

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. 7 Transportation Management Study is intended to evaluate overall statewide policy planning, town/regional planning processes, and specific project development efforts by the VAOT. By studying the 90 mile highway segment of U.S. 7 from East Dorset to South Burlington, the state and regional needs to support Environment, Social and Economic (ESE) goals and objectives are considered in the broadest possible context. U.S. 7 has been nominated for placement on the National Highway System (NHS) by the State of Vermont and is a facility which bears primary responsibility for handling interstate and regional traffic. Issues associated with operations and safety are considered in the same context with the impacts on ESE factors.

VERMONT TRANSPORTATION POLICY PLAN

Policy number 2 of the 1992 Vermont Transportation Policy Plan provides that the State of Vermont will "**ASSURE TRANSPORTATION ACCESS TO ALL AREAS OF THE STATE IN ORDER TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**" The policy narrative points to Rutland, Bennington, and Middlebury as three urban towns without economic support of an Interstate Highway. The narrative continues:

"Southwestern Vermont is the principal example of an area that requires support from transportation infrastructure so economic growth and development opportunity equals that of other sectors of the State."

The policy statement is supported by four goal statements:

- **Goal 2.1:** Examine the transportation challenges and develop alternatives for economically lagging areas.
- **Goal 2.2:** Pursue actions designed to connect Interstate 89 through Mid-State and/or Bennington areas with Interstate 87 in New York.
- **Goal 2.3:** Assess local and regional attitudes regarding alternative transportation corridor development.
- **Goal 2.4:** Examine the potential of U.S. 7 expansion and improvement between Burlington and Rutland.

The U.S. 7 Transportation Corridor Management Study is designed to address goals 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of the policy statement. The strong desire to "pro-actively" make

efficient, economical, and productive transportation improvements has been a driving force behind the U.S. 7 study.

Economic Impacts. Through economic development studies performed in the Rutland region a strong relationship has been established between mobility through highway improvements and resultant economic growth. While "economic needs" must be balanced against environmental, social, and financial concerns, a productive regional economy lies at the heart of a fruitful "quality of life." Interest in economic development varies within the corridor. The need for job creation, tax base, and enhanced productivity is viewed more critical in the Rutland region than in other parts of the study area. Therefore, there is a higher level of receptiveness in this area to related transportation improvements.

Interregional Transportation Needs

Mobility needs are defined in terms of the movement of people and goods on a local, regional, state, national, and international basis. The interest in enhanced mobility is brought about by the public's desire to support its need for economic and social well being. Current and future needs are expressed in town and regional plans and statewide policy statements. The safe operation, maintenance and construction of transportation facilities is important to prevent loss of life, injury, and property damage caused by highway accidents.

Multimodal transportation planning must consider the movement of both people and goods (freight). Movement of people includes private automobile, vans, buses, rail, air and non-motorized transportation, such as bicycles and pedestrians. Goods movement includes truck, air, water/barge and rail. Additionally, intermodal connections, such as park and ride facilities must be identified.

Key concerns in transportation planning include:

- Existing transportation network, travel movements, vehicle volumes, and safety information (fatal, injury, and property damage only accidents);
- Travel demand forecasting which considers population, employment, and other demographic indicators;
- Accident data to identify high accident locations, general accident experience, and appropriate design standards;

- Sufficiency ratings which consider the functional and physical needs of pavement, drainage structures, bridges, signs and signals, and overall operating characteristics;
- The needs of the transportation disadvantaged including senior citizens, the young, low income and disabled citizens;
- Performance measures which gauge the effectiveness of the transportation systems, and respond to current and future demands such as operating speeds, delay, volume to capacity ratios, congestion and identification of choke points;
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies which encourage travelers to change their mode choice through incentives such as parking control strategies, park and ride facilities, or upgraded public transportation service to develop a balanced program of transportation;
- Transportation improvement strategies which range from repair and restoration of existing facilities to construction of new highway facilities or development of new transit routes; and,
- Environment, Social and Economic (ESE) considerations that serve as catalysts for improvement and constrain the location of improvements. Care must be taken to address environmental concerns that might result in significant, permanent degradation of the natural or manmade environment. However, transportation improvements should serve to enhance local and regional economy and environment, and play a proactive role in improving the overall quality of life.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

The objective of the U.S 7 Transportation Corridor Management Study is to balance the goals and objectives from town, regional, and state levels in Vermont and to develop a cohesive approach to enhance transportation service - mobility and safety. While the study focuses the highway facility, other areas of consideration such as ridesharing, public transportation, truck movements, rail, and intermodal were considered to optimize the investment in transportation improvements.

SCOPE OF THE FINAL REPORT

This final report is intended to summarize documentation of the U.S. 7 Transportation Corridor Management Study. Preliminary documentation has been provided throughout

the study through the public participation and outreach process. In numerous cases, this information has been revised and updated to reflect public comment and subsequent analysis. Principal sources of detailed technical information include:

- **Technical Memorandum No. 1** - Traffic operations, public transportation, regional/town plans, and demographics;
- **Technical Memorandum No. 2** - Traveler preference survey, survey operation, survey sample size, and travel characteristics; and,
- **Technical Memorandum No. 3** - Development of economic and population forecasts for the corridor; travel demand modeling; analysis of transportation deficiencies; committed transportation improvements; alternative transportation solutions; and, the citizen participation process.

The information contained in the Technical Memoranda, as well as that distributed throughout the course of the study, should be viewed as preliminary to the final report.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING INITIATIVE

The **Transportation Planning Initiative** is an effort by the VAOT to promote and develop town and regionally based transportation planning. The U.S. 7 Transportation Corridor Management Study will provide direct input into the initiative by:

- Identifying **transportation and development related problems** in the immediate and long range;
- Providing **data and analytical information** regarding the magnitude of problems and the potential success of alternative solutions;
- Recommending **improvement projects** which encompass transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and operational/safety improvements; and,
- Initiating a **consensus building process** which will lead to the implementation of transportation improvement projects.

The VAOT has stated on numerous occasions that the initiative for improvements must come from the town and regional levels.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Transportation improvements, no matter how simple or expensive, do not just happen over night. The large, more expensive projects undergo extensive scrutiny prior to implementation, but even smaller projects receive careful evaluation. For example, the

environmental process could include a full scale Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), a general Environmental Assessment (EA), or a Categorical Exclusion (CE). Even at the environmental stage many planning issues are revised.

Projects may be defined as:

- **Immediate Action** (1 to 5 years)
- **Mid Range** (5 to 10 years)
- **Long Term** (10 to 20 years)

The following is a very general expression of the **Project Development Process (PDP)**:

- Town/City Plan or Select Board/Aldermanic Approval
- Regional Plan Incorporation
- Environmental Studies
- VAOT/State Programming
- Design (PS&E)
- Right-of-Way Purchase
- Construction/Operations

The PDP, while expressed sequentially, may take place simultaneously or iteratively. Months or years may pass as funds are made available or a consensus at the state or local level is developed. Finally, there are many opportunities to adjust projects throughout the process. Community advocacy to support and fund improvement projects and solutions to local and regional problems is absolutely necessary.

