

23 October 2009

Memo to: Transportation Study Committees

From: Susan Mock and Kate Rader

Subject: Interview with Rick Kehne, Transportation Planner for Addison County Regional Planning Commission and Jim Moulton, Executive Director of Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR)

Transportation planning is just one of the purviews of the Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC), which deals with all modes of transport plus infrastructure, works with the other Vermont RPCs, acts as a liaison between local communities and the state, and provides technical assistance to the communities in the district. The mission of the ACTR is to enhance the economic, social and environmental health of the region by providing public transportation services that are safe, reliable, accessible and affordable for everyone.

The ACTR serves the general public, with emphasis on elders, persons with disabilities, nondrivers, and low-income families and individuals. They provide public transit with bus service, dial-a-ride, taxi services, and volunteer drivers. They also have two lift vehicles for wheelchair transport. There are limits on trips/month/capita for their free services. For example, they could transport a dialysis patient for 8 of 13 sessions per month. [In her report on the NEK Rural Community Transport, Claudette Sortino told us that volunteer drivers are sometimes told they need commercial liability insurance to cover their transport of passengers. Moulton said that can sometimes be caused by a misunderstanding of the law and what a particular insurance policy says.]

ACTR receives about 80% of its funding from the federal government. Medicaid pays for the direct costs related to transporting their patients. The RPCs' funds are about 80% federal, 10% state and 10% local.

Kehne and Moulton agreed that more people would use a more efficient means of transportation than their personal cars if it were convenient. Car pool and van pool use would be increased if there were more Park & Ride sites, in particular "mini" P&R. These could be small, informal lots holding, say, 6-10 cars. They could be a section of a larger commercial parking lot, or small public lots or permitted on private property by the owner. The point is to have enough of them, close enough to the users starting point, to minimize personal drive time. [Kehne and Moulton confirmed Steve Gladczuk's finding that the increased use of Park & Ride in response to last year's high gas prices, has not dropped appreciably since with the drop in prices.]

People will use public transportation if it convenient enough: if bus routes are clear, stops are near popular destinations, and busses run frequently; if travel time is not much longer than using a personal car.

Moulton pointed out that the state is making an increased investment in public transport, with funds up from 4% to 6% of the total transportation budget. Baby steps, but in the right direction. He believes that for the long term, we should start thinking of new development in terms of transportation first.

Instead of building a new residential subdivision or commercial project and then constructing a transportation system to/around it, we should look at the transportation infrastructure needs and uses first, and plan around that. He also pointed out that it costs about \$7000/year to own and operate a personal automobile. There are about 30,000 cars in the Addison County area. If people gave up those cars, it would free up \$210 million to use for other, cleaner, modes of transportation.

As did Nancy Schulz, of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition, Kehne referred us to John Kaplan, VTrans, for more information about the states bicycle/pedestrian programs.