



APPROVED MINUTES
WRC Transportation Committee
May 12th, 2025
4:00 p.m.

Members Present: Stephan Chait, Chair, Nick Morgan, Andy Coyne, Rick Cowan, Georgianne Mora, James Bressor

Members Absent: Christine Howe, Erik Moses

Staff present: Colin Bratton

Guests: Abe Koffman (VTrans)

Meeting convened at 4:02 p.m.

Changes to Agenda: None

Minutes: None

Vermont Statewide Transportation Improvement Program: The committee reviewed the list of projects in the Windham Region included in the draft 2025-2028 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) list. The public hearing for this year's STIP was held May 6th and towns have until May 20th to submit comments on the draft project list to VTrans. Currently, there are thirty projects, both state and local, in the Windham Region included in the draft 2025 STIP. Those projects are in various stages of development, some already in construction and others not scheduled until the 2030s.

Major upcoming projects in the Windham Region include the Brattleboro Class 1 Town Highway paving, scheduled for 2025-2026 which will see major roads in Brattleboro, including Main Street, High Street and Canal Street rebuilt, the Brattleboro-Putney US-5 paving project, the Jamaica State Park Bridge project, the Rockingham Depot Street bridge project and the Readsboro Village Route 100 Bridge project to highlight just a few.

There have been significant delays and complications with ongoing STIP projects, in particular bridge replacement projects, in the Windham Region that have impacted towns. The Jamaica State Park bridge project has been delayed several times, now not scheduled to begin construction until 2030. The scope of the project has changed substantially, originally intended as a rehabilitation of the existing structure, VTrans now intends to replace the bridge with a more modern design to accommodate the needs of the Army Corps of Engineers related to the Ball Mountain Dam. Similarly, the Depot Street Bridge project in Rockingham has faced repeated delays and construction has now been pushed back to 2029 at the earliest. The town of Rockingham had previously agreed to cover all engineering costs for the project. Those engineering costs have increased dramatically due to the unexpected delay in construction schedule, increasing the cost burden on the town. The Gageville 121

Bridge and the Brattleboro VT-9 Whetstone Brook Bridge have both also experienced similar delays and cost increases.

The impact of the July 2021 and July 2023 floods on Vermont's transportation infrastructure together with continued year over year construction cost increases have placed a substantial strain on the overall statewide transportation budget. The scale of the emergency repairs and associated expenditure necessitated by those disaster events has limited available funding for regularly scheduled construction projects causing delays to project delivery schedules across the State. This is an ongoing issue that the Transportation Advisory Committee will continue to monitor moving forward.

Vermont Project Selection and Prioritization: The Agency of Transportation has announced that Infrastructure Project Selection and Prioritization process will not open in 2025. This is the 3rd consecutive year where no new projects have been accepted through the selection process, the program last open to towns in 2022. This is by and large related to the aforementioned disaster spending and increasing project costs that have limited available funding for new transportation projects.

This pause in new project programming presents a significant challenge for Vermont towns for a variety of reasons. Previously the Project Selection and Prioritization process was the primary mechanism by which municipalities could submit large scale paving and bridge replacement projects to VTrans for consideration. The process allowed towns to send priority infrastructure projects to VTrans for consideration and potential inclusion on the statewide project list, providing a much-needed opportunity for funding of major local infrastructure needs. Additionally, the VPSP2 process was the primary mechanism for towns to submit local concerns related to traffic and safety on state highways to the Agency of Transportation for consideration and potentially begin a project development process lead by VTrans. Absent this process there is no formal process for towns to raise local concerns related to state highways without towns moving forward with a project development and construction process at their own expense.

The extended pause in the Vermont Project Selection and Prioritization process represents a challenge to Windham Regional communities on several fronts. The inability for towns to submit priority bridge projects to the VTrans Town Highway bridge program will necessitate additional municipal spending on bridge repair and replacement projects that previously would have sought funding from the state. This is a substantial expense, particularly for rural towns, and additional capital and long-term planning at the local level may be required to address this challenge. Some towns, such as Londonderry, have begun setting aside funding annually in a reserve fund to be used for future infrastructure projects. The annual reserve fund potentially provides a model to other towns in the region to address larger scale infrastructure needs.

VTrans Town Highway Bridge Program: The Committee discussed long term trends in the VTrans Town Highway Bridge program and bridge project delivery. The Town Highway bridge program is an Agency of Transportation program providing funding for engineering and construction of bridges on the town highway system. This is the largest and most reliable source of funding for local bridge replacement projects in Vermont and has historically covered a large percentage of total costs for local bridge replacement projects across the State. In line with broader infrastructure spending trends across Vermont, project delivery costs within the town highway bridge program have increased substantially since 2020 and the number of projects completed annually has decreased accordingly. Between 2009 and 2017 VTrans constructed an average of 22 town highway bridges per year, from 2020-2025 that number decreased to an average of just 7 bridges annually. The impact of this has been

felt within the Windham Region where several major bridge replacement projects have been delayed by several years due to unforeseen cost increases.

These persistent funding challenges and resulting reduction in annual town highway bridge constructed is projected to negatively impact the condition of infrastructure around Vermont. Currently, 3% of statewide square foot bridge deck area across the state is assessed as being in poor condition by the Agency of Transportation bridge inspection unit. This number is forecasted to triple by 2031, when 10% of the Vermont's bridge deck areas is expected to be in poor condition. Together with the pause in the Vermont Project Selection and Prioritization process, VTrans funding for town highway bridge projects is likely to be increasingly limited over the foreseeable future, reducing available funding for towns and negatively impacting the condition of important locally owned structures. It is important that towns in the Windham Region be aware of these trends and take proactive steps to ensure our local transportation system remains as safe and functional as possible despite the decreased availability of state funding for local projects. This is an ongoing challenge that will be revisited by the Transportation Advisory Committee at a future meeting.

Note on June Meeting Schedule: VTrans Planning Coordinator Abe Koffman has offered to attend the June Transportation Advisory Committee meeting in person at the Windham Regional Commission office. This will give our commissioners an opportunity to discuss state and local transportation issues directly with VTrans staff. The Committee discussed scheduling the June meeting as an 'encourage in-person' meeting with a hybrid option, rather than as a primarily virtual meeting. This meeting is scheduled tentatively for Monday June 9th at 4:00pm.

Next Meeting Scheduled: 4:00pm June 9th, 2025.

Meeting adjourned approximately 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Colin Bratton, Staff