



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING INITIATIVE

Manual &
Guidebook
2018

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Why TPI?

Since its early beginnings in the late 1980's, the Vermont Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) has become a vital component of Vermont's transportation planning landscape. Through the opportunities the TPI creates for public input and transparency, thousands of Vermonters have participated in transportation planning. Benefits of the TPI include:

- A clear process for local officials to be involved in transportation issues.
- A unified program of regional transportation planning.
- The facilitation of communication between states, regions and municipalities about transportation projects and project development.
- A clear process for reviewing and approving the state's statewide transportation improvement plan (STIP).
- Opportunities for municipalities and regions to be involved in identifying and prioritizing transportation projects.
- Increased citizen participation.
- Opportunities for collaboration, education and communication between communities, regions and the State on transportation planning, policy and implementation.
- Coordination with other sectors on issues that intersect with transportation such as land use, hazard mitigation & resiliency, economic development, environmental protection, health and energy.
- Providing expertise and technical assistance to communities of all sizes.

Because of the TPI, "municipal officials' understanding of the transportation system is dramatically improved. This knowledge helps manage expectations. Access to information is better for local officials and citizens. People feel that they are being listened to and that input gets into projects."

*Peter G. Gregory
Executive Director
TRORC*

Many of the planning studies and activities funded by the TPI have a significant value to Vermont's communities. For example, many studies funded under the TPI effectively present the benefits of implementing a project and identify potential issues well before significant engineering has been done. These preliminary studies are an essential component of a comprehensive project delivery process. Further, the TPI benefits Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans or AOT) and the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) as well. The TPI assists with Agency information sharing and education so that municipalities better understand VTrans processes. This understanding facilitates better regional transportation planning and manages municipal expectations.

In 2017, members of the Regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TAC), which include elected town officials, town staff and in some instances, organizations such as local transit providers, were invited to offer comments via survey on their experience participating in the TPI. More detailed survey information is available in Appendix A1: Survey Questions and Appendix A2: Survey Results Summary.

Overwhelmingly, participants cited learning and gaining knowledge about transportation issues and projects as beneficial to their communities. While not everyone was satisfied with the correlation between the projects they wanted prioritized and their communications with VTrans, everyone recognized the value of a communication conduit between the Agency, RPCs and municipalities.

VTrans staff recognizes the value of communication through the TPI, noting that with RPC assistance, it is helpful to share information in advance and to provide notice that a proposed infrastructure investment might raise concerns at the local level.

The value of TPI funded projects has been recognized at the state and national level. A number of TPI funded Regional Planning Commission projects have received recognition at state and national levels from organizations like the Vermont Planners Association (VPA) and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).



Figure 1: The most common themes of TAC member comments in the 2017 survey.

History of the TPI

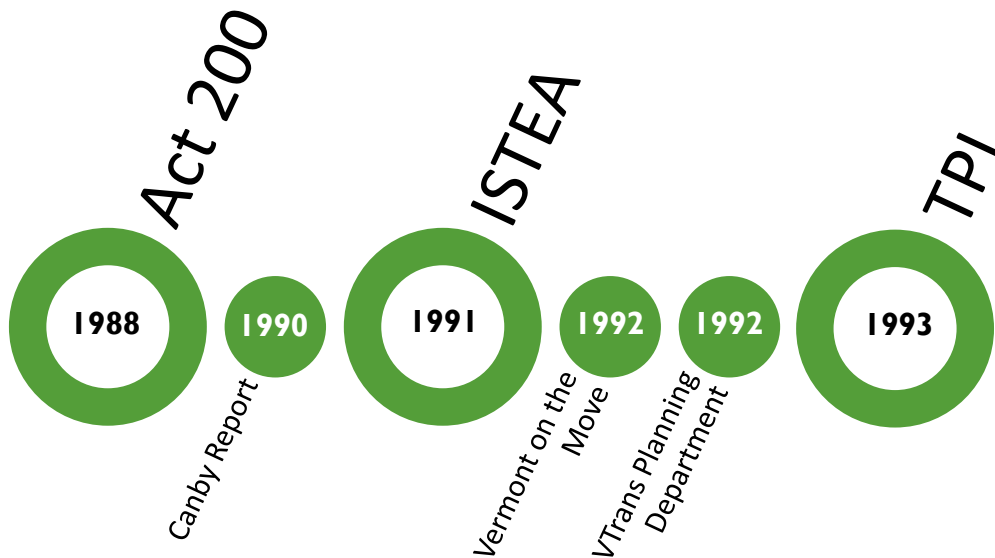


Figure 2: Key Moments in the History of the TPI

The TPI evolved out of a nationwide reaction to centuries of an approach to the planning, design and construction of highways and streets made with limited input from the public. In Vermont, the general public began to have concerns about adverse environmental impacts of development (not limited to the transportation system) and the need to protect their own history and sense of place. Resistance to proposed transportation projects arose when they were perceived as having a clear, measurable adverse impact on their communities. The results of this resistance were project delays or stoppages, not due to lack of funding or demonstrated need, but because communities were not satisfied with the proposed solution and how it met their own needs.

Act 200

For its part, Vermont was ahead of the curve in terms of requiring local input in state agency planning processes. Act 200, passed in 1988, set the goal to encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.¹ Further, the Act required state agencies develop plans in coordination with regional and local entities. State agencies with programs that impacted land use and development were required to engage with the public to discuss issues of local importance such as

¹ Vermont Planning and Development Act, Chapter 117

development along highways, public transit, multi-modal transportation options, and environmental protection.

The Canby Report

In 1990 the Vermont Legislature commissioned an analysis of the Agency of Transportation's management structure and effectiveness. The report, known commonly as the "Canby Report," revealed that (at the time) VTrans "lacked an overall systems plan" and that the Agency needed to "articulate a clear sense of its mission and current goals."² The report, recommended that VTrans establish a planning department. This department would be responsible for all planning, and would build relations with other levels of government and the public.

Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)

The passage of ISTEA (the federal transportation funding law) in 1991 required transportation decision-making to include citizens and local officials. Of particular interest to Vermont, ISTEA addressed rural areas by clearly indicating that local elected officials in non-metropolitan areas should be consulted with regard to their transportation needs. Under this legislation, all citizen engagement required a proactive public involvement process that included complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement.³ ISTEA recognized that in order to address issues relating to the social, economic, energy and environmental impacts of transportation decisions, a robust public process was necessary.

Vermont on the Move & the VTrans Planning Department

Before the passage of ISTEA, Vermont was preparing to comply with the law. In 1992, VTrans completed and released the report "Vermont on the Move." The report described VTrans' revised approach to its transportation decision-making process, an approach that would involve the general public and transportation interests at municipal, regional and statewide levels. The report outlined the following four components to the revised process:

1. State/town/regional partnerships
2. Programing procedure based on priority needs
3. Open and accessible decision-making, allowing all citizens and groups to contribute and express concerns
4. Technical assistance to Municipalities

² Canby Associates, Management Study of the Vermont Agency of Transportation (January 1990)

³ Section 450.212(a) Public Involvement, 23 CFR.

In early 1992, the Agency created the VTrans Planning Division.

Transportation Planning Initiative

In 1992, the final design of the TPI was created to address the requirements of ISTEA, Act 200 and the internal agency reforms which were implemented after the Canby Report. The Agency presented the initiative as a fundamental change in the way it would conduct transportation decision-making and would decentralize transportation planning to the local and regional levels.

When the TPI was developed, Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) were the most logical partner to implement the program. The RPCs direct connections to their communities, understanding of state policies and programs, and ability to manage projects positioned the RPCs to effectively implement the state's local and regional consultation goals. Each RPC developed their own framework for meeting the goals of the TPI, which was approved by their Municipalities and the Agency. As part of the TPI, each RPC formed a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) or Transportation Council, which included elected town officials, town staff and in some instances, other organizations such as local transit providers.

The objectives of the TPI in 1992 could be summarized accordingly:⁴

- Conformance with ISTEA (local official consultation and broad citizen participation)
- Conformance with Act 200 (decentralizing decision-making and developing regional plans)
- Developing comprehensive transportation plans at the regional level
- Providing transportation planning support and resources to Municipalities
- Developing a collaborative and cooperative transportation planning relationship with Vermont Municipalities and regions

As part of the new program, VTrans Planning Coordinators were assigned the role of working with the Regional Planning Commissions to implement the goals of the TPI and to ensure that communication between the Agency and municipalities was effective.

The Watts Report & New Directions

At the 10 year anniversary of the TPI (2002), the Agency of Transportation invited Richard Watts (who became Research Director for the University of Vermont's Transportation Research Center in 2006), to evaluate the program. In his report "Evaluation & Review: Citizen Participation and Local Official Consultation in the Transportation Planning Initiative," Watts noted that after a decade, the TPI had

⁴ Richard Watts. Vermont Agency of Transportation. Evaluation & Review: Citizen Participation and Local Official Consultation in the Transportation Planning Initiative. Attitudes towards the TPI: TAC Members, RPC Staff, VTrans Staff. August 20, 2003, Montpelier, Vermont

“become an institutionalized component of Vermont’s transportation-planning landscape.”

At the 2002 “New Directions Workshop,” a gathering of VTrans staff, RPC s and other organizations, it was recognized that in the following arenas, the TPI was successful:

- Public Involvement
- VTrans Planning Coordinators working with RPCs
- Regional Transportation Plans
- Identification of Needs and Priorities
- Corridor Thinking
- Customer Orientation

In their role as administrators of the TPI at the regional level, RPCs improved communication and customer service between VTrans and municipalities. This communication made the Agency more aware of local needs and priorities as they relate to the transportation system. The RPCs developed corridor management plans for some of Vermont’s most significant transportation corridors, and by this time most had developed regional transportation plans.

Despite these successes, stakeholders felt that the TPI was less successful in the following areas:

- Securing federal funds for the investment in local systems.
- Granting high statewide priority to local projects.
- Moving new projects rapidly into the VTrans Capital Program.

SAFETEA-LU and MAP-21

2009’s SAFETEA-LU (Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act, A Legacy for Users) carried forward statewide planning processes but required that plans address environmental mitigation, improved performance, multimodal capacity as well as bicycle, pedestrian and disabled interests.

MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act) was passed in 2012. It transformed the Federal-aid highway program and the Federal transit program by requiring a transition to a performance-driven, outcome-based program that provides for a greater level of transparency and accountability, improved project decision-making, and more efficient investment of Federal transportation funds. More importantly, the requirement for “consultation” with stakeholders was strengthened to “cooperation,” which demonstrated an expectation that transportation agencies will work with municipalities directly.

Vermont was effectively ahead of the curve when these Federal laws were passed, having already incorporated the principles outlined in each law into the TPI. It is worth

noting that when the language for MAP-21 was developed at the Federal level, the VTrans TPI was used as a model.

TPI Today

General Program Objectives

2017 TPI Objectives and Accomplishments

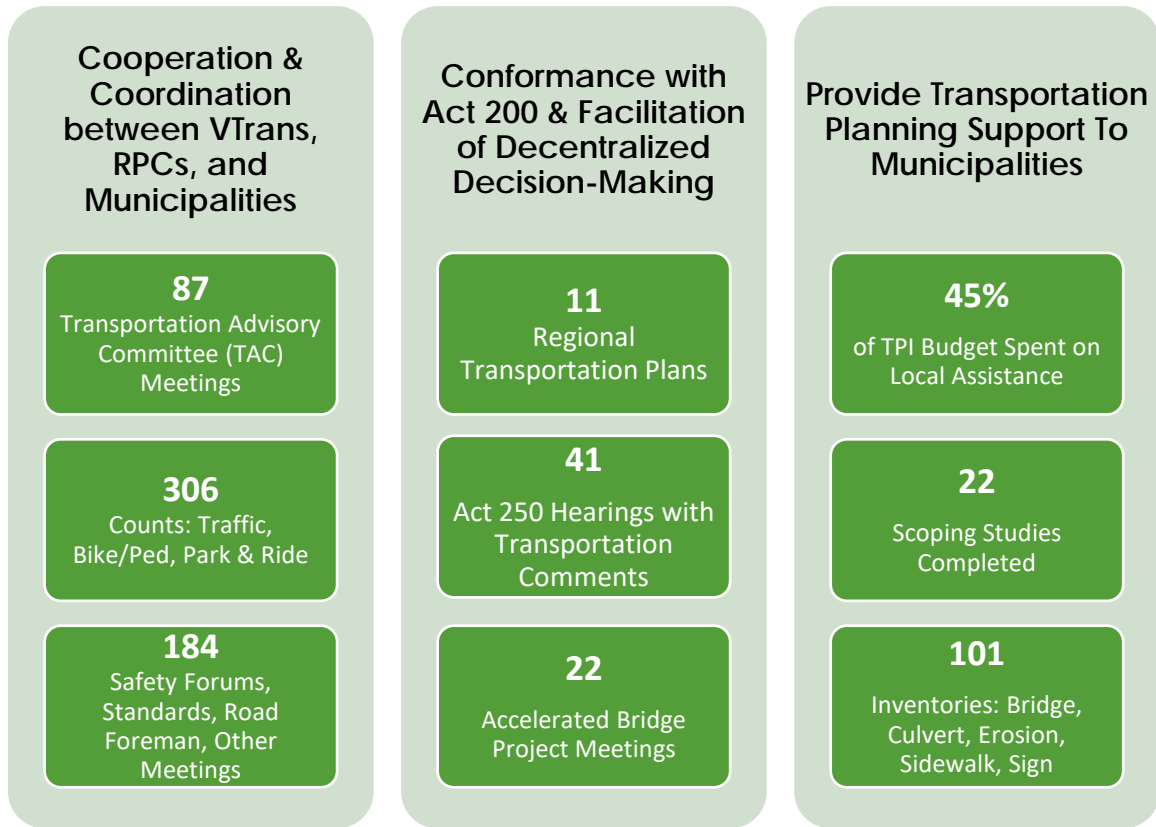


Figure 3 – TPI Accomplishments, VAPDA Annual Report, 2017

The TPI Program currently has three objectives and nine performance measures reported within the VAPDA annual report as shown in Figure 3⁵ above and eight guiding principles, which reflect the program’s original purpose and continuing refinements over the life of the program:

1. Conformance with federal transportation law (local consultation and broad citizen participation)
2. Conformance with Act 200 (decentralized and coordinated decision making and developing regional plans)
3. To develop and maintain comprehensive transportation plans that are incorporated into the Regional Plan
4. To provide transportation planning support and resources to Municipalities

⁵ As part of the TPI Manual Update, the performance measures and objectives were updated. For information see Appendix A.

5. To develop and sustain a collaborative and cooperative transportation planning relationship between VTrans, VT municipalities and regions, and
6. To assist VTrans with public outreach for high profile/impact VTrans projects
7. To ensure that there is a strong link between transportation planning and the programs it relates to, such as water quality, energy conservation, hazard mitigation, etc.
8. To provide a platform for discussing complex state, regional and municipal issues as they relate to transportation.

TPI Requirements

The TPI program follows the regulations in 23 CFR Part 450 established by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Federal transportation regulations are established to implement the Highway Transportation laws which Congress typically passes every 4-5 years. The most recent being the “Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act” (FAST Act) in December of 2015. The specific federal rules that guide state transportation policy and how the TPI must operate change each time a new Federal Transportation law is passed. The FAST Act requires that each State “carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive statewide transportation planning process that provides for consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services” that:

- Supports economic vitality;
- Enhances travel and tourism;
- Increase safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increases accessibility and mobility for people and freight;
- Improves the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduces/mitigates stormwater impact of surface transportation;
- Protects the environment;
- Promotes energy conservation;
- Promotes consistency between transportation improvements and state and local growth and economic patterns;
- Enhances the integration and connectivity of the transportation system across all modes for people and freight;
- Promotes efficient system management and operation; and
- Preserves the existing transportation system.

TPI activities also align with VTrans Mission, Vision and Goals. The 2016 VTrans Strategic Plan seeks to:

- Provide a safe and resilient transportation system that supports the Vermont economy.

- Preserve, maintain and operate the transportation system in a cost effective and environmentally responsible manner.
- Provide Vermonters energy efficient, travel options.
- Cultivate and continually pursue innovation, excellence and quality customer service.
- Develop a workforce to meet the strategic needs of the Agency.

The TPI furthers the state’s goals, targets and policies; and incorporates key federal transportation emphasis areas. It represents an exceptional partnership between state, regional and local entities that implements state and federal policy effectively and efficiently.

In addition to the program’s purpose and goals, the TPI must adhere to all administrative requirements outlined by the Vermont Agency of Administration in Bulletin 3.5 and in the Federal Office of Budget and Management’s Super Circular. These documents dictate the requirements for procurement, contracting, bids, amendments, and other administrative tasks. Because the TPI program is federally funded, all Federal rules and regulations related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Civil Rights Act apply.

Adaptability

TPI remains a highly adaptable program that can accommodate changes as they come, providing all levels of government with the tools they need to practice good transportation planning and implementation.

Funding

Funding for the TPI is comprised of allocations from the FHWA, the Agency of Transportation and Regional Planning Commissions. All TPI efforts are subject to the rules and regulations that govern the use of Federal and State funds (see Program Administration section for more detail).

TPI Partners

TPI is a partnership between VTrans and 10 of Vermont’s 11 Regional Planning Commissions. Chittenden County Regional Commission is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and is not directly funded through the TPI, its work is done in concert with VTrans and other TPI partners and they actively participate in all TPI activities.

VTrans

The VTrans Policy, Planning, and Research Bureau carries out the TPI in partnership with the Regional Planning Commissions and the MPO, through VTrans Planning Coordinators. VTrans Planning Coordinators represent the Agency, work on targeted planning projects and monitor RPC progress on their yearly TPI Work Plans. In addition,

the bureau plays a key role in the Agency’s public outreach efforts – working collaboratively with the RPCs and other state agencies, VTrans program managers, municipalities and public and private organizations to inform the public on important transportation issues, programs, projects, planning activities, and to facilitate the flow of accurate information affecting and/or involving the public. Each RPC has an assigned Planning Coordinator who acts as the primary point of contact for VTrans.

Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs)

Since the creation of the TPI, Vermont’s Regional Planning Commissions have been responsible for the coordination, management and implementation of the TPI in their region. This role has several advantages- the RPCs have the skillset needed to do planning, outreach and education and, most importantly, they know and understand their municipalities. Each of Vermont’s municipalities are unique, which can make it challenging to ensure that statewide transportation policy is properly implemented at the local level without additional coordination.

The RPC role is to act as program leaders and administrators, adapting their program to meet state and federal priorities on a yearly basis. Through the TPI, they are able to offer a wide range of services to municipalities that require a level of expertise and understanding that local governments may not have access to otherwise.

The primary purpose of Vermont’s Regional Planning Commissions is to provide technical assistance on a diverse range of topics to their member municipalities. By working with municipalities on a day-to-day basis, RPCs are able to keep abreast of potential projects, problems, or opportunities that may be applicable to work done under the TPI. RPCs often keep a running list of potential needs so that they can be incorporated in the next TPI Work Plan. Municipalities are more directly involved through their participation on the TAC.

RPCs give municipalities a voice in the project prioritization process and are able to keep VTrans apprised of on-the ground conditions that they might not be aware of, including public sentiment toward proposed transportation improvements. But most importantly, RPCs provide the education and outreach needed to keep communities abreast of new issues at the state and federal level.

Legislative Intent (2007)
State statute specifically identifies the Regional Planning Commissions as an ideal partner in implementing Federal Highway Administration requirements. 19 V.S.A. §10L says:

“The general assembly finds that regional planning commissions possess a unique expertise that enables the agency to conduct rural transportation planning and local consultation activities that build upon the integration of land use, environmental, and economic development inputs.”

Through the TPI, Regional Planning Commissions maintain and update regional Transportation Plans, which implement the state's planning goals. Using these plans in the Act 250 process, Regional Commissions can ensure that development as it relates to transportation occurs in a manner that is appropriate for the region and consistent with the state's vision as it relates to 24 V.S.A. §4302.

Legislation added in 2007 (19 V.S.A §10L) specifically identifies the following TPI duties for RPCs:

Regional planning commissions, serving areas of the state not qualifying as a Metropolitan Planning Area under federal regulations, shall implement the transportation planning initiative (TPI) program. This program provides the mechanism by which the agency coordinates policy development and planning to ensure the involvement by Vermont citizens and rural local officials. It shall include, but not be limited to:

- 1. Ensuring that local officials and citizens are involved in the statewide transportation planning process.*
- 2. Providing technical assistance to facilitate local officials and staff in making transportation policy and investment decisions.*
- 3. Coordinating town planning and development regulations to meet better state transportation policies and investment priorities.*
- 4. Participating in state and national transportation policy and planning development processes to ensure regional and local input.*
- 5. Implementing a project evaluation process to prioritize all transportation projects within the regions utilizing state or federal funds to be included in the state transportation program.*
- 6. Developing and maintaining a regional, multi-modal transportation plan that clearly details regional and local project, planning, and policy priorities.*
- 7. Maintaining a regional transportation advisory committee that reviews and provides input on all major state and federal transportation planning and policy decisions. In order to facilitate this input, the regional planning commissions, in collaboration with the agency of transportation, shall provide warning and notice of all public meetings regarding transportation plans, projects, and proposals.*

Transportation Advisory Committees

As part of the requirement to ensure “local consultation and broad citizen participation,” each Regional Planning Commission has created a TAC. The TAC consists of members of the public including local officials, municipal officials and, in some instances, representatives from local stakeholder groups. VTrans strongly encourages RPCs to include local stakeholders such as public transit providers, walk-bicycle councils, state airports, railroad operators, AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), etc., as they provide valuable insight into important components of the region’s transportation system. The TAC is intended to act as a liaison between local communities and VTrans, providing local and regional input on transportation issues important to their regions.



Figure 4: The TAC is an important component of local consultation and citizen participation. Photo Source: Rita Seto, TRORC

Municipalities

Municipalities develop their own Municipal Plans (often with assistance from Regional Planning Commissions) which help guide local investment in transportation operations, maintenance and improvements. State statute requires that Municipal Plans include land use and transportation elements. Many communities have representation on the local TAC who report back to the Selectboard and other relevant committees as a way to provide clear communication from all TPI partners.

TPI Coordination and Work Plan

Building the Right Work Plan

The TPI work plan is similar to a grant application and details what planning activities will be undertaken during a Federal Fiscal Year. At its core, the Regional Planning Commission's TPI work plan addresses state and federal legislative requirements that mandate Vermont consult with local officials during the transportation planning process (which includes planning, policy development, project selection and construction). The TPI provides rural officials similar level of services and opportunity for participation as urban regions (Chittenden County) have enjoyed under their federally-mandated metropolitan planning process.

Each region is unique, with different needs and issues that can be incorporated into the program. RPC transportation staff should consider the following examples when assessing what tasks might need to be included in your Work Plan:

- Any impending state rules or regulations that relate to transportation infrastructure or transportation planning - This might include updated bridge and road requirements, new stormwater rules, etc. Changes to state or federal regulations can be challenging for local transportation officials to understand or implement. Often, they will require significant education and outreach, as well as the potential for direct technical assistance to communities that may not have the capacity to administer new requirements.
- Any pressing projects or inventories that are vital to the transportation system in your region – this might include resiliency planning, the need for critical inventories (such as town bridge or culvert), or location-specific bicycle/pedestrian/vehicle counts.

An important thing for a Transportation Planner unfamiliar with the TPI and annual Work Plan to recognize there is no need to start from scratch. In addition to guidance from

Use Your Peers as a Resource

When asked what suggestions they would offer a new transportation planner who has taken over management of the TPI program, RPC staff members recommended the following:

- *“Learn from your fellow RPC planners”*
- *“Network with other RPC Transportation Planners”*
- *“reach out to your colleagues at other RPCs frequently”*
- *“Never hesitate to call on other transportation planners for advice”*

VTrans on the specific details of the Work Plan for any given year, other RPCs are an excellent resource for information and guidance. All RPCs have TPI Work Plans (except Chittenden County). RPC Transportation planners collaborate openly and are more than willing to share program information and to provide experiences and recommendations for developing a new TPI Work Plan.

Work Plan Tasks

The work plan currently includes six tasks under which all RPC activities should fall. The tasks are specific enough to ensure that the state and federal rules are met, but flexible enough that the program is able to provide useful services to a diverse group of communities. VTrans annually reevaluates the tasks to ensure that they are relevant and valuable. The TPI Annual Work Program Guidance⁶ provides guidance on required and optional activities for each task (in the work plan), in addition to a broad range of other possible activities. For mandatory tasks, deliverables will be predefined. Questions as to whether or not a task is eligible under the TPI should be directed to the VTrans Planning Coordinator.

Flexibility is Important

RPC Transportation Planners cited the program's flexibility as one of its best features, recognizing that the region's transportation planning needs change over time.

Each year VTrans issues an updated TPI Annual Work Program Guidance to RPCs. While the underlying requirements of the TPI described in this manual are applicable, the yearly update allows for time-sensitive and relevant changes or additions to be made to the program. Changes to the TPI Guidance are generally due to new focus areas for the Agency or policies at the federal or state level. The TPI Program is nimble and able

VTrans Values TPI Tasks

When asked about the value of the TPI in relation to their own programs, VTrans staff said that:

- *The TPI "provides great feedback from towns and RPCs"*
- *The TPI "is an informative and collaborative process to convey and share information"*
- *That the RPCs "have been great partners – whenever we call upon them they have been very responsive."*

⁶ The Annual Work Program Guidance is the guiding document for the development of the annual RPC TPI Work Plan. The TPI Work Plan defines the work that will or could be accomplished in a given Federal fiscal year.

to address transportation planning needs as they arise such as flood resiliency and storm water management.

Task #1: Program Administration

It is the RPC's responsibility to administer and monitor the activities of their TPI Work Plan. This includes all activities related to the management of financial, reporting and auditing requirements. The appropriate financial manager at the RPC must calculate overhead and prepare the annual indirect cost rate proposal as required by VTrans and FHWA. Additionally, the RPC Transportation Planner must prepare the Work Plan, evaluate progress, provide monthly progress reports, and participate in mid-year review, documentation and billings, etc. Activities also include the hiring and supervision of consultant services and purchasing equipment needed to carry out transportation planning activities.

Examples for Program Administration include, but are not limited to:

- Direct program support
- Purchase of equipment directly related to TPI activities
- Administration of the grant agreement with the State
- Administrative tasks associated with consultant agreements
- Development of Work Plans and budgets and employee time devoted to mid-year reviews
- Indirect cost rate proposals and audit activities
- Staff time and expense to improve knowledge and skills specific to transportation planning best practices
- Reporting: monthly progress reports and weekly reports

Task #2: Public Participation and Coordination

The purpose of this task is to ensure that the general public, municipalities and other stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in all levels of the transportation planning & implementation process both individually and through their locally elected officials. Activities should help inform, educate and gather input from participants about transportation issues, opportunities and solutions. This work activity should also support coordination and information sharing between local, regional and state planning partners.

Examples of Public Participation and Coordination Include, but are not limited to:

- Organizing, attending and facilitating meetings
- Publicizing meetings and the TPI process
- Advising VTrans of and, as appropriate, assisting municipalities with local questions, concerns and solutions regarding transportation projects and policies

- Planning and facilitating TAC meetings, meetings of public transportation providers to ensure a coordinated approach to transportation planning and road foreman meetings
- Training staff, TAC and RPC members
- Newsletters and publications
- Interagency coordination
- Citizen participation
- Serving on various transportation related task forces and study committees
- Access management outreach

Required activities (as defined by Annual Work Program Guidance) under this task might include things such as participation in annual state programs such as the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) public hearing, or outreach events such as the Way to Go! Challenge.

Much of the work under this task will be directly related to keeping communities educated and informed about transportation issues, changes in state policy, etc.

Knowledge is Power

When asked about the usefulness of the TAC, participants indicated that the educational value of being a participant was exceptional.

The TAC is just one of the many components of the RPC public participation and coordination effort.

Monthly RPC/VTrans TPI Meetings: A Valuable Resource for Transportation Planners

Transportation Planners and State Officials both acknowledge the value of actively attending the 10 regularly scheduled TPI meetings during the calendar year. These meetings, organized by the VTrans Planning Coordinator and an RPC Transportation Planner, are designed to inform, educate and provide a forum for discussion between state agencies and RPCs. Topics (which are selected collaboratively between VTrans and the Regional Planning Commissions) are diverse and comprehensive, featuring information that is relevant to RPCs and State agencies alike. Attending these meetings in person enables RPC staff to be actively engaged in discussions and to have a voice at the table representing their communities and the work that they do at the local level.

What do attendees think of the TPI meetings?

- *“A valuable way to share information, even between agencies”*
- *“It’s a very friendly group that will offer guidance to new transportation planners.”*
- *“The TPI meetings introduce you to people you can reach out to when you need help.”*

However, it is also extremely important for RPC staff to be well-informed. RPC staff should incorporate opportunities to learn about current issues, or educate themselves about new transportation planning techniques as part of their work program.

Task #3: Long Range Planning

The practice of long-range transportation system planning and analysis under the TPI began with the need for each RPC to develop a regional transportation plan. With the completion of the initial TPI Long Range Plans (all RPCs have transportation plans that are incorporated into Regional Plans), this task now provides the opportunity to conduct regular and systematic review of multi-modal transportation needs based on existing and future land use patterns, socioeconomic characteristics and trends, environmental challenges and other influencing factors.

Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.

Transportation needs are evaluated in the context of regional and local plans and solutions identified to meet those needs. Often, this process is conducted as part of an update to the Regional Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan, which must be adopted or readopted at a minimum of every eight years as required in V.S.A. Title 24, § 4348b unless otherwise noted under the yearly TPI Work Program Guidance provided by VTrans. 24 V.S.A. § 4302, states that all state agencies are responsible for supporting and reinforcing Vermont’s historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside. This requirement is particularly relevant to long range planning at the regional level. All long-range transportation planning activities should be considered through this lens. Additionally, all relevant modes of transportation should be considered and integrated into the overall transportation system and transportation system planning.

Central to all RPC efforts under this task are the: (1) Ongoing implementation of local, regional, and statewide transportation planning priorities and recommendations; (2) The refinement and continual updating of local and regional plans and ordinances to fit evolving needs for transportation projects and services; and (3) The active investment in local transportation, public works, and planning professionals.

Typical examples of Long Range Planning activities include, but are not limited to:

- Creating and updating the Regional Transportation Plan
- Preparing corridor or subarea plans
- Multi-modal system classification (corridor determinations, overlay analyses, corridor analyses)
- Coordinating inter-regional efforts such as the Scenic Byways Program, Public Transit and others

- Scenario planning activities
- Assessing and forecasting future travel demand based on land use, demographic projections and other influencing factors; and assessing and recommending strategies to manage demand
- Developing and maintaining statistics and GIS data and analyses used to support transportation planning and project development (journey to work data, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, existing land use, land use regulations, floodplains, river corridors, farmland, critical wildlife habitat and hazardous materials, etc.)
- Working with local planning partners to identify and implement performance-based planning practices
- Evaluating access to jobs and essential services
- Acting as liaison with public transit provider(s) participating and providing technical support for transit planning activities
- Identifying wildlife corridors, roadway barriers and crossings, and other environmental transportation connections
- Coordination of intermodal, multimodal and freight transportation activities, taking into account the transportation needs of different users – businesses, commuters, students, persons with special needs etc.
- Access management activities, with the goal of improving service without large scale investments in new infrastructure
- Transit planning, including route mapping and analysis, and route schedules (in conjunction with transit providers)
- Examination, analysis and recommendations for system-wide opportunities, such as traffic calming, use of shoulders for bicycles, guard rails, historic bridges, safety inventories
- Bicycle/pedestrian analysis and systems planning
- Preparation of road and bridge codes and standards relating to FEMA natural disaster activities
- Passenger and freight rail planning
- Develop origin/destination studies for both intra and inter regional movement

Required activities (as defined by yearly program guidance) under this task might include such responsibilities as the development of Regional Transportation Plans, the collection and inventorying of data, as well as direct RPC participation in working groups, steering committees, and/or advisory committees and assistance with outreach to local officials and the public on VTrans managed projects.

Task #4: Short-Range Planning

The Short Range Planning task includes activities emphasizing transportation system analysis and problem solving of a more immediate nature. Short range transportation planning projects may be identified in long range plans, conducted in response to an

emerging issue, or prepared at the request of a municipality to address a specific need. The planning work may focus on a smaller area such as a downtown, commercial area or school and recommendations would be developed at a greater level of detail than typically provided in long range planning work. This task often involves annual, bi-annual, or strategic planning activities with regional, local, state, and nonprofit organizations. For the TPI, short range planning also includes activities emphasizing the ongoing data collection, assessment, and capital planning efforts being conducted by Municipalities, VTrans, and other governmental groups and organizations (such as public transit providers or walk-bicycle councils).

Typical eligible activities include but are not limited to:

- Municipal Transportation Capital Improvement Plans
- Assessment of transportation problems on regional corridors and alternatives analysis
- Feasibility studies, cost-effectiveness studies, origin/destination and capacity studies
- Evaluations of specific transportation problems including safety inventories and audits
- Park and Ride utilization (including usage counts and origin/destination studies)
- Evaluation of designated centers transportation issues (e.g. pedestrian access; parking and circulation, and traffic calming in state designated downtowns and villages)
- Planning, coordination and outreach associated with designated scenic byways
- Assisting municipalities with town highway road, culvert, bridge and roadway sign inventories and assessments
- Participation in transit development plans (assisting VTrans or individual public transit provider consultant with preparation of plan)
- Review of traffic impact studies of proposed development projects with potential impacts to the federal aid system and relative to the regional transportation plan.
- Providing planning, technical assistance, grant management support, as needed for communities participating in the Strong Communities, Better Connections Program.
- Developing and implementing analytical methods to identify gaps in the connectivity of the transportation system.
- Evaluation and prioritization of specific local and/or regional transportation problems/issues including air and rail

Required activities for this task (as defined by yearly program guidance) might include the collection of traffic, bicycle or pedestrian travel data or inventorying roads, bridges and culverts.

Task #5: Project and Program Development Planning

Where the long range planning process identifies goals, and the short range planning process identifies projects that implement those goals, each individual project goes through a process of planning and development prior to implementation at the state or local level. Project development activities provide continuity between planning and implementation and provide a framework for on-going public participation as specific design alternatives, costs and impacts are explored. Establishing regional priorities for transportation projects is a critical step because it ensures that regional goals are incorporated into project funding decisions and the implementation schedule.

Examples of Project and Program Development activities include, but are not limited to:

- Identification of regional priorities
- Feasibility studies
- Identification of local issues that relate to scoping analysis
- Evaluation of various scoping alternatives including cost/benefit analysis
- Facilitation and participation in the public decision making process for project development
- Assist and review communities' Municipal Assistance projects that can be funded and developed outside the statewide prioritization system (such as Transportation Alternatives, Bicycle/Pedestrian and other locally managed projects)
- Preparation of cultural and natural resource studies
- Facilitation and participation in the public decision making process for project development
- Participation in the Project Definition process, the VTrans forum to decide project parameters
- Project Prioritization

Required activities for this task generally include such things as project prioritization and specific project outreach and coordination.

Project Prioritization

Project prioritization has been a recurring required activity as part of the TPI program since 2006 when the Legislature directed the Agency of Transportation to “annually solicit input from the 11 regional planning commissions” on regional priorities. The annual process factors input from the RPCs into the VTrans ranking process, which is based on quantitative factors such as asset condition, safety, average annual daily traffic (AADT), remaining life, intersection capacity, crash rates, vehicle-per-mile impacts, cost-benefit ratios, and project momentum. The Regional Planning Commissions contributes 15-20% to the overall ranking process. This percentage recognizes additional qualitative factors that considers the project impact on congestion, functional importance of the facility within the regional network and conformance to local and regional plans.

Input into the project prioritization process generally involves the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee. Having the TAC involved in project prioritization allows municipalities to better understand the process, provide valuable local input, and to communicate to VTrans, which projects are of most importance to the region to address.

Although the project prioritization process has been performed since 2006, there are certain inefficiencies with the current process such as the lack of a simple process to rank new projects as the need arises. In 2017, VTrans initiated a strategic improvement of the project selection and prioritization process. The goals of the new process are to optimize the use of funding dollars; ensure alignment with state and regional goals; and incorporate performance based measures and outcomes with a new decision-making model. The new process will be used to prioritize projects for FY2020.

Task #6: Other Planning Activities

Task #6 is occasionally used by VTrans or RPCs for activities that may not have a direct connection to other tasks but implement the goals of the TPI.

Organizing and Managing the TAC

RPCs are required to have a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), but there are no specific rules about how it must be organized. Most TACs consist of representatives from each town within the RPC's region. Commonly, representatives are appointed by the Selectboard and often include members of the Selectboard or Municipal staff. Because municipal representation is a core part of the TPI, it is desirable to have full representation from all communities in the region.

VTrans strongly encourages RPCs to include local stakeholders that are not specifically part of municipal government. This might include a member who represents underserved populations e.g. seniors or disabled, the local walk-bicycle council or intermodal representatives (ie. rail, aviation, transit). It is in the best interest of each region to consider these additional stakeholders as members of the TAC as they may offer perspectives that are not represented by municipalities.

Rules of Procedure & Bylaws

Vermont's open meeting laws (1 V.S.A. §310) apply to all boards, councils and commissions of the state and its political subdivisions (which includes Regional Planning Commissions and Municipalities).

- TACs must abide by the laws regarding majorities, and any time there will be a meeting of a majority of the TAC, the RPC Transportation Planner must ensure that the public are notified of the date, time and location of the meeting.
- All public bodies are required to take meeting minutes. Minutes must at least include the names of all members of the public body present at the meeting, other participants, and all motions, proposals and resolutions made and their dispositions, and the results of any votes taken.
- Minutes must be posted no later than five days from the date of the meeting to a website, if one exists that the public body maintains or has designated as their official web site.
- Because TACs are part of a federally funded program, they must adhere to the ADA, which means meetings must be held in a location that is ADA compliant.

TAC Facts

TAC members were surveyed in 2017 to gauge their participation and perception of the effectiveness of their committee

- 85% of TAC members represent municipalities.
- 78% attend most TAC meetings.
- 81% agree that the TAC influences decisions about transportation policy or projects.
- 87% ranked the opportunity for conversations with knowledgeable people from the State, RPC and other Municipalities as important.
- 76% indicated that they were satisfied with the TA.

In the case of most TACs, these administrative duties are handled by the Regional Planning Commission.

It is advisable for the TAC to establish bylaws and/or rules of procedure. Bylaws or Rules of procedure might include the following:

- Purpose: A general definition of the TACs purpose
- General Activities: A general list of what the TAC does
- Role: The TAC's role in relation to the RPC (often advisory)
- Election of Officers: Define how and when officers are elected
- Attendance and Quorums: Clearly define the numbers needed to constitute a quorum and procedures regarding attendance
- Communication and Coordination: Note compliance with open meeting law, how minutes and other documents generated by the TAC will be distributed and how TAC members should communicate with their municipalities
- Conflicts of Interest: It is important to address how conflicts of interest should be handled by the TAC

Communication

It is vital that RPC staff communicate well with the TAC. They should be sent meeting minutes per open meeting law requirements, regular meeting reminders, and the next meeting agenda. It is good practice to have the meeting dates and topics for subsequent meetings determined by the regular meeting so TAC is aware of where and when the next meeting will be and what it will be about.

Meeting Schedule

When surveyed in 2017, most TACs met 6-9 (31%) or 10 (61%) or more times a year. The number of times a TAC meets is up to the TAC and the RPC to determine, but it must meet often enough to effectively execute its duties. Some TACs only meet on an as-needed basis, others meet monthly, and many take specific months off each year, primarily due to other schedule issues, such as holidays or vacation schedules. The number of yearly meetings should be determined by the needs of the region, any specific projects that need TAC input and most importantly by the TAC.

It is also important to determine the best time for a TAC to meet. In some regions, the Transportation Advisory Committee meets during the day, in others they meet in the evening. Day meetings are more likely to attract municipal staff and members who are

Ask your TAC

When trying to develop engaging material for your TAC or determine the best meeting schedule, one of the most important recommendations made by RPC Transportation Planners is to "ask your TAC."

In many regions, the TAC takes an active role in determining what topics they will cover. This approach is encouraged provided the topics selected fit under the Work Plan tasks of the TPI program.

retired or have a flexible work schedule. Evening meetings may not be as appealing to local officials, but easier for volunteers with less flexible daytime schedules. RPC Transportation Planners recommend that the date and time of TAC meetings be revisited with each committee on a yearly basis, as membership may change.

Strategies for Engaging the TAC

One of the more challenging tasks for the RPC Transportation Planner, who also serves as the TAC organizer, is keeping the committee engaged, interested and active. A best practice is for RPC staff to involve the members of the TAC in determining meeting topics as a way to ensure that they find the material compelling. Potential topics can include the following:

- Project Prioritization - Prioritization occurs on a yearly basis in the spring.
- Locally significant or unique projects – Could include a project that is unusual for the region, such as a road relocation or an innovative bridge replacement project, such as the one pictured to the right.
- Education about VTrans Programs– Use available VTrans staff to provide up-to-date information to the TAC.
- Updates from local transit agencies – The TAC should be aware of what other transportation organizations in the region are doing and what their needs are.
- TPI project material – Such as presenting long or short range plans and soliciting input from the TAC.
- Seasonally relevant issues – Such as flood resiliency or invasive species management.

Creative ways to engage your TAC are encouraged. For example, several RPCs chose to have a “field trip” scheduled for the TAC at least once a year. This allows the members of the TAC to see a project in person and it provides them with something different than a traditional meeting.

Ensuring meeting attendance can be another challenge. Creativity and adaptability are important considerations. It may be beneficial depending upon the makeup of the TAC to hold meetings at a meal time and provide a light meal of pizza or sandwiches or rotate locations.



Photo Source: EIV Technical Services
Figure 5: Preparations for the I-91 Bridge Slide in Hartford, VT, a unique project that featured “slide-in” bridge construction to limit downtime. This type of project makes an excellent TAC field trip.

Program Administration

Administration is a significant component of the RPCs responsibilities related to TPI management. All reporting and provision of work plan deliverables to VTrans is handled by the RPC. The content of the Annual Work Program Guidance is updated on a yearly basis by VTrans. As the Guidance for the next year is being developed, RPCs are invited to provide comments. Any potential changes to the program will be discussed at a VTrans TPI meeting.

While the RPC is responsible for all administration, at the discretion of the Regional Planning Commission, some TPI responsibilities may be passed through to a municipality if they have the capability of managing the project according to state and federal requirements. The RPC may also hire consultants to do various aspects of the Work Plan.

Administrative procedures for the TPI are summarized below. Specific information, such as federal guidance documents like the Super Circular (2 C.F.R. Part 200) and Vermont Administrative Bulletin 3.5 is available via (<http://aoa.vermont.gov/bulletins/3point5>). Detailed information is not included with this guide due to the potential for changes in rules and regulations at the Federal and State level.

Grant Agreement and Work Plan Timeline

During the federal fiscal year (which extends from October 1st to September 30th - see Figure 6), there are two processes happening concurrently which involve VTrans and RPC Transportation Planners. During this cycle, Transportation Planners implement their active Work Plan for the current fiscal year. At the same time, Transportation Planners must work with VTrans on the Work Plan for the next fiscal year.

- **January-March:** VTrans discusses opportunities for next year's Work Plan with VTrans program managers and executive staff.
- **March-April:** VTrans calculates apportionments, develops and issues Annual Work Program Guidance, work plan task categories and application instructions. RPCs and VTrans do a mid-year review of the existing fiscal year's work plan.
- **May-July:** VTrans releases Annual Work Program Guidance for next Federal Fiscal Year TPI, RPCs draft and submit annual work plan.
- **Early August:** Deadline for RPC to submit completed application for next fiscal year.

Yearly Cycle of TPI Work Plan

Task	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
VTrans Develops and Releases Annual Work Program Guidance								Guidance released 3 rd week				
Feedback sought from RPCs and VAPDA re: Annual Work Program Guidance												
VTrans Calculates Annual RPC Financial Apportionments RPCs Draft & Submit Annual Work Plan												
VTrans Reviews & Approves Work Plan												
VTrans Prepares and Finalizes Grant Agreement												
Mid-Year Review of Work Plan and Budget conducted												
Submit Indirect Cost Proposal to VTrans												
Ongoing Implementation of Work Plan												

Current Fiscal Year

Figure 6: Yearly Cycle of the TPI Work Plan

- **June-July:** VTrans Planning Coordinator reviews application for next fiscal year, coordinates any necessary changes and VTrans Contract Administration prepares the grant agreement and coordinates signatures.

- **September 30:** End of the period of activity for eligible expenses for the current fiscal year. Invoices for work completed prior to September 30th may be submitted for up to three months afterwards. Funds are not transferable between fiscal years.
- **October 1:** Beginning of the period of activity for eligible expenses for the current fiscal year. Invoices should be submitted monthly, accompanied by a narrative project progress report (see below).
- **December:** Previous fiscal year is closed out. Final invoice for payment should be submitted to VTrans. Yearly audit of RPC should be submitted to the VTrans Planning Coordinator by the RPC's audit date.
- **End of December:** Per 3/25/2014 Memorandum of Understanding between VT RPCs and VTrans RPC Indirect Cost Rate Proposal for the next fiscal year should be submitted to VTrans by the end of December.

Monthly Invoices

The TPI is a "reimbursement of actual eligible expense" program. Once the yearly grant agreement has been fully executed, the RPC may begin to work on the tasks outlined in their work plan. The cycle of invoicing and reimbursement is established by VTrans. The VTrans Planning Coordinator reviews and approves monthly invoices (subject to verification). Reimbursable activities are generally those that are directly related to approved Work Plan items or administration and that are legally sanctioned by federal requirements. Staff time must be billed as regular time, not overtime nor above and beyond staff's regular duties. Indirect costs are only allowed with a VTrans approved indirect cost rate proposal and only up to the maximum value approved in the approval letter. The expense of municipal officials to attend meetings to discuss a specific project is considered routine administration and is not reimbursable (see In-Kind Match). Monthly invoices must include a staff progress report (discussed below).

Reporting

RPC staff reports progress on TPI tasks to the VTrans Planning Coordinators with monthly invoices. The monthly progress report may be brief, but at a minimum should include not only a list of activities (meetings, analyses, reports, GIS work, site visits, etc.) but a brief description of the content and issues involved and progress toward grant agreement milestones or deliverables. The VTrans Planning Coordinator may be involved in at least some of the activities, so at times this may seem repetitive, but it is important to document activities for others, including the final audit.

In addition, RPCs are also asked to submit weekly reports that summarize significant activities or tasks undertaken during the prior week. Each RPCs weekly report information is compiled into VTrans Weekly Reports which is a tool to keep VTrans program managers, directors and staff informed about the activities of the RPCs.

A mid-year review (which serves as sub-recipient monitoring as well) is conducted at the mid-point of the program cycle (usually in March or April). The objective of this meeting is to review and discuss fulfillment of planning tasks and responsibilities associated with the TPI and identify any needs for mid-course adjustment. The following is a general checklist of issues that are discussed at the mid-year review, but all are encouraged to discuss additional topics that are considered important or relevant:

- Work Plan and Budget Status;
- Conformance to Terms and Conditions of the Grant Agreement;
- Upcoming New TPI Contract (preliminary discussions);
- Other: What are the important transportation issues in the region today? How are you dealing with these? What are the challenges and opportunities not currently being addressed?

RPC Transportation Planners are also responsible for providing TPI related reporting for the Vermont Association of Planning and Development's (VAPDA) annual report which is submitted to the legislature in January.

Audit

At the close of the TPI year, a final report and financial documentation are required. Federal law requires that a subrecipient (in this case, the RPC) that expends \$750,000 or more in federal assistance during its fiscal year is required to have a single audit conducted in accordance with the Single Audit Act, except when it elects to have a program specific audit. The subrecipient may elect to have a program specific audit if it expends funds under only one federal program and the federal program's laws, regulations or grant agreements do not require a financial statement audit of the entity.

Indirect Costs

On an annual basis, RPCs must have their indirect cost rate proposals approved by VTrans. Per the Memorandum of Understanding between VTrans and RPCs dated 3/25/2014 each RPC prepares an indirect cost proposal using a methodology that is authorized under the Code of Federal Regulations. This information is submitted to the VTrans Audit section who reviews the indirect cost proposal and assuming the proposal meets the requirements approves the resulting indirect rate. In the event of extenuating circumstances an RPC may voluntarily cap its indirect cost rate. Any voluntary caps must be submitted in advance and approved by the VTrans Audit section prior to being used.

Indirect Rate

Indirect costs are those that have been incurred for common or joint objectives and cannot be readily connected to the project or task and are applied uniformly across all programs. It includes day-to-day expenses such as office heating, electricity, etc.

Procurement

Under the TPI, procurement of qualified consultants, contractors and materials must adhere to state and federal procurement guidelines. The Vermont Agency of Administration (AOA) releases procurement and contracting procedures on a quarterly basis, or as needed under Bulletin 3.5. Bulletin 3.5 and related documents are available for download from the AOA web site (<http://aoa.vermont.gov/bulletins/3point5>). Because TPI is a federally funded program, the Federal Uniform Code, which addresses administrative requirements, cost principles and audit requirements for federal awards also applies. This information is available in 2 C.F.R. Part 200.

Municipalities may also administer or implement Work Plan items if they have an approved subrecipient agreement with the RPC that meets all requirements. Each RPC is required to have and maintain state and federally compliant procurement procedures.

Local Match, and In-Kind Match

The RPC is responsible for contributing 10% local match as part of their TPI. This may be cash or in-kind donations. For the TPI, eligible In-kind donations are limited to volunteer time that is spent on activities that are integral and necessary to complete a specific eligible activity in the approved TPI Work Plan. These services might include the time TAC members spend preparing for and attending regular TAC meetings. In order to be eligible for in-kind match the time must be well documented and valued consistent with 2 C.F.R. Section 200.306. Attendance at project specific meetings is not eligible for in-kind match.

Contract Amendments

The amount of federal and state funds available for the TPI program is approved by the Vermont Legislature via the annual Appropriations Bill. Each Subrecipient/RPC receives a share of what is appropriated based upon the number of towns served, population and road mileage in their respective planning regions.

Changes in a region's work plan that arise during the grant year are common. If the change is anticipated to be minor e.g. involves less than 10% of the overall yearly Work Plan budget and only involves moving funds between tasks, an administrative amendment to the grant agreement is necessary prior to proceeding with any work. The VTrans Planning Coordinator approves and processes administrative amendments. If the change is significant e.g. involves 10% or more of the overall yearly Work Plan budget, the addition or deletion of tasks or funding, then a formal amendment to the grant agreement must be processed in order for this work to be reimbursable. Formal amendments are processed via the VTrans Contract Administration section. Work conducted prior to execution of a formal amendment will not be reimbursable. If you anticipate needing a formal or administrative contract amendment, please contact your VTrans Planning Coordinator no later than 2-months prior to the end of the grant agreement fiscal year.

Conclusion

The TPI has a long history in Vermont, and has served as a model for collaboration between state, regional and municipal governments. The U.S. Congress used components of Vermont's laws regarding transportation consultation between VTrans and impacted citizens and communities in the bill that eventually became MAP-21.

Through work funded by the TPI, the level of understanding municipal officials have of Vermont's transportation system has significantly improved. Access to information is better for communities, regional planning commissions and the state. Most importantly, communities feel that they have a voice that is heard throughout the project development and implementation process.

For the Agency of Transportation, TPI provides a valuable platform for public outreach and communication, for testing new ideas through work plan tasks and for fostering a strong working relationship with Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions. RPCs are able to provide VTrans with a local context, enabling the Agency to know who to communicate with at the municipal level, and how VTrans activities might be received by the municipality.

RPCs benefit from a stable source of funding for technical assistance that is essential to their communities. Municipal roads and infrastructure make up a significant portion of town budgets; the technical assistance provided by RPCs help them reduce costs and more effectively manage their roads. For planners new to Vermont's TPI who may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of managing the program, it is most important to rely on support from peers. RPC transportation planners are always willing to respond to questions, offer guidance and provide input.

Appendices

Appendix A: TPI Program Evaluation and Review

Appendix A1: Survey Questions

Appendix A2: Survey Results Summary

Transportation Planning Initiative

Program Evaluation and Review



**DuBois
& King** inc.

January 2018

Executive Summary

The last revision of the Transportation Policy Initiative Manual was completed in 2007. At the behest of the Agency of Transportation, Dubois & King, Inc. has undertaken the process of significantly updating the manual. To ensure that the manual accurately reflects State and Federal goals and current practice, D&K staff engaged a wide range of stakeholders in discussions about the TPI program, the roles of the program participants, and future program needs. In keeping with the previous program evaluations (such as the Watts Report in 2002⁷), this report considers the factors that led to the TPI, analyzes the TPI today and provides recommendations for continuing to meet the program's goals.

This report attempts to answer four questions:

1. Has the TPI program made progress toward previously recommended improvements?
2. How do TPI program participants benefit from the program?
3. Has Vermont's approach to consultive planning been productive and meaningful?
4. Are there opportunities for improvement?

To answer these questions, this report reviews the TPI program through several lenses. First is a consideration of previous program analysis – the Canby Report and the Watts report (see page 4-5). These two reports provided guidance and feedback for the Agency with regard to improving communication and planning policy, much of which has been implemented. Second, interviews with State, Regional and Municipal TPI participants provide important data and feedback on how the program is viewed by its stakeholders and what opportunities for improvement exist. Finally, by analyzing the state and federal goals and requirements for consultive planning which guide the TPI, this report considers whether or not the TPI is meeting these standards. Like the Watts Report, this report looks closely at the vitality of the TPI and at the mechanisms and results of the consultive planning process as it is coordinated through the TPI.

Some key findings include:

- The TPI program provides valuable information at all levels – state, regional and local.

⁷ Richard Watts. Vermont Agency of Transportation. Evaluation & Review: Citizen Participation and Local Official Consultation in the Transportation Planning Initiative. Attitudes towards the TPI: TAC Members, RPC Staff, VTrans Staff. August 20, 2003, Montpelier, Vermont

- Effective communication between VTrans, RPCs and Towns helps to avoid potentially contentious situations relating to project implementation.
- 80 percent of TAC members are positive about the role of the transportation advisory committees and their influence over transportation decision-making.
- Nearly 77 percent of TAC members indicated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their TAC.
- VTrans staff and RPC staff remain strongly positive about the TPI and think that it has enhanced a collaborative relationship with the communities.
- The TPI continues to meet its objectives, including conforming with federal and state law, developing regional transportation plans, providing planning resources to local communities and creating collaborative relationships with local communities.

Progress on Past Evaluation Recommendations

In 1993, the TPI was created to address the requirements of Act 200, ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act), Act 250 and the internal agency reforms which were implemented after the Canby Report. The Agency presented the initiative as a fundamental change in the way it would conduct transportation decision-making and would decentralize transportation planning to the local and regional levels.

Canby Report

The Canby Report was a management study of the Agency of Transportation conducted by the Legislature in 1990. This report, which ultimately provided strong support for creating the TPI, identified a number of issues which recommended further review around a number of broad areas, several of which are addressed by the modern TPI. The following summarizes the issues that were relevant to the creation of the TPI:

- The agency needed to articulate a clear sense of its mission and current goals.
- The Agency's planning process was project oriented and lacked an overall systems plan for Vermont's transportation needs.
- The amount of time consumed in developing a project and bringing it to construction was overly long.
- The organization structure required adjustment in the planning, project and intermodal areas.

The report recommended that the Agency:

- Involve citizens' groups and elected officials, including the legislature, in the policy development process through rulemaking, hearings and or amendments to existing statutes.
- Develop a long-range plan that integrates all modes, incorporates agency policies and identifies deficiencies in the transportation systems and needs for all modes.
- Create a project development step in the planning process which would secure local concurrence.
- Establish separate departments for policy and planning (which includes an intermodal division).
- Establish a public information unit.

The issues and actions identified by the Canby Report were addressed by the Agency. The creation of what is now known as the Planning, Policy and Research Bureau, provided the Agency with a division that could focus on long-range statewide

transportation planning, including multimodal issues. The TPI, which was created several years after the Canby Report, is one of the most effective ways that VTrans is able to involve stakeholders in the policy making and project development process. VTrans has continued to work diligently to provide information to the public through the TPI and through the Planning Division's Public Outreach coordinator.

Watts Report

At the 10 year anniversary of the TPI (2002) in VT, the Agency of Transportation invited Richard Watts, Research Director for the University of Vermont's Transportation Research Center to evaluate the program. In his report "Evaluation & Review: Citizen Participation and Local Official Consultation in the Transportation Planning Initiative," Watts noted that after a decade, the TPI had "become an institutionalized component of Vermont's transportation-planning landscape."

The Watts Report clearly determined that the TPI is meeting its original objectives, which included:

- Conformance with ISTEA
- Conformance with Act 200
- Developing Comprehensive Plans at the Regional Level
- Providing Transportation Planning Support and Resources to Towns
- Developing a Collaborative and Cooperative Transportation Planning Relationship with Vermont Towns and Regions
- Creating a Small Staff of Full-Time Planning Coordinators at VTrans

The Report concluded with the identification of several areas where improvement would be beneficial, including the following:

- VTrans and the RPCs need to keep developing citizen participation and local consultation programs that provide a chance for meaningful input into transportation planning and programs.
- An effort could be made to broaden TAC participation beyond town officials and to diversify and energize participation by bringing in more diversity in terms of representation, age, gender and geographical location.
- There should be an effort to provide training for Agency staff in citizen participation and the opportunities within the TPI in cooperation with RPC staff.

VTrans continues to utilize the TPI program as a tool for engaging with the public, through the RPCs, providing communities a voice in transportation planning and policy development. Efforts have been made to encourage TAC participation to include stakeholders with some success, although more must be done to broaden TAC membership.

Present-day Attitudes toward the Transportation Planning Initiative

In addition to a Steering Committee comprised of TPI program staff, VTrans representatives and Regional Planners, input was provided through meetings with Agency of Transportation staff, the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA), regional transportation planners and individual interviews with VTrans and Regional Planning Staff. A survey of TAC members was conducted in 2017 as well. Group meetings took place between October and December of 2016, with individual interviews and TAC survey occurring in the spring of 2017. The results of this outreach are summarized by stakeholder below, including an overview of positive findings and opportunities for improvement.

VTrans Interview Findings

VTrans staff members indicated that there are many ways they utilize and benefit from the TPI. In particular, it was noted that the TPI offers an opportunity for the Agency to “ground truth” ideas for potential projects or data collection. This is commonly done through pilot programs in which a few Regional Planning Commissions undertake a specific task to test its value and methodology, allowing VTrans to determine whether or not the new task is worth doing statewide.

The exchange of information via the TPI program allows VTrans to keep communities up-to-date through a skilled RPC staff. Likewise, RPCs are able to keep the Agency apprised of any potential concerns or issues that might be raised at the local level. This two-way communication is seen as essential to the program, and indeed is a fundamental requirement of the Federal laws guiding the TPI program.

The Agency values the Regional Commission’s independence. Recognizing that the RPCs wear multiple hats, as coordinators of the TPI program and also as a voice for communities. VTrans appreciates the fact that while RPCs and VTrans do not always agree, they are a reliable partner.

Common Themes

During meetings and interviews with stakeholders, several common themes emerged, including:

- *Communication and Information is Valuable: The TPI program provides valuable information at all levels – state, regional and local.*
- *Good Communication Saves Time and Money: Effective communication between VTrans, RPCs and Towns helps to avoid potentially contentious situations relating to project implementation.*

Additional Positive Findings

- The project prioritization process works well, RPC input can make a difference in a projects ranking.
- TPI is a valuable tool for sharing information within between different state agencies.
- RPC assistance with policy development is valuable – RPCs serve on many VTrans advisory committees, program selection committees, long range and modal plans, etc.
- TPI is an effective mechanism for educating communities about public safety.
- RPCs provide valuable assistance in coordination of local concerns questionnaires for bridge projects.

Opportunities for Improvement

As with all programs, there are areas opportunities for improvement that will benefit all stakeholders. VTrans staff identified the following during meetings and interviews, including:

- RPCs can sometimes find it challenging to balance the specific, unique tasks required in a given year with regular yearly program tasks.
- Varying skill level among RPC staff can make project and task delivery inconsistent.
- RPC staff vary in their ability to serve as Municipal Project Managers.
- RPCs could be more proactive in updating access management categories and alerting VTrans to issues related to 1111 permits.
- RPCs should manage their TAC to effectively encourage communication between the TAC member and their community.
- In light of significant positive feedback regarding the value of regular TPI meetings (which indicated the benefit of networking, information exchange, etc.) some RPC staff need to attend TPI meetings in person on a more consistent basis to take advantage of the opportunities offered to participants.

RPC Staff Interview Findings

The TPI has a 25 year history of success and, from the RPCs perspective, it represents a solid professional relationship between the Regions and VTrans. This relationship allows the RPCs to act almost as an extension of staff for VTrans, providing a valuable conduit for information to pass between their communities and the Agency.

RPCs cited the TPI program's built-in flexibility as one of its most important characteristics. Each region has different priorities, as do their communities. The flexibility inherent in the TPI program allows the RPCs to craft a work program that

satisfies the individual needs of their regions while meeting the fundamental requirements of the TPI program.

The strong relationships RPCs have with their communities are based on trust (in most cases), which often makes them the first place a town calls when they have a transportation question. Because of the strong connection between the RPCs and VTrans, planning staff have a good working knowledge of who at VTrans can help with a local issue.

Additional Positive Findings

- The TPI program has had a positive impact on the level of understanding among local officials on transportation issues.
- Many studies conducted as part of the RPC TPI program have led to the implementation of projects that benefit their communities, projects that might not have been done without assistance from the program.
- The program provides the benefit of a network of people that understand the tradeoffs, processes and connections between transportation and other related goals.
- The program has allowed municipalities to have an impact on transportation policy and projects at the state level.

Opportunities for Improvement

- TPI should be more effectively integrated with the planning efforts of regional transit providers.
- RPC project prioritization scores should be given a higher percentage in the project prioritization process, if only to ensure that communities feel their suggestions are being more clearly considered.
- VTrans must continue to provide flexibility in the TPI program by balancing required statewide projects with the more open work program tasks.

TAC Member Survey Findings

TAC members were provided with the opportunity to comment (via online or paper survey) on the effectiveness of their TAC and their feelings about their role as part of the TPI program. A total of 88 individual responses were received. By and large, TAC members agreed that they influenced decisions about transportation policy or projects. Members placed the highest value on exchange of information and communication, citing the opportunity for conversations with knowledgeable people from the State, RPC and towns, as one of the most important aspects of being on the Committee. The survey and a data summary are available in Appendix A1 and Appendix A2 of this report.

Most TAC participants are appreciative of how the RPCs organize and run the regular meetings of the Committee. In particular, those RPCs who are working hard to provide TAC members with new information or new opportunities to look at transportation in a new way received accolades. Because RPCs are so well connected with state agencies, they are able to bring information from agencies not directly involved with the TPI (such as the Agency of Natural Resources) to the TAC in a way that allows for a broader understanding of the issues that impact their municipal transportation systems and maintenance.

TAC members see their ability to get specific projects implemented in their community, in a way that works for their town, as vitally important. The pre-implementation work that the TPI program can offer communities facilitates these projects significantly.

Additional Positive Findings

- More than 75% of TAC members attend most meetings of their TAC. 94% felt that the number of meetings was “about right.”
- More than half indicated that they report back to their communities with information and updates.
- Most feel that they have an influence on Regional policy relating to transportation.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Greater clarity in how TAC input affects project prioritization at the state level is necessary, as many TAC members felt that they do not have an influence on the process.
- Some members voiced frustration with poorly planned TAC meetings, that either had an overly ambitious agenda, or a sparse agenda, which impacts the time invested in travel, etc.
- TAC members voiced frustration with the amount of time between prioritization and implementation of a project.

Program Evaluation

Across all communication, outreach and stakeholder discussion, there was strong support for the TPI program. The TPI is a very successful program that is effectively meeting the goals set by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and state statute. Vermont's TPI program has been considered a model and has been used to inform policy at the Federal level. With the 10-year anniversary of the release of the TPI manual, it is time to examine how effectively the program is implementing its guiding principles and goals and whether new evaluation criteria should be considered.

Summary of Current Requirements and Measures

State and Federal Program Requirements

The TPI program follows the purpose and goals established by the FHWA and VTrans. The specific federal rules that guide state transportation policy and how the TPI must operate change each time a new Federal Transportation law is passed. Federal regulations from 23 CFR Subpart B Section 450 - Statewide and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning and Programming (adopted on 5/27/16, reflect both MAP-21 and FAST Act provisions) requires that each State must "carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive statewide transportation planning process that provides for consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services" that:

- Supports economic vitality;
- Enhances travel and tourism;
- Increases safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increases accessibility and mobility for people and freight;
- Improves the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduces/mitigates stormwater impact of surface transportation;
- Protects the environment;
- Promotes energy conservation;
- Promotes consistency between transportation improvements and state and local growth and economic patterns;
- Enhances the integration and connectivity of the transportation system across all modes for people and freight;
- Promotes efficient system management and operation; and
- Preserves the existing transportation system.

Yearly TPI Performance Measures

TPI program administrators currently submit a yearly performance report through the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA). The report covers all work done by the Regional Planning Commissions, including a transportation planning component which focuses on three primary objectives:

- Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, Regions and Municipalities – This objective comes directly from the FHWA requirements for all federally funded transportation programs. Measures of success include the number of Transportation Advisory Committee meetings, counts (traffic, bike/ped, park and ride) conducted for VTrans and outreach efforts such as safety forums and road foreman meetings.
- Conformance with Act 200 and facilitating decentralized decision making – Act 200 formalized the requirements of FHWA and required the development of regional transportation plans. Measures of success include a count of the number of adopted Regional Transportation Plans, the number of transportation related Act 250 hearings commented on and the number of accelerated bridge project meetings.
- Providing transportation planning and resources to towns – This objective also relates to FWHA requirements, although less directly. Measures include an accounting of what percentage of TPI funds were spent on local assistance, how many scoping studies were completed and how many inventories were conducted.

This report was intended primarily as a tool which VAPDA uses to keep the legislature and state agencies up-to-date on their yearly efforts. VTrans has integrated the same metrics into its reporting process in an effort to track success in the TPI program. While the objectives listed above are being met, they do not directly correlate to the goals established in the VTrans Strategic Plan or the Results Based Accountability outcomes established by the Legislature under V.S.A. §2311(c).

Results Based Policy and VTrans Strategic Plan

In 2014, S.293 – “an Act Relating to reporting on population-level outcomes and indicators and on program level performance measures” was passed by the legislature and ratified by the Governor. The law institutionalized the use of “results based” policy making throughout state government and included the following outcomes, summarized below:

- Vermont has a prosperous economy
- Vermonters are healthy
- Vermont's environment is clean and sustainable
- Vermont's communities are safe and supportive
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable and supported.
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential.
- Vermont's elders and people with disabilities and people with mental conditions live with dignity and independence in the settings they prefer.
- Vermont has an open, effective, and inclusive government with a supported, motivated, and accountable State workforce.
- Vermont's State infrastructure meets the needs of Vermonters, the economy and the environment.

To properly track success, a number of trackable indicators are included in the State's performance measures. In accordance with the State's results-based policy initiative, VTrans has developed strategic plan goals which work toward achieving the State's planned outcomes, it seeks to:

- Provide a safe and resilient transportation system that supports the Vermont economy.
- Preserve, maintain and operate the transportation system in a cost effective and environmentally responsible manner.
- Provide Vermonters energy efficient, travel options.
- Cultivate and continually pursue innovation, excellence and quality customer service.
- Develop a workforce to meet the strategic needs of the Agency.

TPI Objectives and Performance Measures

The TPI Program currently has three objectives and nine performance measures reported within the VAPDA annual report as shown in Figure 3 of the TPI Manual.

In the fall of 2017, VTrans Planning Coordinators and RPC staff defined a mission, new objectives and new performance measures as part of the development of the TPI program evaluation. In developing the objectives and measures, the following were key considerations:

- VT Growth Management Act (Act 200)
- VTrans local consultation requirements (19 V.S.A. § 10I)
- Federal Highway Administration Planning Factors (23 CFR 450.206)

- VTrans Strategic Plan Goals¹⁸
- Provide a safe and resilient transportation system that supports the Vermont economy.
- Preserve, maintain and operate the transportation system in a cost effective and environmentally responsible manner.
- Provide Vermonters energy efficient, travel options.
- Cultivate and continually pursue innovation, excellence and quality customer service.

Additional key considerations; data availability, ease of reporting and if the measure is easily understood.

The following is a list of updated objectives and measures. Each performance measure is the aggregate of all RPC data to capture the overall benefit of the TPI program to VTrans and other State entities. Some performance measures are cross cutting and may apply to more than one objective. Figure 1(p.19) demonstrates this concept.

TPI Mission

Enhance cooperative decision-making among state, regional, and local partners about the transportation system.

Updated TPI Objectives/Performance Measures

1. Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities

A. # of TAC meetings held

This is the total number of TAC meetings held annually. The value of measuring TAC meeting occurrences is to demonstrate the potential for municipal and citizen involvement. TAC meetings are the framework that establishes local input into the transportation planning process.

B. # of non-municipal TAC members actively engaged in transportation planning

This is the total number of citizens or multimodal representatives (air, rail, public transit, bike/ped, chamber of commerce or regional economic development organization) that attended at least one TAC meeting throughout the year. This measure captures the integration of local/regional interest groups in the

⁸ Goal 5 of the VTrans Strategic Plan was intentionally not a consideration. Goal 5 is to develop a workforce to meet the *strategic* needs of the Agency.

transportation planning process.

C. # of municipalities actively engaged in transportation planning

This is the total number of municipalities that have sought assistance from RPCs in the prior year or participated in a TAC meeting. The purpose of this measure is to provide a comprehensive measure of the impact and relationships created through the TPI program because focusing entirely on TAC meetings/members may not represent the full reach of an RPC, since not all members attend TAC meetings. Seeking assistance demonstrates engagement for purposes of reporting.

D. # of RPC coordination activities with municipalities and VTrans

This is the total number of TPI related coordination activities led by the RPC. Examples include: road foreman meetings, local concerns questionnaire completion, road safety audits, accelerate bridge project meetings, Public Transit Elderly & Disabled meetings.

2. Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning

E. # of regional transportation plans that are current (within 8 years)

Regional transportation plans serve many purposes such as coordinating town planning and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns. The RPCs play a key role in ensuring these plans are relevant, updated and actionable.

F. # of Act 250 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation

RPCs review of ACT 250 considers the consequences of growth and development for the region and the state, as well as the municipalities in which it takes place.

G. # of Section 248 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation

RPCs review of Section 248 considers the protection of the environment and promote energy conservation between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.

Section 248 is a Vermont law that requires an approval from the Public Utilities Commission before beginning site preparation or construction of electric transmission facilities, electric generation facilities and certain gas pipelines and associated infrastructure.

H. # of coordination activities in support of regional public transit providers

RPC participation ensures greater coordination of local and regional land use planning efforts with public transit provider planning efforts. RPCs bring a unique perspective to discussions because they have a more holistic view of many the factors that influence public transit demand e.g. demographics, employment and commuter trends etc.

I. # of VTrans committees that involves RPC staff participation

The RPCs provide support to the Agency by way of input and serving in an advisory role on many committees and commenting on planning documents. Examples include Bike/ped grant committee, on road bicycle plan stakeholder group, project prioritization working group, and providing feedback on modal plans.

J. # of regions participating in Project Prioritization

This measure will evolve over time once the new prioritization process is in place. For now this measure is to **emphasize** the RPC role in the project prioritization process and their role in assisting VTrans in implementing a project evaluation process. This process prioritizes the transportation projects included in the state transportation program.

3. Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities

K. # of municipalities participating in road foreman meetings annually

This is the total number of municipalities that attended at least one road foreman meeting. These meetings cover a broad range of topics and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans.

L. # of municipalities assisted with transportation related grants

This is the total number of municipalities the RPCs assisted with grant applications, demonstrating the RPCs role in helping municipalities understand grants and secure funding.

M. % of budget spent on municipal technical assistance

This measure emphasizes the percentage of TPI program dollars spent on providing technical assistance to municipalities.

N. # of municipal transportation inventories conducted

Municipal inventories assist municipalities in managing their transportation assets, developing capital budgets and meeting federal and state requirements. This measure is for non – Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) inventories. Examples include bridge, culvert, sidewalks, signs, pavement condition inventories, etc.

O. # of municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition studies completed/undertaken

This measure highlights how the RPCs assist VTrans and municipalities in advancing transportation improvement projects.

P. # of municipalities assisted with transportation element of municipal/town plan

This measure serves the same purpose as above but is distinct.

Q. # of road erosion inventories in support of the MRGP completed using TPI dollars and using other funding sources

Road erosion inventories (REI) will be conducted on all hydrologically connected municipal roads to meet Municipal Road General Permit (MRGP) Standards. The MRGP road erosion inventories have required extensive effort and therefore tracked separately from measure 'N' above. This measure reflects those REI that use TPI program dollars and other funding sources to demonstrate the capacity building role of the TPI program.

4. Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans

This objective differs from the above because it focuses on meeting VTrans needs with measures specific to the Agencies priorities.

R. # of data collection activities conducted specifically for VTrans

This measure focuses on tasks required in the yearly TPI Guidance such as park & ride, bike/ped and traffic or turning movement counts, HPMS data, complete streets inventory etc.

5. Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education

Note: Objective 5 does not have defined performance measures, but as shown in Figure 1 it shares several cross cutting performance measures with other objectives.

VTrans relationship with RPC staff has developed into a network and resource available outside of routine activities especially during unplanned events.

To highlight this benefit, each RPC will report annually unique examples of situations that occurred during the prior year that required their assistance.

For example, an emergency culvert closure that result in unexpected delays and additional outreach, the need to hold a public forum due to regional transportation concerns or the RPCs role in disaster response and recovery during a declared emergency.

Objectives	Performance Measures																	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
1. Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, Regions and Municipalities																		
2. Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning																		
3. Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities and Expand Their Ability to Implement Transportation Planning Best Practices																		
4. Deliver Results that Advances VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans																		
5. Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education																		

Figure 7 - Performance Measures and Relationship to Objectives

Recommendations for Program Improvement

Integrate Regional Public Transit Planning into TPI – During the RPC interviews it was noted that while the RPCs often do tasks related to public transit through the TPI, regional transit providers often do their short and long range transit development plans without actively utilizing local resources, such as the RPC. Because the Regional Commissions have such a strong relationship with their communities, and a unique knowledge of the area in which they operate. In the past, Federal Transit Administration funding has been used in conjunction with the TPI to do targeted short range planning for transit providers. This is consistent with the State’s policy to “make maximum use of available federal funds for the support of public transportation.”⁹

Identify training opportunities to ensure RPCs have similar level of skills related to specific tasks – VTrans staff noted that skill levels that relate to specific TPI tasks can vary significantly from RPC to RPC. For example, data collection can be inconsistent due to differences in GIS training. VTrans should work internally to ensure that staff receiving deliverables through the TPI program communicate any issues with what they receive.

With feedback from VTrans Staff, RPCs should identify key areas where education and training would be beneficial for staff in all regions and develop curriculum that will address deficiencies. It is important to recognize that VTrans has limited staff resources to provide training, which means training must be a collaborative process with the RPCs taking an equal, if not greater, responsibility for training. In many instances, RPC staff who already possess adequate training in a specific subject would be able to train their peers. This might include data-focused GIS training or Municipal Project Management training, for example.

Improve communication between partners relating to task expectations – In an effort to limit differences in the production of deliverables by RPCs, it is important that VTrans clearly communicate expectations, particularly when the deliverable is technical in nature. Likewise, if there are issues or concerns about how the RPCs are completing a task, staff should be notified and any issues corrected. RPC Transportation Planners should include their VTrans Planning Coordinator on communications with Agency staff, particularly when submitting deliverables.

Provide greater clarity and transparency with regard to the VTrans project decision making process. Comments provided by TAC members clearly identifies a need for greater clarity with regard to how VTrans processes local input through the Project Prioritization Process. VTrans and the RPCs should work collaboratively to develop a

⁹ 2012 Vermont Public Transit Policy Plan

uniform explanation of how VTrans processes local input so as to ensure an equal understand of the process among all TACs.

Consider increasing the percentage of weight given to TAC project prioritization. One approach addressing the perception that “VTrans doesn’t listen,” or “our input doesn’t matter” could be to consider raising the weight of local comments. While this might not have a marked impact on which projects are selected, an increase of this nature might improve support for the process at the local level.

Do note, VTrans hopes to address this concern as part of the on-going update to VTrans Project Prioritization (known as VPSP2) anticipated to be rolled out for the 2020 project prioritization.

Continue to maintain a balance between required tasks – RPC staff and some VTrans staff noted that, at times, the number of required tasks in a given year of the program can limit the RPC’s ability to complete the more regular TPI tasks (such as outreach and education).

Make regular in-person attendance at TPI meetings mandatory – VTrans staff members indicated a frustration with RPCs that do not attend TPI meetings in person on a regular basis. This is surprising, given that a number of RPC staff interviewed described these meetings as extremely valuable – particularly to planners new to the program. Making it a requirement that RPC staff attend at least a majority of TPI meetings in person, will help improve RPC understanding of specific TPI related issues statewide, additionally it will continue to develop the network of RPC transportation planners so that they may rely on each other more consistently. Attendees agree that the format of TPI meetings should generally be timed to take up a full day, so as to make travelling long distances worthwhile for RPC staff.

Continually Evaluate Program – VTrans should work with RPCs to continually evaluate the performance of the TPI program and all of its partners; the Agency, RPCs and Municipalities (as they relate to the TPI). Given the amount of new information collected from several small surveys, it is clear that there are more opportunities for VTrans to continually seek data that may point to areas where improvement is needed, or where success is occurring. Using this information, VTrans and its partners can keep the TPI program relevant.

TPI Survey

TAC Member Survey

To: Regional Planning Commission Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Representatives

As part of an effort to evaluate the Transportation Planning Initiative program (TPI) of the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), we are seeking input from TAC representatives through this survey. In particular, we would like to better understand how the TPI program is functioning from your perspective, and where there may be opportunities to make the TPI more relevant to meeting program's objectives.

About the TPI. The TPI provides funding and resources to Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) to engage in transportation planning activities that will increase communication and coordination with municipalities, and enable VTrans to better target transportation investments to meet local and regional needs. The program began in 1993 with the following expectations for RPCs:

- Develop a comprehensive transportation plans at the regional level
- Provide transportation planning support and resources to towns
- Develop a collaborative and cooperative transportation planning relationship between VTrans, municipalities and regions
- Providing technical assistance to municipalities in transportation and related areas, such as stormwater, parking or traffic safety.

About the TAC. The success of the TPI is in part due to the connections that RPC staff has with their communities, and the communication that flows between the VTrans, RPC, municipalities and public. The TACs play a key role in informing RPC staff and ultimately VTrans about local issues that could erupt into conflicts; and asserting local and regional priorities for funding of projects. This TAC member survey is being conducted to check in with TAC members to gauge how well the TPI is meeting the program's primary goals:

- Bring public input into transportation decisions
- Developing a regional transportation plan that can be used to plan and prioritize projects
- Develop expertise at the RPC's for transportation planning
- Increase citizen knowledge and participation in transportation issues
- Disseminating information to the community and public via RPC staff or TAC representatives
- Reinforce coordination of local, regional and state agency plans

The survey will also be helpful in developing recommendations for "best practices" to ensure continuing productive TAC involvement and engagement. In addition, the information collected will be compared with TAC survey results collected in a 2002 survey of TAC to understand how the TPI and TAC has evolved. An online survey is available if preferred.

Please answer the following questions, and return the completed survey to your RPC, or by mail to:

Lucy Gibson, DuBois & King, In., 28 North Main St, Randolph, VT 05060

Questions

Which RPC TAC are you involved with?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addison County
RPC | <input type="checkbox"/> Northeastern VT Dev
Ass | <input type="checkbox"/> Two Rivers-Ottauquechee
RC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bennington Cty RC | <input type="checkbox"/> Northwest VT RPC | <input type="checkbox"/> Windham Regional
Com |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chittenden Cty RPC | <input type="checkbox"/> Rutland Regional PC | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Central VT RPC | <input type="checkbox"/> Southern Windsor Cty
RPC | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lamoille Cty RPC | | |

Do you have other involvement with your RPC?

- Regional commissioner
- RPC Subcommittee
- RPC executive committee
- Other _____

Who do you represent on the TAC?

- Municipality
- Transit agency
- Bicycle and/or pedestrian
organization
- Economic development
organization
- Rail
- Aviation
- Housing
- Environmental
- Senior Citizens/Council on Aging
- Other _____

What is your role in your municipality or organization?

- Staff _____ (title)
- Elected official
- Appointed board member
- Volunteer
- Other _____

What is the population size of your community?

- Less than 1,000
- 1,000-2,499
- 2,500-5,000
- Greater than 5,000

How long have you been a member of the TAC?

- Less than 2 years
- 2 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- More than 10 years

How often does your TAC meet?

- 10+ times / year
- 6-9 times /year
- 5 or fewer times /year)
- Don't know

How often do you attend?

- Never
- Attend occasionally
- Attend about half of the meetings
- Attend most meetings

In your opinion, is the TAC meeting frequency

- too infrequent
- too often
- about right

How often do you engage with your RPC outside of TAC activities?

- Never
- Occasionally (1-3 times per year)
- Frequently (4 or more times per year)

How often do you report back to your community about TAC activities?

- Never
- Occasionally (1-3 times per year)
- Frequently (4 or more times per year)

Do you agree with the following statement?

“During the time that I have served on the TAC, the TAC influenced decisions about transportation policy and/or projects.”

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No Opinion/not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Are you satisfied with the amount of influence that the TAC has on the following areas? Choose 1 through 5, with 1 being not satisfied (i.e. not enough influence) and 5 being satisfied (i.e. the TAC has a reasonable influence). Select "n/a" if the TAC has not considered that topic.

State Policies	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Regional Policies	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
VTrans Project Priorities	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Project Design Decisions	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Road / Highway Projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Bridge Projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Bicycle/Pedestrian/Streetscape	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Public Transit Projects / Services	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Freight Projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Rail Projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Aviation Projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Travel Demand Management Projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Park and Ride	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

What are the most important benefits that participation on the TAC brings to your organization or municipality? Rank the following 1 through 5, with 1 being not important and 5 being very important. Chose "n/a" if the item does not pertain to you/your TAC.

Knowledge of upcoming transportation projects	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Information on funding opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Access to Technical Assistance	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Awareness of emerging issues	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Technical information that pertains to your community	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Input on project prioritization	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Getting projects completed successfully	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Advocacy for local projects and funding	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Assistance on funding requests or applications for the town	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Opportunity for conversation with knowledgeable people from State, RPC and other towns	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

Other _____ 1 2 3 4 5 n/a

What is your overall level of satisfaction with the TAC? Choose 1 if you are not satisfied, and 5 if you are highly satisfied.

1 2 3 4 5 n/a

Consider your participation on the TAC within the past 3 years to answer the following questions:

- a) What is the most successful action or accomplishment of the TAC?
- b) What have you found most rewarding about participating in the TAC?
- c) What have you found most frustrating or disappointing about participating in the TAC?
- d) What suggestions do you have for making your TAC participation more rewarding and productive?
- e) Do you have a clear understanding of the TAC's role in the region and state?
- f) What motivated you to participate on the TAC? (job, interest in a specific project or issue, other, elected)
- g) What other topics would you like to see the TAC address?

TAC Survey Results Summary

TAC Survey Results Summary

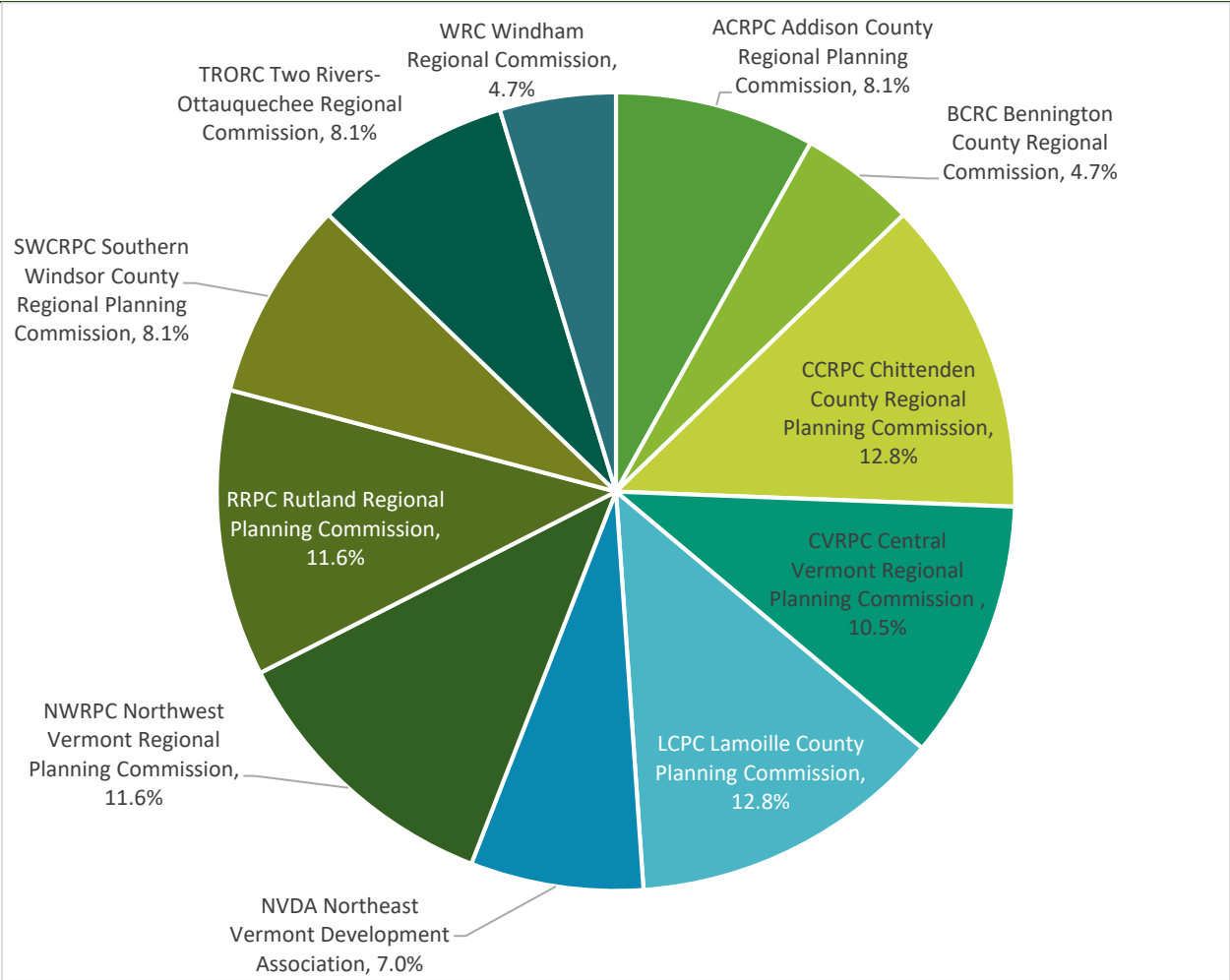


Figure 8: Survey Participation by RPC

Demographics

- 88 responses to survey
- 85% of TAC respondees represent municipalities
- Roles are primarily Staff, Elected Officials or appointed board members.
- Size of Community Represented
 - Less than 1000 – 20%
 - 1000-2499 – 36%
 - 2500-5000 – 19%
 - Greater than 5000 – 24%
- Members are equally split in terms of the amount of time they have been on the TAC.

Meetings, etc.

- 60% of TACs meet more than 10 times per year, 30% 6-9 times.
- Nearly 78% attend most meetings.
- 94% of respondents felt that the number of meetings were “about right.”
- Almost 57% frequently (more than 4 times per year) engage with their RPC outside of the TAC.
- 55% frequently report back to their communities. Almost 38% do so occasionally. Reporting is generally to the Selectboard or Town Staff.

Influence of TAC

- Over 81% of responses agree or strongly agree that the TAC influenced decisions about transportation policy or projects.
- With regard to the TAC’s influence, the following had a majority of Satisfactory ratings:
 - Regional Policies (76% satisfactory)
 - VTrans Project Priorities (57% satisfactory)
 - Road/Highway Projects (61% satisfactory)
 - Bridge Projects (62% satisfactory)
 - Park and Ride Projects (67% satisfactory)
- With regard to the TAC’s influence, the following had **less than** a majority of Satisfactory ratings:
 - State Policies (36% satisfactory)
 - Project Design Decisions (45% satisfactory)
 - Public Transit Projects (44% satisfactory)
 - Freight Projects (10% satisfactory)
 - Rail Projects (14% satisfactory)
 - Aviation Projects (14% satisfactory)
 - TDM Initiatives (21% satisfactory)
 - Bicycle/Pedestrian/Streetscape (49% satisfactory)

Importance of TAC

- Within the ranking of important benefits that participation on the TAC brings to an organization or municipality, there were a majority of rankings of “important.”
 - Most highly ranked (87%) was the “opportunity for conversations with knowledgeable people from State, RPC and other Towns.”
 - The lowest ranking was given to “advocacy for local projects and funding.”
- 76% of respondents indicated that they are satisfied (or highly satisfied) with the TAC. Only 10% were unsatisfied.
 - 40% of open answer comments were specifically positive.

- o Other themes included the need for better communication, particularly with VTrans, and the need for TACs to have more influence on project prioritization.