

3 February 2010

Memo to: Transportation Study Committee

From: Hedi Ballantyne and Kate Rader

Subject: Interview with Brian Shupe, Sustainable Communities Program Director and Energy Program Co-Director, Vermont Natural Resources Council

Brian Shupe led a workshop at the Toxics Action 2009 conference at Vermont Technical College in November. There he said that transportation planning should precede, rather than follow, development. Land use planning should keep town and city centers viable and accessible. The state has a program for designated Downtown and Growth Centers, and organizations like Vermont Smart Growth also promote this kind of planning.

“Connectivity” in roadway layouts influences how much we drive. If there are two parallel cul-de-sacs, someone going from the end of one to the end of the other is more likely to drive than if the two streets connected. Cul-de-sacs increase congestion on the collector road connecting them. Shupe told us that statistics show less obesity in “walkable” neighborhoods, where there is less incentive to drive to a destination which may be only a short walk away by the most direct route. This, of course, also has an impact on air pollution. The maintenance of strip development also requires a higher level of services, accommodating features such as multiple curb cuts.

Part of the VNRC's Sustainable Communities efforts include working to influence Vermont's transportation policy. Act 250 has no provision for bike and pedestrian transport, and VNRC is working with the AARP and the Vermont Bike/Pedestrian coalition to pass Complete Streets legislation, which calls for bike and pedestrian ways to be provided with any major roadway or street renovation.

When asked about funding improvements, Shupe only remarked that VT, with its per-gallon gas tax lost money when the price of gas cut down on driving. Meanwhile states that had a straight percentage sales tax on gas had increased revenues.

Shupe recommended we talk to Rep. Sue Minter of Waterbury, who is quite knowledgeable about transportation issues.