**Project #1: Evaluation of Service Models for Elderly and Disabled Populations**

*Community Partner: Mary-Claire Crogan, Community-Relations Manager, Addison County Transit Resources*

*Resource Contacts: Mike Winslow, Transportation Planner, Addison County Regional Planning Commission; Kelly Stoddard-Poor, Associate Director, AARP; Angela Smith-Dieng, Adult Services Director, VT Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living; Ross MacDonald, Public Transit Program Manager, VT Agency of Transportation*

Background and Context

Vermont’s Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the state’s regional transit providers offer a range of mobility services to Vermonters. The 2019 Vermont Public Transportation Policy Plan (PTPP) details how these services need to shift and adapt to important trends. Central to this latest plan are strategies to meet the needs of Vermont’s elderly and disabled (E&D) populations. Vermonters 60 years of age or older and/or living with an ADA defined disability define the E&D population and are eligible for specialized transit services. The PTPP prioritizes E&D services due to the fact that “within the next 10 years, the leading edge of the Baby Boom generation will enter their 80s, the start of a projected 60% increase in that age cohort.” [[1]](#footnote-1) Further, “the number of residents age 65 or older is forecast to increase quickly, from 18% of the population in 2015 to 27% of the population in 2030. To address the needs of the aging population, a coordinated strategy including land use, housing, technology, funding, and community participation must be developed and executed.”

Motivation for Research

In addition to access to regular bus routes, transit providers across the state (see map[[2]](#footnote-2)) currently utilize different models of demand-response services to meet the diverse needs of their E&D clients (inclusive of critical / chronic care needs as well as access to food and routine care). For example, two Dial-A-Ride models operate within the two different regions of Tri-Valley Transit (TVT). In TVT’s Addison County region, dba “ACTR” (and your partner for this project), E&D clients are offered a set number of free rides per month (in the 4-6 range, depending on available funding). Additional rides are allowed for chronic care purposes such as cardiac rehab, cancer treatment, and dialysis. This program has allowed them to meet 80-100% of eligible trip requests over the past several years. Most of these rides are provided by volunteer drivers. In comparison, TVT’s Orange and Northern Windsor County region, dba “Stagecoach”, offers a “Ticket-to-Ride” variation of Dial-A-Ride where E&D clients register for a limited transportation budget that they may use for bus fares and/or volunteer driver trips. There is a cap on the number of people who can enroll. Both of TVT’s Dial-A-Ride service models are free to use and may be used for diverse trip purposes. E&D clients may verbally self-certify age and/or physical disability to enroll in TVT ride programs. E&D clients in both regions have the option of client-pay billing if more rides are needed than allocated within the service model. A third model is that of Green Mountain Transit (GMT) which subcontracts out all of their medical E&D trips to a private non-profit called Special Services Transportation Agency.[[3]](#footnote-3) This service follows a set schedule, so appointments need to be planned accordingly. E&D clients must submit applications to certify eligibility for ride programs. Tickets must be purchased to access SSTA services. GMT is also working with the United Way to build a volunteer driver program for other E&D trip purposes.

VTrans would like to advance one statewide approach to E&D services and the 2019 PTPP recommends piloting what they are calling “Personal Mobility Accounts” (PMA), which they frame as “essentially an expanded Ticket to Ride Program.” PMA’s would not be limited to E&D clients and would “allow eligible individuals to take trips for whatever purpose they choose.” In terms of program funding, the PTPP further states that a “larger percentage of the E&D funding would be allocated to this PMA/TTR. To supplement the public funds, private funds could come from the individual or family members/friends/community supporters.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Your partner for this project, ACTR, would like to have a clearer picture of the potential local / regional implications of this new proposal that takes into account regional variations, economic implications, and potential unintended consequences (e.g. unmet needs) as demographics and budgets continue to shift.

Project Objectives

This project team will have the opportunity to design a study that could be replicated in other parts of the state or even by other states in the region as well as to contribute to the contribute to the policy conversation and decision making by VTrans as they move to pilot the PMA model. Your specific objectives include:

* Conducting an evaluation of demand response service provision models for the Tri-Valley Transit service territory (ACTR and Stagecoach, see map) from a range of perspectives including:
	+ Numbers of people served / number of rides per month
	+ Costs – how to weigh most economical approach vs. providing the most comprehensive service possible?
	+ Demand for volunteer drivers vs. utilizing existing bus routes
	+ Ride tracking and reporting implications
* Designing and conducting a GIS analysis (likely with ACRPC due to HIPPA protections) to map current E&D users
	+ What are the pros/cons/implications of different service models for people in more densely populated hubs vs. clients in more rural areas
	+ Analyze your findings in light of current Act 250 legislative conversations around encouraging more housing density & in-town housing
* Research could expand to include different models that other VT transit providers follow (e.g. GMT) and / or models from different states.

**Project #2: Storytelling to Highlight the Impact and Outcomes of Elderly and Disabled Transit Service**

*Community Partner: Mary-Claire Crogan, Community-Relations Manager, Addison County Transit Resources*

*Resource Contacts: Mike Winslow, Transportation Planner, Addison County Regional Planning Commission; Kelly Stoddard-Poor, Associate Director, AARP; Ross MacDonald, Public Transit Coordinator, VT Agency of Transportation; Angela Smith-Dieng, Adult Services Director, VT Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living*

Background and Context

In addition to its focus on the needs of Vermont’s aging population, the 2019 PTPP also places a strong emphasis on outreach strategies to raise awareness and utilization of public transportation. In addition to providing critical needs to many Vermonter’s as well as addressing challenges of social isolation and mental health, increased public transit options are also key to reducing Vermont’s transportation greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation in Vermont represents the largest energy usage by sector at 36% and contributes the largest percentage (43%) of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions.[[5]](#footnote-5),[[6]](#footnote-6) Lastly, these outreach strategies are central to securing public and private funds to support public transit in Vermont. To complement the wealth of statistics and data around transit in the state the PTPP has prioritized telling the stories of Vermonters in the below suggested thematic areas:

* **Transit and Mobility** – Transit can enhance mobility for everyone, not just people who cannot

otherwise drive. As more people unshackle themselves from cars, service can be increased, making it more convenient for everyone.

* **Transit and Environment** – While Washington talks about a Green New Deal sometime in the

distant future, transit offers the possibility of having a real impact on climate change right now. The transportation sector in Vermont accounts for about 43% of greenhouse gas emissions. A broad switch to transit can lower that figure significantly.

* **Transit and Independent Living** – Transit is an option that older adults should take advantage of

sooner rather than later, saving money and enhancing mobility before the dreaded day when driving is no longer feasible. This not only benefits seniors, but also family members who would otherwise need to take time off from work to bring them to appointments.

* **Transit and Healthy Communities** – Transit not only allows people with mobility challenges to

get the health care they need, but it is also part of a lifestyle that includes more walking, less driving, and more engagement with other people and businesses in the community, all of which contribute to improved health.

Motivation for Research

There are a range of partners interested in storytelling around the outcomes and impacts of public transit. In addition to VTrans’ statewide interest, your local partner for this project, Addison County Transit Resources, also has specific local interests and needs. In particular, stories would help them recruit volunteer drivers, secure the mandated 20% local matching funds that they need to raise from the towns in their service area, and strengthen their own local promotion and annual reporting. Similar to Project #1, this project will also focus on the region’s elderly and disabled populations due to the wealth of new and existing survey data. This focus on E&D clients brings in a third interested party, AARP-Vermont, which has a committed focus on transportation as part of their livable communities work. All three entities have survey data and are looking to emphasize and translate the findings in these data through personal stories. These include:

* ACTR’s existing survey data collected in collaboration with United Way as part of their Retired and Senior Volunteer Program
* A 2020 VTrans survey that was just completed in January-early February 2020
* AARP 2019 member survey

Project Objectives

This project offers the opportunity to study and analyze trends in the above-mentioned survey data and design and develop stories to give a human voice to documented results. This type of translation of information is an important strategy for reaching a range of audiences. Your specific objectives include:

* Some real time data entry! VTrans data will be coming in as the semester starts, so a first task will be to assist with hands-on survey data entry (snacks provided😊).
* Develop a series of stories through personal interviews. Through a combination of folks who self-identify through the new VTrans survey that they would be willing to be contacted for follow-up conversations, tapping AARP members, and other strategies for reaching out to additional Vermonters, the stories you develop should have two key goals in mind:
	+ Highlighting as many diverse impacts and outcomes as possible (e.g. critical health needs being met, being able to get to wellness visits preventing more serious and expensive long-term health issues for clients, food access, mental & community benefits of social contact & interactions, enabled aging in place, financial and environmental benefits, etc.)
	+ Accurately represent the survey data findings (this can include positive impacts and outcomes as well as identified barriers).
* Work with partners to determine best format(s) for stories – e.g. video, audio, print. VTrans has also offered to provide professional assistance from their marketing team.

**Project #3: Travel Planning for Middlebury Schools**

*Community Partner: Erik Remsen, Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Walk Bike Council of Addison County*

*Resource Contacts: Jen Kravitz, Principal, Mary Hogan Elementary School; Kristin Holsman-Francoeur, Principal Middlebury Union Middle School; William Lawson, Principal, Middlebury Union High School; Peter Burrows, Addison Central School District Superintendent; Nancy Malcolm, Neighbors Together*

Background and Context

**Safe Routes to School** (SRTS) is a statewide program with the aim of ensuring that kids are able to safely walk and bike to school. Key motivating factors for the efforts of this program include helping students develop independence, improving academic performance, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution, and cultivating a stronger sense of community.[[7]](#footnote-7) Locally, Mary Hogan Elementary School is a SRTS school partner, and your partner for this project is the SRTS Coordinator for the Walk-Bike Council of Addison County. The Walk-Bike Council is a citizen advisory group whose mission states, “bicycling and walking are essential modes of transit and recreation, and that increasing opportunities and awareness for safe walking and bicycling are good for Addison County as a whole.” They also detail similar motivating factors for their work: improved access to amenities and services, healthier lifestyles, a better sense of place, and a cleaner environment.[[8]](#footnote-8) 2013-2014 mapping data from Mary Hogan show that 34% of all students live within a mile or less of the school and 53% of all students live within two miles or less. While there aren’t robust data about the regularity/consistency of walking or biking to school, snapshot data show that up to 30% of students commuted either to or from school by walking or biking.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Motivation for Research

There are a variety of reasons why the partners for this project are interested in fostering not only increased bike & pedestrian commuting, but also increased usage of either public transit or school buses, particularly in this moment in time for the Town of Middlebury. The first relates to fostering all of the associated student, community, and environmental benefits detailed above. The second relates to some substantial transportation infrastructure challenges planned for the next two springs—namely the planned road closures associated with the in-town railroad bridge project (May 27-August 5, 2020) as well as planned Court Street / Rte. 7 paving projects (Spring 2021). Traffic congestion could be greatly alleviated if personal vehicle travel to and from schools (both parent pick-up and drop-offs as well as student drivers) could be reduced. A collaborative of businesses and organizations in Middlebury called Neighbors Together has been working to support “economic, social and cultural vitality & accessibility” throughout the railroad construction project, and working with area schools is one of their goals.[[10]](#footnote-10) The third relates to using this disruption to potentially affect longer term behavior change. For students, this could mean getting them in to better habits at an early age, and for parents, this could mean helping address / respond to barriers. The 2013/2014 Mary Hogan study mentioned above notes that there are a larger percentage of students interested in biking and walking to school than are perhaps allowed by their parents. Survey data indicate the most oft-cited parent barriers as being both the amount and speed of traffic, safety, distance, lack of sidewalks/paths, and weather/climate.

Project Objectives

This project will offer the opportunity to design and implement a travel planning survey that will provide not only critical insights for your work this semester, but which will also be used in the longer term to inform conversations among schools, planners, and policy-makers regarding transportation infrastructure improvements; to develop outreach campaigns, ideally in collaboration with area youth; and to learn about strategies for affecting behavior change. Specific project objectives include:

* *Contribute to the development of a Safe Routes to School Travel Plan*.[[11]](#footnote-11) Mary Hogan last completed a Travel Plan during the 2013-2014 school year, and it needs to be updated for 2020. Your contributions to this process should include both data collection about how kids get to and from school, survey work to reveal current barriers to walking and biking to school, as well as other ideas and interests you bring to this project. Middlebury’s middle and high schools have not yet completed travel plans, so any baseline data gathering that could be initiated for these two schools would also be quite useful.
* *Develop Campaign for May “Way to Go” Challenge and Railroad Closures*. The “Way to Go” Challenge is an annual statewide school transportation challenge with the goal of reducing vehicle travel to and from schools, and the spring 2020 challenge takes place May 1-15.[[12]](#footnote-12) This is perfect timing to kick-start continued non-vehicle commuting during the start of Middlebury’s railroad closures in late May through the end of the school year. Informed by the existing data and your newly gathered travel planning data, work with area schools (student groups, parents, and administrators) to develop campaigns for these May events.
* *Offer long-term strategies for sustaining behavior change*. Informed by your research, conversations, and observations over the course of the semester, offer your recommendations for to how normalize the behavior of walking, biking, or using public transit for area youth and recommendations for which strategies might be most effective for addressing noted barriers. The Travel Plan guidance document encourages that strategies focus on “education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation, and engineering.”

Conveniently tied with the culmination of our semester, the statewide Walk-Bike Summit will take place in Middlebury this year on May 8.[[13]](#footnote-13) We took the liberty to submit a proposal on this team’s behalf as the proposals were due before the start of our semester, so this team will need to plan on this as an off-campus presentation of your work.

1. <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/PTPP> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.connectingcommuters.org/bus-info/bus-providers/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://sstarides.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This would require that local transit service providers offer “Client-Pay” billing options. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [https://vtrans.vermont.gov/sites/aot/files/planning/documents/planning/The Vermont Transportation Energy Profile\_2019\_Final.pdf](https://vtrans.vermont.gov/sites/aot/files/planning/documents/planning/The%20Vermont%20Transportation%20Energy%20Profile_2019_Final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.eanvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EAN-report-2018-highres-compressed.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://saferoutes.vermont.gov/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.walkbikeaddison.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://54.172.27.91/transportation/SR2S/MBRY_MaryHoganSchoolTravelPlan_2014.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.middneighborstogether.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://saferoutes.vermont.gov/sites/saferoutes/files/TravelPlan.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.waytogovt.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://vtwalkbikesummit.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)