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The Integration of Public Transportation Systems

Integrating public transportation is a process that involves joining multiple actors together to fund and provide transportation services across the state. The state government can have a pivotal role in leading the integration of public transportation by bringing together the many transportation agencies and organizations in the state and creating a forum for cooperation. Uneven populations distributed across the state of Vermont and lack of communication among transportation providers may become problems during this process. According to the National Governors Association, successful integration requires that the government exhibit leadership, facilitate participation, and keep the long-term picture in mind for future citizens of Vermont.

Public Transportation in Vermont

The state of mass transportation in Vermont is a decentralized combination of regional transit agencies, rail lines, park & ride facilities, ferry services, and carpooling programs that provide transportation within the state of Vermont and bordering states.¹ (For a detailed study of the state of public transportation in Vermont see the Rockefeller Center's Report here: <http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/shop/PRS%20Policy%20Brief%200809-03.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 locations that provide parking and close access to public transportation.³ (For more on Park & Rides also see the Vermont Legislative Research Service Report here: <http://www.uvm.edu/~vlrs/Transportation/Park%20and%20Ride.pdf>.)

¹ Kahlie Dufresne, Chase Raines, Christine Souffrant, and Tara Wohlgemuth, "Public Transportation in Vermont," Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College: The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences, March 1, 2009, accessed January 29, 2012,

<http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/shop/PRS%20Policy%20Brief%200809-03.pdf>.

² Kahlie Dufresne et al., "Public Transportation in Vermont."

³ Vermont Agency of Transportation, "Planning Division: Public Transit Section," accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/PublicTransit/transit.htm>.

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.⁴ 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.⁷ 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."⁹ 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 as 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 Mallon, and William Vassilakis, “Next Generation Intermodal Passenger Transportation System: Phase I,” accessed February 7, 2012, <http://tigger.uic.edu/~vonu-pt/intermodal.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.”

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans) released a 2011 report that outlined the state's transportation goals for the next two years.¹¹ It highlighted investment in intermodal transportation, highway preservation, and bridge maintenance, as the three areas integral to Vermont's sustained "economic development and community vitality."¹² The report calls for a renewed focus on supporting and improving existing rail systems, public transit, and bicycle/pedestrian programs. In conjunction, these three projects would function to create a system defined by "mobility, sustainability, and livability" that is resistant to oil prices and climate change.¹³

Improving Public Transportation – Keys To Success

According to a report by the National Governors Association, three keys to the success of integrating public transportation include leadership, participation, and continuity.¹⁴ The first key to success, leadership, states that a strong Governor can be useful for garnering support and overcoming implementation barriers to increase integration for public transportation. One of the biggest challenges to public transportation integration by the state is that "transportation services are provided at the city, county, and regional levels."¹⁵ Participation, the second key of success, means that governmental agencies at all levels, as well as non-governmental organizations involved in public transportation, need to participate and communicate strategies to improve public transportation integration. One strategy for increasing participation is the creation of a working group that includes multiple transportation agencies including governmental and non-governmental.¹⁶ Continuity is the third key to success when trying to integrate public transportation in the long term.¹⁷ The creation of performance measures and keeping communication open between all actors will help ensure that stakeholders are benefitting continually over time.¹⁸

States can coordinate efforts from multiple agencies through a few different mechanisms. One available mechanism is the ability to issue a legislative mandate. For example, New Jersey and Ohio have mandated that "counties develop coordination plans and submit them to the

¹¹ Vermont Agency of Transportation, "Background Info, Emphasis Areas, and Projected Prioritization," accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/capprog/documents/FY13/02BackgroundInfoEmphasisAreasAndProjectPrioritization.pdf>.

¹² Vermont Agency of Transportation, "Background Info, Emphasis Areas, and Projected Prioritization," p. 1.

¹³ Vermont Agency of Transportation, "Background Info, Emphasis Areas, and Projected Prioritization."

¹⁴ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination," accessed January 30, 2012, <http://vtsrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/011503IMPROVINGTRANS.pdf>.

¹⁵ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination," p. 12.

¹⁶ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination."

¹⁷ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination."

¹⁸ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination."

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 "expansion of the scope of an existing agency to provide general public transportation."²³ 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 five counties.²⁴ It also works in conjunction with Central Arkansas Transportation and the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department in order to synchronize activity across the metropolitan area. Its primary function “is to work with local governments, the state department of transportation, and local transit providers to determine transportation needs and funding priorities for federal transportation investments. Metroplan also provides general planning, mapping, and technical assistance to local governments.”²⁵

Michigan

The state of Michigan created a program called “To Strengthen Michigan Families” to fortify public transportation systems for welfare recipients. The program included a component called “Project Zero” that led to the coordination of multiple state agencies including the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Family Independence Agency, and the Michigan Jobs

¹⁹ National Governors Association, “Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination,” p. 13.

²⁰ National Governors Association, “Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination,” p. 13.

²¹ National Governors Association, “Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination.”

²² National Governors Association, “Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination.”

²³ National Governors Association, “Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination.”

²⁴ Metroplan, “About Metroplan,” 2012, accessed February 28th, 2012, <http://metroplan.org/index.php?fuseaction=p0004.&mod=54>.

²⁵ Metroplan, “About Metroplan.”

Commission.²⁶ These agencies exchanged information with local transit providers in order to work towards eliminating transportation barriers for Project Zero participants. Despite the focus of the program on welfare recipients the services are also available to the general public.²⁷

The most critical features of the Project Zero plan include:

- Bringing state and local stakeholders together to discuss transportation needs of the public;
- Creating services and means to address the needs, and;
- Funding the services created to address the needs.²⁸

Alabama

Communities along the gulf coast of Alabama are experiencing soaring population rates that demand better integrated public transportation systems. To meet the transportation needs the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission was utilized to create the state's first multi-county regional public transportation system called Baylinc.²⁹ The Baylinc commuter bus service connects rural residents in Alabama to major cities, such as Mobile, where many people work. The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission was able to bring together multiple stakeholders including the Alabama Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System, and other federal, state and local officials to negotiate.³⁰ Although the negotiation process spurred disagreements from the different actors they were still able to form a well-coordinated public transportation system.³¹

Oregon

When the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) brought together transportation agencies from around rural Oregon with the common goal of integrating public transportation systems, the result was two transportation systems that analyzed and combined their routes under the name Cascades East Transit.³² This unification allows for seamless transportation between cities and towns in rural Oregon.³³ In the process, COIC sought to "maximize the use

²⁶ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination," accessed January 30, 2012, <http://vtsrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/011503IMPROVINGTRANS.pdf>.

²⁷ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination."

²⁸ National Governors Association, "Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination."

²⁹ NADO Research Foundation, "Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers," December 2011, accessed February 2, 2012, <http://www.ruraltransportation.org/uploads/RegTransit.pdf>.

³⁰ NADO Research Foundation, "Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers," p. 8.

³¹ NADO Research Foundation, "Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers."

³² NADO Research Foundation, "Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers."

³³ NADO Research Foundation, "Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers."

of existing vehicles in community programs through shared use programs”³⁴ 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 Rail Zone” within downtown that allows free access to multiple forms of public transit such as the light rail system (“TriMet”) and streetcars (Portland Streetcar).³⁷ In Portland, the use of public transportation is growing faster than auto use, as “84% of riders *choose* TriMet over driving” and “Commutes are 20% shorter.”³⁸

Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Employment Transportation Assistance Program (WETAP) aims to 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 system. 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.

³⁴ Oregon Department of Transportation, “The Coordination Challenge”, Pg. 4, accessed January 29, 2012, <http://www.infolizer.com/unit5ed49n5erid45ea17gov/Moss-adams-llp-and-ctaa-final-project-report.html>.

³⁵ NADO Research Foundation, “Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers,” December 2011, accessed February 2, 2012, <http://www.ruraltransportation.org/uploads/RegTransit.pdf>.

³⁶ NADO Research Foundation, “Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers.”

³⁷ Danielle Kurtzleben, “The 10 Best Cities for Public Transportation,” U.S. News, 2012, accessed February 28, 2012, <http://www.usnews.com/news/slideshows/the-10-best-cities-for-public-transportation/7>.

³⁸ Trimet, “Public Transportation in the Portland Metro Area,” accessed February 28th, 2012, <http://trimet.org/about/index.htm>.

³⁹ NADO Research Foundation, “Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers.”

⁴⁰ NADO Research Foundation, “Exploring the Role of Regional Transportation Projects as Rural Economy Drivers.”

⁴¹ National Governors Association, “Improving Public Transportation Services through Effective Statewide Coordination.”

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