or public parking-lot locations.

### *Funding opportunities and challenges related to public transportation*

- The budget last year dedicated about 870 million dollars to transportation, and not nearly enough to pay for sustainability programs. The State needs to be committed to get the budget aligned with our values, and the Climate Action Plan needs to be explicit about how we are going to align our budget with our equity and climate goals.
- The majority of funding as a public transit provider comes from federal grants, and in order to receive them, there needs to be local match funds. Many of the local match funds are contributed by the State, and also by local communities, sometimes private institutions, and even ski resorts. It is not easily predictable year-to-year what local match is going to be available, which poses challenges to expanding routes, increasing

frequency, etc. Many in the public transit industry feel grateful for the support received, but would like to provide higher quality of service which will only be possible if there are more predictable and ongoing sources of local match funding.

- Community Rides Vermont received State funding for a pilot program called *Mobility for All* that may have important lessons for other public transit providers related to how to best serve people without cars and foster an environment where people are less reliant on their own vehicles. Community Rides VT is a quasi-public transit provider with an all electric vehicle fleet that provides taxi-like services to the general public and is a contract transportation provider for local schools.
  - The public transit system meets most peoples' needs, but there are still people that slip through the cracks. Because of this, the Mobility for all funding stream could be important to implement statewide.
- If we are concerned that federal support for EVs and lower carbon solutions will be reduced soon, can we quickly expand Vermont's programs to maximize the amount of federal co-funding we can draw down in the next year or 18 months?
- We should spend money in the budget on projects that shift people away from car usage. Other states have implemented a cap on greenhouse gas emissions or VMT increases that can result from major transportation projects. During planning, if a big transportation project is to be done, it has to be evaluated for its effect on greenhouse gas emissions or VMT, and if it is going to increase greenhouse gas emissions or VMT, those have to be mitigated elsewhere, or the project has to be changed in order to go in the direction of the goal (i.e. in Colorado).
  - The current Climate Action Plan discusses a sustainable transportation plan that looks at VMT reduction and what is needed to achieve that in terms of investments. This should specifically explore a planning rule or a regulatory scheme similar to the [mechanisms](#) Colorado has put in place.

#### *Reducing dependency on single occupancy vehicles*

- Structural / cultural change and associated challenges
  - Reducing car dependency will require a structural/mindset change. State leadership is essential to provide other transportation solutions. Many think this won't be possible due to Vermont's geography and settlement patterns, but the subcommittee should look at models in places such as Switzerland, one of the best rail-connected countries that is also extremely rural and more mountainous than Vermont.
  - Car ownership used to be a luxury, similar to the way people use private planes now and it was also the case that transportation was seen as a collective

responsibility. Should return to this collective approach that aims to reduce costs for Vermonters.

- Hands-on learning and talking to students/ kids of all ages about transportation is key to shift the culture around cars. There is already widespread acceptance from youth about the different available modes of transportation such as biking and walking, while also being aware that it depends on the road or sidewalk situation.
  - However, there are limits to promoting this as public transit is not an option for many kids. If kids don't see that there is a viable option for them to take a local bus, there isn't anywhere for that conversation to go/ any way for them to practice the skills involved in taking public transit. This will look very different depending on where people are in the State, so we need a systematic approach that makes public transportation/ other alternatives to driving a viable option that works reliably and is accessible to a variety of people across the state.
- Alternatives (i.e. car-sharing, biking, walking, rail)
  - Acknowledge that some people cannot get rid of their individual vehicle due to work (i.e. as a landlord, it would be difficult to get rid of personal transportation, especially in terms of delivering new supplies to buildings and plowing parking lots and roads.)
    - VTrans could consider Electric Truck demonstrations/rides to interested residents.
  - Expand car-sharing programs throughout the state for jobs like deliveries, recognizing that most people have a need for doing a major equipment delivery pretty infrequently. Likewise, for street plowing - we already collectivize this for our public roads, and we could simply extend this as a town or smaller-than-town-area plow-sharing program, as well.
  - Consider increasing the gas tax.
  - Continue (and expand) e-bike incentive programs and bike/pedestrian infrastructure programs.
  - The idea of setting up a "bike/walk bus" where kids get organized to bike/walk to school together invariably falls on busy and exhausted parents. Need to focus on building systems that let more people participate without adding more work to volunteers.
  - Rail is a good concept, but there have been financial barriers for decades to finance and bring more efficient rail to Vermont.
  - The last-mile challenge, or the challenge of getting people from a rail station to a rural residence, still looms large. Luckily, Vermont, unlike many other rural states

in the US, has dense, walkable town centers that can serve as centers for rail connections. One solution is similar to what Green Mountain transit does in Montpelier with an on-demand vehicle. Another solution is to expand electric bike parking at stations, as well as the use of electric bikes to get to and from rail stations for shorter distances.

### *Electrification*

- Electrifying the fleet (public transportation and SOVs)
  - Need enhanced incentives for public transit and other transportation companies to electrify, because the benefits of electrification (given experience with EV vehicle fleet on the road all day everyday the past 18 months) in terms of cost, reliability, and pollution reduction are significant. Getting other businesses to electrify would generate substantial cost savings and pollution reduction.
  - How do you respond to claims that we are harming the earth in order to build batteries for electric vehicles?
- Charging
  - The state should devote greater effort and resources to solving charging problems (such as those in multi-unit housing) that severely hinder EV adoption.
  - Green Mountain Power (GMP) has a great program in terms of EV incentives, but these incentives are not consistent statewide. The State needs to implement equitable charging rates throughout.
  - How do we address having quick charging stations at regular intervals across the State for those who are traveling long distances, also taking into account that Vermont's economy is dependent on tourism income?
  - Many people commute from rural areas that are more affordable to jobs in urban centers. Investing in workplace charging at major employment hubs could help encourage "rural super users" to consider EVs.
  - Concern about the push to electrify the vehicle fleet because we cannot keep up with the electricity requirements now. Are we improving the grid enough to also have everyone charging cars, too?
- Other limitations
  - There are many towns in which areas are limited in terms of thermal capacity and installing new solar. It doesn't matter how much we promote EVs if this is not changed. Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) does not even offer on-demand metering as a service. Getting all our utilities on the same level should be a primary goal.

- There are barriers people in single family homes and in apartments face when they try to upgrade their systems. Perhaps we should be looking at the utilities to provide a minimum service level at each household as part of our strategy.

### *Local capacity and regional collaboration*

- Any statewide decisions that are trying to increase incentives or provide opportunities for towns to implement these initiatives need to make sure that the towns have the capacity and resources to do the planning work.
- Need to work together to enhance local and regional planning (especially if other paving or infrastructure projects are happening at the same time). Otherwise, municipalities can be left on their own to plan and implement transportation infrastructure, make investment decisions, and deal with increased costs of road maintenance which is becoming more expensive due to extreme weather.

### *Other*

- Need to ensure that incentives work for lower-income folks, but also incentives should target high users, too, so we are getting the best payback.
- Intersecting issues
  - Need to combine thinking with other intersecting issues in the State such as affordable housing, forestry, etc. and how that connects to the public's needs for efficient transportation, especially in rural areas.
- Adopt the "investment" mentality
  - Need to look at financing as investments. If we are able to overcome the challenges associated with getting lower-income families electric vehicles or convert their oil burners to heat pumps, we know they will save money in the same ways.
- Concern that the Affordable Heat Act is not actually transparent or affordable at all, that government officials don't have the public's best interest in mind, and that taxpayer dollars are not being efficiently spent, leaving Vermonters in a hard spot.
  - Concern that weatherization involves insulating homes with non-environmentally friendly products.
  - Concern that older people are being forced to upgrade their homes, leading them to take on debt.
  - What are the rate/tax increases accomplishing?
  - What alternatives are in place in terms of fuels besides electricity via GMP?  
Concern that GMP is raising their rates.



- Concern that people skilled in the trades are in high demand and short supply.

## **Participants**

Ari Lattanzi, Beth Meachem, Barbara Dailey, Logan Nicoll, Jason Hirsch, Joy Yakie, Scott Campbell, Geena Baber, Johanna Miller, Sharyl Green, Andrea Wright, Karl Kemnitzer, dave farnsworth, Edward Barber, Jonathon Weber, Melissa Bailey, Reuben MacMartin, Samantha Page, Christine Forde, Adams Carroll, Laural Ruggles, Peggy O'Neill-Vivanco, David Roberts, Katherine Lee Goyette, Caleb Grant, Liam Abbate, Abby Bleything, John Haffner, Callie Fishburn, Dave Pelletier, Cara Robeck, Colin Bratton, Liz Amler, Alex Grist, Maja Klostermann, Lena Stier, Keith Cubbon, Brian Woods, Sarah Camille Wilson, Collin Smythe, Eliana Fox, Leigh Martin, Eleni Churchill, Richard Cowart, Evelyn Seidner, Jason Charest, Robb Kidd, Jared Duval, Jeremy Roy, Jane Lazorchak, Susan Bowen, Ann Janda, Neva Cote, Rep Phil Pouech, Rep Scott Campbell, Sophia Donforth, Otis Ellms-Munroe, Annie Bourdon, Val Hughes, Kati Gallagher, Deirdra Ritzer, Ingrid Malmgren, Karen Horn, Amanda Carlson, Charlie Ansley, Bram Kleppner, Amanda Holland, Ross MacDonald, Adam Aguirre, Victoria Underhill, David Plumb (facilitator), Charlotte Goodman (facilitator), Hannah Gantt (ASL interpreter), Hilda Colondres (ASL interpreter)