



Green Mountain
CITIZEN

Winter 2010

First Call to Convention

The 52nd Convention of the LWVVT
will be held on
Saturday, May 21, 2011
Vermont College of Fine Arts
Montpelier
Save the date

Transportation Study Nears Completion

The Transportation Study adopted by convention in 2009 is nearing completion. In this issue of the GMC, the committee presents a synopsis of its findings, along with consensus questions.

The consensus process is best served when consensus is reached (or not) through discussion. To that end, local Leagues are encouraged to schedule consensus meetings, in time for submission to the study committee before the board meeting of February 12. For our members at large who are not near enough to a local meeting to attend (meetings will be posted on the website, www.lwvofvt.org) can mail in responses to Kate Rader as an e-mail attachment (president@lwvofvt.org) or by U.S. Mail (1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier, 05651).

The following material is intended to give you sufficient information to respond meaningfully to the consensus questions at the end of this report. The questions are designed to provide a framework for discussion, but also to be useable as a mail-in response for those who are not able to attend a consensus meeting. More detailed information is posted on our website (www.lwvofvt.org) along with links to reports by other research and government organizations, which are too long to be posted on the website.

Background

At their 2009 convention, the League of Women Voters of Vermont adopted the following:

(Cont'd on p. 4)

President's Message

Winter 2010/2011

I picked the last of the viable Brussels sprouts not long before the temperature went below zero a few days ago. The garden is truly done, and with the end of the deer season Sally and I can head into the woods again.



We're also heading into the busy season for the League.

January brings state and local Program Planning, the means by which our membership maps out League activities for the coming local League year and state League biennium.

The LWVUS is soliciting recommendations for our national advocacy priorities in January as well (see p. 3). The policy of asking the membership for this advice is still fairly new, and I urge you to take advantage of it.

I also want to remind you of the two LWVUS studies, one on the role of the federal government in education, and the other on privatization of functions traditionally carried out by governmental bodies. While there will be a committee appointed by the LWVUS board officially gathering information and formulating consensus questions, members at the local and state levels can conduct their own research into those issues, and contribute their own knowledge to the information provided by the national committee. If any of you are interested in pursuing this line of inquiry, let me know and I will put you together.

At its February meeting, the board will be approving a budget and (we hope) an advocacy position on transportation issues for submission to the membership at Convention in May.

March 16 brings us our annual Legislative Day, when members converge upon the State House to observe, meet with legislators, and advocate for our positions. Details will appear in the March GMC and, before that, on our website, www.lwvofvt.org.

In the meantime, the nominating committee is at work, putting together a slate of officers and directors to lead the LWVVT in the next biennium. When a member of the committee calls, I hope that all of you will consider service on the board as a personal opportunity - to pursue issues of interest, be it health care, the environment, energy, election law, or education.

If advocacy is not the aspect of League that most attracts you, voter service (voter education, voter registration) always needs activists and the public appreciates our efforts.

John F. Kennedy famously entreated us to ask not what the country can do for us, but what we can do for your country. I suggest that you turn that around when considering joining the state board: ask not (only) what you can do for the board, but what the board can do for you. I can speak from twenty-five years of experience, that the rewards of service - in friends made, skills learned and satisfaction gained - far outweigh the extra involvement that being on the board entails.

With that, I send you my very warmest wishes for the holidays and a busy and productive new year.

Kate

The Green Mountain Citizen
is published four times per year by
The League of Women Voters of Vermont

Kate Rader, President
Kate Rader, Editor *pro tem*

Membership in the League includes a subscription.
If you would like to join the League, e-mail, write,
or call:

League of Women Voters of Vermont
P.O. Box 94, Cabot, VT 05647
802-734-9709

e-mail: League@lwvofvt.org

It's Time for State Program Planning

January is the month for local Leagues to make suggestions to the national (even-numbered years) and state (odd-numbered years) for program for the following biennium.

“Program” is the League's reason for being, the basis for both advocacy and education efforts. League program arises from the suggestions of members. At every level of the league, the board of directors is responsible for reviewing and discussing these suggestions, formulating them in appropriate language, and recommending all or some of them for adoption according to procedures specified in the bylaws.

A local League's action or advocacy program is determined by members at its annual meeting; state and national programs are voted upon by delegates at their respective conventions.

It all starts with you. The state League convention will be held on May 21, and local League annual meetings are coming up as well. The boards needs your suggestions in order to make valid recommendations to the membership for League activity for the next year or two. Experience has shown that in order for adopted program to be successful, the ideas must come from the membership.

Watch your local League calendar for your program planning meeting. Think about what you want you local and state Leagues to be doing, and let the boards know. The vitality and effectiveness of the League depends on you.

Nominations Sought for June Carmichael Award

The June Carmichael award, recognizing outstanding service to the League, was established in 2008 in memory of long time member and leader June Carmichael. It was first awarded at convention 2009.

Please send your nomination, and why your nominee should be given the award, to Kate Rader at President@lwvofvt.org, or by U.S. Mail at 1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier 05651.

Tell the LWVUS What You Care About

In January, the LWV Board of Directors will be setting the LWV Advocacy Priorities for the upcoming year. Setting advocacy priorities is an annual responsibility for the LWV Board.

According to the LWV Impact on Issues, the goals for setting priorities to guide the LWV advocacy work are to:

- Enhance the League’s effectiveness by concentrating resources on priority issues;
- Build the League’s credibility and visibility by projecting a focused and consistent image;
- Ensure that the League has sufficient issue and political expertise to act knowledgeably; and
- Enable the League to manage resources effectively.

In setting legislative priorities, the Board considers the following:

- Opportunities for the League to make an impact;
- Program decisions made at Convention and/or Council;
- Member interest; and
- Resources available to manage effectively.

Once again, the Board is soliciting suggestions for advocacy priorities from members. If you are interested in making suggestions to the Board, please consider the goals and criteria as listed above. While the LWV has numerous positions under which we might take action, the Board must prioritize and consider those issues where we might be able to make a difference.

If you would like to make suggestions for advocacy priorities, please email Judy Duffy, Chair of the Advocacy Committee at: jduffy@lww@aol.com . Suggestions must be received by January 15.

(Cont. from p. 1)

Transportation Study: *To examine the state's transportation needs and explore potential means of meeting those needs.*

Scope: *This study would focus on passenger transportation in and between the state's regional hubs, particularly in underserved rural areas. The study would include but not be limited to: availability of passenger rail service, inter- and intra-urban bus service, energy efficient transportation, facilitation of carpools, and state and federal funding for infrastructure. The impact, particularly on infrastructure, of commercial traffic and transportation of goods may also be examined.*

The conditions in Vermont that prompted adoption of our transportation study are well-described in the Snelling Center's 2009 report, *Transporting the Public*: "Each day, Vermonters struggle to find ways to get to where they want or need to go if they cannot drive or do not have access to a car. At the same time, Vermonters concerned about gas prices, air quality and global [climate change] may be motivated to drive less, but find alternatives lacking. A new approach is needed for transporting the public that improves mobility while reducing the need for driving single-occupancy vehicles; an approach that simultaneously contributes to health living, creates economically vibrant communities, protects our natural environment, and utilizes a wide variety of existing public and private transportation assets."

(<http://www.snellingcenter.org/public-policy/aarp-transporting>)

Alternative Modes and Systems

Rural Area and special needs systems

According to an AARP poll of Vermonters over 17, lower income, unemployed, and older residents have more transportation problems and get out less frequently. Driving costs for gas alone doubled between 2002 and 2007. It is evident that rural land use and transportation planning need better integration. Safe sidewalks and bike paths are needed for "complete" streets. "GoVermont" vanpool and carpool programs need expansion, as do car sharing and volunteer driver programs.

Systems that are based on private vehicles

Given the rural nature and the long standing use of private automobiles for transportation, it is not very

surprising that opportunities for, and use of, public transit, car pooling and alternative modes of transportation are not common in Vermont. The cost of owning and driving a car is considerably more than the cost of a gallon of gas, ranging from \$0.50 to over \$1.00 per mile.

Go Vermont is a state sponsored service that connects commuters for the purpose of creating car and van pools. Registered users who share a ride at least two days per week are eligible for the Guaranteed Ride Home program in cases of emergency transportation needs. Information can be found at <http://www.connectingcommuters.org/>.

Where Park and Ride lots are available, they are well used. The distribution around the state is uneven, with most lots near the Interstate exits. The Addison County Planning Commission suggests developing mini Park and Ride lots at strategic locations to encourage car pools.

Car Share VT provides a fleet of automobiles in the Burlington area for members to use on a fee per use/reservation system. Membership allows users to own, and thus store, fewer cars in the residential area. <http://www.carsharevt.org/home>

Campus Area Transportation Management Association (**CATMA**) coordinates transit needs for thousands of the staff of the university and hospital in Burlington. www.catmavt.org/

Local and regional transit services such as CCTA serve specific communities with bus or van transit.

In an effort to improve the opportunities for multimodal and alternative transportation at the local and regional level, AARP VT is working with a coalition of organizations to introduce the **Complete Streets** Bill. The goal is to "ensure that the needs of all users of Vermont's transportation system—including motorists, bicyclists, public transportation users, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities—be considered and accommodated in all phases of state and locally managed transportation projects, including planning, development, and construction." This "complete streets" principle shall be integral to state and local transportation policy in Vermont.

In 2009, local bus companies received three-year federal grants to expand services. Included was a new commuter route between Montpelier and St. Johnsbury. According to Steve Gładczuk, transportation planner for the Central VT Regional Planning Commission, that route exceeded projected ridership before the end of the first year.

Rail

On May 4th, 2010 the LWV Upper Valley sponsored a program entitled *All Aboard: Plans for Higher-Speed Rail in the Upper Valley*. While the discussion included the rail systems of both New Hampshire and Vermont, in our opinion the two states are somewhat inseparable, especially if the expansion of rail transportation includes anything that would connect Boston with Montreal via Hanover/Norwich, Montpelier, and Burlington. A synopsis of the meeting can be found at <http://www.uppervalleyleague.org/higherspeedrail.html>.

The last section of this report contains a **proposal for long-term rail strategy** and is specific to Vermont. The **panel discussion summary** includes some interesting data:

1. In 2008 the government spent \$11 billion on railroads and \$135 billion on highways, 12.3 times as much. Consequently, 86% of travel is by car.
2. In Vermont, 42% of greenhouse gases come from transportation vs. 20% for the country. Less public transportation is a big factor.
3. It costs \$10,000,000 to build a mile of new track. It costs the same to build **each lane** of a mile of new highway (four lanes, \$40 million).
4. The faster the speed of a train, the lower the cost of operation.

Planning

Transportation planning may be a starting point for evaluating transportation projects and land use. The concept of sustainability is accommodating the needs of the present population without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As applied to the transportation sector, planning for sustainability can incorporate a variety of strategies to conserve natural resources (including use of clean fuels), encourage modes other than single occupant vehicles, and promote travel reduction strategies.

Current trends in transportation contribute to unsustainable conditions, including greenhouse gas emissions, energy insecurity, congestion, and ecological impacts. Although widespread uncertainty exists about how to address the goal of a sustainable transportation system, transportation officials and stakeholders are now recognizing that their decisions have longterm implications and impacts and are working on how to prepare metropolitan and statewide transportation plans and programs accordingly. Attaining a sustainable transportation system will require action by the public sector, private companies, and individual

citizens.

Two sites that League members may find useful for current research on transportation and planning are The Volpe Center, a transportation research center created by the Federal Highway Administration, <http://www.volpe.dot.gov/> and the Victoria Transportation Policy Institute, www.vtppi.org, a Canadian research and consulting organization. VTrans also has a very good searchable website for accessing information about Vermont, <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/>.

VTrans' Planning, Outreach and Community Affairs Division engages in a wide range of planning activities. One study that provides much useful information on the relationships between land use planning and transportation planning is *A Guide to Transportation and Land Use Connections, experiences from northwestern Vermont* (<http://transportation-landuse.org>).

Regional and Town Plans are to guide public policy. Regional plans are intended to promote regional planning that integrates the needs of Towns within the regional planning commission area, while Town Plans are intended to guide local public policy and serve as a guide for the creation of zoning ordinances and town development review practices. Both Regional and Town Plans have standing in the Act 250 development review process, since compliance with Regional and Town Plans are review criteria for issuing a Land Use Permit under Act 250. Transportation infrastructure projects are subject to Act 250 review if they meet the threshold requirements for Act 250 jurisdiction.

Public transportation services *per se* would not be subject to Act 250 review, since Act 250 is a land use law. The infrastructure to support public transportation services such as bus stops, multi-modal centers, and park and ride lots would not likely receive Act 250 review because of their small area, unless they were proposed as part of a larger development project requiring Act 250 review or were proposed on a property that is already covered by an Act 250 Land Use Permit. Such infrastructure projects may be subject to local Zoning Ordinances and the local Development Review process.

Beyond getting from here to there

Implications for Climate Change

Automobiles are known to be significant air and water polluters due to non-point source pollution from exhaust and dripping fluids. One third of Vermont's pollution comes from cars and trucks. Details of the

pollutants from internal combustion engines can be found on the Transportation Study page of the LWVVT website.

The New England states and Eastern Canadian provinces adopted green house gas (GHG) emission reduction goals in the early nineties. The intention was to reduce emissions by 25% from 1990 levels by 2012, 50% by 2028, and, if practical, 75% by 2050. Instead, GHG emissions from transportation fuel use have risen steadily since 1990 at an average rate of slightly over 1.1% annually. (CO2 constitutes 96% of all transportation emissions.)

One objective in the final report of the Climate Change Commission in 2007, is that by 2012, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in Vermont equal to VMT level in 2000 and that VMT in 2025 equal those of 1990. Instead, there already seems to have been an increase. Admittedly a large portion is traffic passing through, tourist traffic, and the fact that Vermont's rural population is widespread. Percentage increases in passenger and freight rail traffic were also sought.

Implications for Public Health

It has become increasingly apparent that many Americans do not get enough exercise and are developing serious health problems from excess weight and inactivity .

Dispersed development has made us car-dependent. Forty years ago two out of five children ages 5 to 18 walked to school. Now it's less than one. Increasing rates of obesity correlate with this dispersion, as do higher fossil-fuel usage and high carbon emissions. Desirable outcomes include reduced carbon and other harmful emissions, improved energy efficiency, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, and reduced air, water, and noise pollution.

Funding

Historically, gasoline and diesel tax has been the major source of revenue for transportation infrastructure. Other traditional sources are: vehicle tax; property taxes and assessments; General Fund appropriations; income tax; utility tax; sales tax; registration fees; and rental care excise tax.

Because the funding mechanism is so dependent on gas and diesel tax, improved fuel efficiency, alternative fuels and non-motorized transportation are reducing the funding for the maintenance and expansion of our transportation system.

State projects are funded by legislative budget appropriations and federal grants. The gas tax is a significant source of state revenue for transportation projects. Projects recommended by Regional Plans may be funded by state and federal grants and by member Town appropriations. Towns and cities receive state-aid for highway projects and may also apply for federal grant monies, usually through an umbrella federal grant received by VTrans. Towns may also provide funding in local budgets approved at Town Meeting. From our meetings with state and regional planners, it seems that public transit and carpool/van pool programs are largely funded through federal grants.

Most new funding mechanisms under discussion, such as congestion pricing or vehicle miles traveled (VMT) taxes, are not feasible for rural areas because they require more total miles of travel than is typical for a rural area, and because travel distances are longer, VMT taxes raise concerns about regressivity. At a Rural Transportation Funding Summit sponsored by the UVM Transportation Research Center in December, 2008, attendees made the following suggestions for new revenue sources more appropriate for rural areas: carbon tax; mileage-based fee, especially for trucks; more general funding through progressive taxes; a surcharge applied for goods delivered to home or business; public-private partnerships; funding by local entities; and naming rights. In addition, it was felt that the gas and diesel tax could be raised 20 cents to return to its spending power of 1957 and then indexed for inflation.

The above was excerpted from two reports by the UVM Transportation Research Center. The full reports can be found at <http://www.uvm.edu/~transctr/devsite/?Page=News&storyID=14607>. Click on Report #002 and Report #003.

An accessible, 9-page summary of Vermont's transportation budget for 2011 can be found at <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/Budget.htm>.

Glossary

Multi-modal: Transportation system that takes into consideration various modes (walking, cycling, automobile, public transit, etc.) and connects the modes so each can fill its optimal role in the overall transport system.

Connectivity: *Connectivity* refers to the density of connections in path or road network and the directness of links. A well-connected road or path network has many short links, numerous inter-sections, and minimal dead-ends (cul-de-sacs).

Consensus Questions

How should start-up systems (e.g., new bus routes) be judged?

How should these systems be funded after federal start up funding has been exhausted?

What would encourage you to use a service like Go Vermont for sharing rides?

Should passenger rail service be increased? What incentives would increase ridership enough to justify expanded services?

What role should the state have in improving opportunities for public transit, car or van pooling, car sharing, and/or alternatives such as walking or biking?

- None, we will not get out of our cars.
- It is important to invest a percentage of the state transportation budget for improving the opportunities.
- This should be handled by private enterprises and non-profits.
- State should be more involved with car and van pooling.
- The state should be more assertive about the need for changes in the transportation model.

Should the state require local communities to be involved with creating the opportunities for public transit, sharing, and alternatives such as walking or biking?

- No, it is the state's role.
- Yes, most of the opportunity is at the local level, it is up to each individual town to decide.
- There should be close collaboration among state, regional and local governments and agencies.

How should local planning prepare for new alternatives for transportation, i.e., electric cars; car share-bike share; more pedestrians; multi-modal connections.

What incentives should be used to encourage motorists to reduce individual automobile use?

- None, won't work.
- Cost of carpooling or ride share programs should be tax deductible on Vermont income tax.
- Employers should provide opportunities and/or subsidize the costs of their employees.
- The state should provide incentives to employers who work to create opportunities and incentives.
- Stop building new roads.
- Allow gas prices to rise.
- Allow gas prices to rise and provide tax deductions for low income motorists in areas with no/few opportunities.

What role should the state take to encourage multi-modal transportation?

Should transportation be planned for development or should transportation planning follow development? Why?

Local communities, through the regional planning commissions, are involved with planning for various modes of transportation.

- The plans are important to decisions made.
- Local and regional transportation planning is not very obvious. More effort needs to be made to make the results more public.
- The plans need more funding to be implemented.

Should local planning and zoning encourage connectivity among neighborhoods for transportation? Why and How?

Should school buses be used to enhance local public transportation? How?

Should communities be required to foot the cost of improving sidewalks or building bike paths or ands to encourage walking and riding for short distance transportation?

- No
- Yes
- The cost should be shared among the federal, state and local transportation budgets.
- Local taxes should be enacted to fund transit improvements.

Should local communities be required to create decentralized park and ride lots for public use?

- No
- Yes

When thinking about your responses to the following questions, keep in mind the costs of not changing transportation systems.

Gas taxes can be levied in a variety of ways: a flat fee per gallon, a percentage of sales, or a combination – a minimum fee per gallon plus a percentage of sales. Which would you support.

What other sources of funding should be used for transportation projects (e.g., increased fees, tolls, property taxes, other).

Should local taxes be used to fund transportation infrastructure? If so, what? For example, mini park and rides, sidewalks, pedestrian trails, bikeways, recharge stations, other.

GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

League of Women Voters of Vermont

Post Office Box 94

Cabot, VT 05647

LWVVT Calendar 2010/11

- January TBA State Program Planning
TBA Consensus Meetings, state Transportation Study
15 Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Board Meeting, Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Montpelier. All members welcome
- February 12 Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Board Meeting, location TBA. All members welcome
- March 16 Legislative Day, The State House, Montpelier. Details will be in the March GMC and on the website. Save the date.
- April 11 Monday, 4:30 p.m., Board Meeting, Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Montpelier. All members welcome.
- May 21 LWVVT Convention, location TBA