



## The Impact of Access to Transportation on Employment Amongst Vermont's Resettled Refugee Community: Understanding and Addressing a Complex Problem



A Group Project Completed for the Master of Public Administration Capstone Course at The University of Vermont

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## **I. Introduction**

On a cold Monday morning in early March, the United States Border Patrol stops a group of women who look out of place. In fact, they are lost, and although they have already traveled for 2 and-a-half hours on two different buses, they have still not reached their final destination: a day of paid work. This group of refugee women is attempting to commute from their homes in Chittenden County to a job site 30 miles away in an industrial park in St. Albans, Vermont. After exhausting the capabilities of public transportation, the willing workers were left to walk the remainder of the trip. That's when they were picked up by border patrol officers who kindly escorted them through the final leg of their journey.

Such were the details of a call received last month by an employment counselor at the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP), a call that happened to come during a meeting to discuss transportation barriers facing refugees seeking to access employment. It is in this context that we, a group of public administration graduate students, undertook an analysis of the issue. Initially, this project began with a very specific problem: lack of transportation to the Fort Ethan Allen Homestead for resettled refugees participating in the “New Farms for New Americans” program. However, as we dug deeper into this issue, gathered data, conducted stakeholder interviews, and identified key themes in our findings; our team quickly came to realize that this problem is much bigger than one location. Therefore, we expanded our scope to look at the problem of lack of mobility and impacts on employment for resettled refugees in the rural state of Vermont. We have sought to provide useful information and recommendations to support any current or new efforts underway to address transportation as a barrier to employment for refugees in Vermont. What follows is the result of these efforts.

## **II. Background**

Since 1989, when Vermont began reliably tracking data, the state has welcomed 6,131 refugees according to information provided by the State Refugee Coordinator. The State Refugee Coordinator's Office does not keep track of whether or not refugees remain in their communities after resettlement, though unofficial evidence suggests that the vast majority of these newcomers settle in Burlington and Winooski, or in other Chittenden County towns. The US Census Bureau estimates that of the 14,000 person population growth or 2.1% of Vermont's total population between 2000 and 2010, just over half has been due to migration, including over 4,300 immigrants from outside of the United States, the majority of whom are resettled refugees.

The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, a key actor in the refugee resettlement process, is the local field office of the national nonprofit, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), and is the only resettlement program currently operating in Vermont. VRRP is responsible for supporting refugees through the initial stages of the resettlement process and offers a wide array of services. It is the overarching goal of VRRP to help refugees to successfully adapt to life in the United States.

In collecting background information for this report, our group interviewed two members of the VRRP staff; Employment Counselor Alyssa Vingneault, who works with area businesses to secure employment for VRRP clients and assists refugees in taking their first steps towards economic self-sufficiency, and Program Coordinator Matt Thompson who oversees the Matching Grant, Wilson/Fish, and Reach Up programs administered by USCRI/VRRP and the State of Vermont. The interview provided, among other things, an overview of the refugee resettlement process in Vermont.

Refugees often enter their resettlement countries with significant gaps in employment and education, have often faced a variety of traumas, and are confronting a wide array of other challenges and difficulties. The US, Canada, and Australia are amongst the most active resettlement countries, and refugees generally resettle in Vermont because they have family, friends, or another community connection within the state. Without help or some system of support, Vermont's rural nature can make it a difficult place to resettle. Since resettlement began in Vermont in 1980, the main populations of refugee that have arrived are Bosnian, Vietnamese, Somali, Nepali, Burmese, Bhutanese, Karen, and Iraqi.

The first step when an individual or family arrives is for the housing manager to arrange a place for them to live. Every refugee goes through an intake process upon arrival during which their history is captured and things like education, language, and past experiences are assessed. Additionally, there are some cash assistance programs that refugees are eligible to enroll in right away. The first is the Reach Up program, a State/Federal match program administered by the State's Department for Children and Families (DCF) division. Reach Up is a State program available to low income families with young children, and it is not directly affiliated with the refugee resettlement process. It is funded by a State/Federal match formula and follows TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families) eligibility requirements. Two additional cash assistance programs, Wilson Fish and Matching Grant are available to assist refugees in the resettlement process, but they are short term in nature lasting for a maximum of 8 and 6 months respectively. Refugees are provided with a visa that allows them to begin working from the moment they arrive on US soil, which is different than many other types of visas. It is the overarching goal of all programs to assist refugees in gaining employment in order to become self-sufficient as soon as possible. VRRP offers assistance to refugees

in navigating the job market, and many refugees attend a 4-6 week orientation to employment workshop before they begin work.

### **III. Refugee Resettlement Agencies, Networks and Resources**

Refugee resettlement in Vermont is a collaborative process between various public, private, nonprofit, and community actors. While VRRP serves as the official resettlement program, other organizations provide important services as well. The State of Vermont supports a position of State Refugee Coordinator, housed within the Agency of Human Services (AHS). This is the only full time state government position focused on refugee issues. The Coordinator works across all state departments and agencies and with national, local and community partners to increase collaboration, foster the sharing of information, and maximize resources for the resettlement and successful integration of the refugees into Vermont. Specifically, the Coordinator implements the State Plan for Refugee Resettlement and oversees federal grants for refugee services. The Coordinator also chairs the Refugee and Immigrant Service Providers Network (RISPNet) of Chittenden and Washington counties and the Limited English Proficiency Committee within AHS. RISPNet brings together key refugee and immigrant service providers on a regular basis to share resources and confront challenges facing the populations. Currently there are approximately 300 to 400 people on the RISPNet list serve meeting roughly every six weeks to share information and best practices.

Another important provider of services to the refugee community is the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV). AALV was formed over seven years ago as a way for the small Vermont African community to get together and discuss the challenges of being in the United States. Over time, AALV grew into a small social service agency with full-time staff, and in 2009 began serving refugees from any population in Vermont. AALV receives partial funding from the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, Vermont's AHS, and the United Way of Chittenden County. Through its growth, the organization has emerged as an important service provider for refugees in the State of Vermont.

Another group working to address issues for refugees is Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS). Their mission is to address business-staffing needs by helping to place qualified workers who face challenges entering or reentering the workforce. They are part of the Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation, a group that originally served as a liaison between private sector employers and skilled workers with disabilities, but has grown to include networks of professionals who work to ensure meaningful and appropriate employment for all members of the community. CWS holds

meetings twice a month for service providers and employers to come together and share their “leads and needs” and other information related to serving clients who face challenges to employment. Because transportation is such a prevalent barrier to employment, CWS formed a “transportation subgroup” in order to find viable solutions across multiple agencies and institutions.

#### **IV. The Employment Picture**

According to our interview with VRRP staff, there are a number of employers that consistently hire refugees in Vermont, but many of them are difficult to access because of transportation barriers. The jobs tend to fall into three sectors: hospitality, manufacturing/production and agriculture. Because these are the very first jobs immediately following resettlement in Vermont, they tend to be entry level, low skilled positions requiring little or no English language proficiency. These jobs provide an opportunity for this population to establish and develop a domestic work history and earn an income while adjusting to the language and culture.

Hospitality sector jobs, especially in hotels and restaurants, provide a good fit for employers and refugees. Refugees provide a reliable workforce in an industry that otherwise has a high turnover rate. Positions such as dishwasher or housekeeper require limited English proficiency, work history or training. Through stakeholder interviews we learned that the Hilton Burlington has a zero turnover rate for its refugee employees. Other key employers in this sector include: The Farmhouse Group of restaurants (the Farmhouse Tap & Grill, El Cortijo Taqueria and Guild & Company Steakhouse), Holiday Inn Express, the Inn at Shelburne Farms, and the Courtyard by Marriott Burlington Harbor. Many of these establishments are located either in downtown Burlington or on Williston and Shelburne Roads in South Burlington, and are generally both accessible to bikes and pedestrians, and are served by public transit. That said a significant challenge persists even for those locations that are accessible by public transportation, as many early morning and late night work shifts fall outside the bus schedule. The Inn at Shelburne Farms is accessible by bus from Shelburne Road to Harbor Road only. Workers must then bike or walk the two miles from Shelburne Road to the Inn. In particularly bad weather Shelburne Farms will send a van down Harbor Road to pick up employees who have been dropped off by the bus. Vermont ski resorts also represent good employment opportunities for refugee workers, but face greater challenges with transportation access.

Production and manufacturing jobs are also available to refugees through direct employment or temporary job placement agencies. However, many of these opportunities are located in outlying areas that lack bus service, pedestrian and bike

access. Even within Chittenden County, there are many employers that are very difficult to access without a car. Further complicating the matter is that in addition to the problem of early morning and late night shifts that start and end outside of the bus schedule, the bus routes are not always designed to reach key employers. One such example is Lane Press, a printing company located at Meadowland Drive off Hinesburg Road in South Burlington. Lane Press has made a commitment to hiring refugees, but their site is difficult to access via public transit. The CCTA bus goes by the location, but since there is no pull off and no cross walk, it is illegal for the bus to stop there. Autumn Harp is another big employer of refugees. They are a manufacturer of cosmetics and skincare products located off Route 15 in Essex Junction. According to our interview bus service will become available to this location in the future in part due to the work of Creative Workforce Solutions. Huber + Suhner, a manufacturer of components and systems for electrical and optical connectivity located in the same industrial area as Autumn Harp, also regularly employs refugees. Further examples include employers located on Tilley Drive in South Burlington and Hurricane Lane in Williston.

Outside Chittenden County producers and manufacturers are even harder to access. One particularly problematic area is the Arrowhead Industrial Park located one mile from exit 18 off I-89 in Georgia, where employers such as PBM Nutritionals, a maker of infant formulas, baby cereals and toddler foods, remain inaccessible by public transportation. Another additional area is the St. Albans Town Industrial Park where employers such as Peerless Clothing International and Ben & Jerry's are located. St. Albans is accessible from Burlington on a limited schedule via the CCTA LINK Express to Highgate Commons or Collins Perley Arena, however the buses do not go directly to the industrial park sites. Furthermore, employers in Plattsburgh, NY have reached out to VRRP, but barriers such as lack of access to and from the ferry on both sides of Lake Champlain and the price prohibitive cost of ferry travel are difficult to overcome. In order to provide labor to these businesses, temporary employment agencies have implemented their own solutions to transportation access such as paying drivers to provide transportation to refugees. In one case, an employer was even willing to pay for the cost of the ferry and gasoline in order to have access to a reliable workforce.

Agriculture is another sector that has opportunities available for the employment of refugee workers, but the challenges of reaching industrial areas outside the population centers of Chittenden County are even more magnified when applied to rural dairy farms that are impossible to reach without a car and offer even fewer opportunities for carpooling and ridesharing. That said, there has been some successful employment of refugees at Mazza's in Colchester and a berry farm in Charlotte during the harvest season.

## V. The Transportation Picture

Currently, the transportation options available to the refugee community include the following resources and challenges:

**Personal Automobile:** Individual car ownership is not a viable option for many refugees. While some refugees may come to Vermont with an international driver's license, most do not, and it is necessary for them to go to work before they can get a license. Refugees oftentimes do not have enough money to purchase a car, lack credit history to obtain a loan, and may have difficulty affording insurance and registration. Some refugees pool money with relatives to buy a car. Many refugees who have been in the U.S. longer do in fact purchase cars and get licenses, but mechanical problems, bad winter weather conditions, speeding tickets, and different work schedules can make carpooling an unreliable option. Car ownership is a solution to the employment access problem, but it comes with its own set of challenges.

Personal automobiles are available to some members of the refugee community through Good News Garage. Good News Garage is a program of Lutheran Social Services whose mission is to "create economic opportunity by providing affordable and reliable transportation options for people in need." Good News Garage repairs many donated cars in order to provide them to low-income individuals and families in need. While some refugees have received vehicles through Good News Garage, due to funding limitations, this service is currently only available to individuals on Reach-Up.

**Chittenden County Transit Authority:** The Chittenden County Transit Authority provides bus service to Chittenden County and surrounding regions. Regular, fixed route service is primarily provided within the "core" of Chittenden County (Burlington, South Burlington, Essex/Essex Junction, and Williston). Morning, mid-day, and evening commuter service is provided to Milton. Morning and evening commuter service, referred to as LINK Express service, is provided to Middlebury, Montpelier, and Saint Albans. Additional LINK Express service to Jeffersonville is planned. Through CCTA's affiliate, Green Mountain Transit Authority, limited fixed route service is provided in the Saint Albans and Morristown/Stowe areas.

In general, CCTA provides adequate daytime service in the core of Chittenden County. However, many refugees are employed in jobs that require evening shifts outside of the regular bus schedule. Many of the employment opportunities available to refugees are located in areas not served by CCTA. In some cases, an area may be served by CCTA but involves a very long ride time. For example, several transfers are required to travel from Winooski, where many refugees live, to Williston, a community with employment opportunities in retail and hospitality. The transportation working group of Creative

Workforce Solutions has identified specific gaps and is working on expanding transit service to the following areas: Hurricane Lane in Williston, Saint Albans, Plattsburgh, NY, Lane Press in South Burlington, Tilley Drive in South Burlington, Autumn Harp in Essex Junction, Georgia/Milton and the ski resorts.

Unfortunately, many of these destinations do not have potential ridership volumes large enough to support regular bus service or were not developed in such a way that supports bus service. One example is that buildings are not connected by sidewalks, or are built at such low densities that walking from a bus stop to the final destination is impractical.

Refugees and others face a financial barrier to using CCTA services. An unlimited ride bus pass costs \$50/month for fixed route service, while LINK Express passes cost \$150/month. The Agency of Human Services does not provide individual subsidies for bus passes. Very few employers provide bus passes as a benefit of employment. CCTA provides about 300 free bus passes to select social and non-profit organizations through its Provide-a-Ride program.

**Taxi Service:** Private taxi service can provide access to employment in areas not within the CCTA service area. For example, a 14-passenger van operated by Morph Transit, a private taxi company, has been utilized to transport a group of refugees to jobs located in St. Albans. The cost of this service is \$90 per one-way trip. This cost must be paid by the workers themselves, as no public subsidies for taxi service are available. Unless a large group requires transportation to the same location at the same time on a consistent basis, this cost is prohibitively expensive for most refugees.

Another taxi service available in Chittenden County is Recession Ride. Recession Ride is a small, for-profit van service that offers rides to employment at discounted rates. Recession Ride operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Currently, Recession Ride only operates two vans, and demand for the service exceeds the company's capacity.

**Bike Recycle Vermont:** Bike Recycle Vermont (BRV) is a non-profit bike shop located in the Old North End of Burlington. BRV began in 2004 as the result of a request by the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program to provide a Somali refugee family with four bicycles for basic transportation. Today, BRV operates out of shop space provided by the Good News Garage. BRV accepts donated bikes, organizes volunteers to refurbish them, and then provide the refurbished bicycle to low-income Vermonters. BRV also provides free and low cost bike locks and helmets. Volunteers between the ages of 8 to eighteen who volunteer at the shop for more than 10 hours also receive a free bicycle. Access to bicycles can allow refugees and other transit dependent Vermonters to



access employment opportunities located outside of the regular CCTA service area. Of course, only individuals who are physically able to operate a bicycle are able to benefit from this service. In addition, distance and lack of appropriate infrastructure, such as bike lanes or paths, limits the areas that can be accessed using this mode of travel.

**Go Vermont:** Go Vermont is an online resource that provides information about alternative transportation modes to the single occupancy automobile. The site contains information about bus routes, biking or walking, and other transportation alternatives. Go Vermont resources include a free carpool matching service, a map of park and rides, and tips for ride sharing. It will provide financial support for larger groups to develop vanpools. Go Vermont offers a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH), a benefit for registered carpoolers who rideshare at least two days per week. If a user faces an unforeseen change of plans such as a work-related or family emergency, GRH will reimburse travel fees up to \$70. Users are entitled to use this benefit up to six times each year, but not more than twice in a single month.

Go Vermont is primarily focused on the environmental and economic benefits of reducing the use of single occupancy vehicles and focuses on individuals and groups for whom carpooling is a choice rather than a necessity. Refugees in particular face specific barriers to utilizing this service. For example, the cost of a vanpool is about \$1,000 per month or \$100/person/month for a group of ten. A vanpool requires at least two designated drivers, both of whom have a 5-year clean driving record, insurance, and a good credit history. This disqualifies many new refugees from being vanpool drivers. Go Vermont also strongly recommends that carpool drives carry insurance. This too disqualifies many refugees. Finally, the service is operated through the Internet, making it difficult for individuals without Internet access to use. The site also requires high proficiency in English, which creates an additional challenge for the refugee population.

**Go Chittenden County:** Go Chittenden County is similar to Go Vermont but focuses directly on Chittenden County. Go Chittenden County includes a hotline to address Commuter Challenges and will work with employers to develop custom easy-to-implement multimodal transportation programs. Use of the site requires Internet access and high proficiency in English

**Vermont Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan:** The Vermont Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan (HSTCP) was developed by the Vermont Agency of Transportation in response to requirements for Federal funding found in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). At minimum, the HSTCP is required to address the specific needs of the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals. The Plan is divided into

chapters focused on the needs and issues faced by each Vermont County. These chapters focus primarily on existing services and available or needed infrastructure. For each county, the target populations remain largely the same, the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals. The Chittenden County chapter makes no reference to refugees or non-English speakers despite the concentration of these populations in Burlington and Winooski. Further, while several human service providers are mentioned in the Plan, it is unclear if they were consulted while the Plan was developed.

**Chittenden County Regional Plan (ECOS Plan):** The Chittenden County Regional Plan is developed every five years by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. The Regional Plan serves as a guiding document for development in Chittenden County. The Plan also identifies key policies and issues related to the transportation network. These policies are then used to prioritize transportation projects. The Plan contains a single reference to the County's growing refugee population:

2.5.3 TRANSPORTATION Key Issues/Trends/Insights: Some population segments –youth, the elderly, minorities, refugees, and the poor – lack access to viable public and private transportation options. The lack of safe, reliable, and complete connections within the transportation system and between transportation modes reduces access to employment, social, economic, and recreation.

**Vermont Public Transit Policy Plan:** The PTPP is developed every five years by the State of Vermont. The most recent Plan was developed in 2012. The PTPP provides policy level direction to help guide transit investments. The Plan includes a Gap Analysis. While refugees are not specifically mentioned in the Plan, the lack of transportation options for transit dependent populations, people who do not have access to a car, is noted as a gap. The Plan was developed by the Vermont Public Transportation Advisory Committee. The Committee included a representative from the Vermont Agency of Human Services.

## **VI. The Case for Transportation Access to Employment**

We believe that it is important to note the impact that this problem has on Vermont's economy. Vermont's population is one of the oldest in the nation, and its birth rate is declining. Given this demographic shift, Vermont businesses will continue to face a challenge to fill entry-level and low-skill jobs with a reliable and dedicated workforce. The need for this workforce is documented within the Long-Term Occupational Projections 2010 - 2020 report released by the State of Vermont Department of Labor,

Economic and Labor Market Information in April 2013 and included at the end of this document. This report is an important source of data that addresses economic, employment and workforce trends in the state by identifying growth or decline in occupations, expected job openings, current wage levels, and education and training requirements. These projections are based on historical and current data and focus on economic impacts on the job market over time.

In order to assess the employment opportunities projected for the refugee community, we focused on the data filtered by: typical education needed for entry, work experience in related occupation, and typical on-the-job training to attain competency in the occupation. We utilized the results for Burlington and South Burlington Metropolitan NEATA, which includes all of Chittenden and Grand Isle and parts of Franklin and Addison counties, as we found that this is the geographic area most impacted by employment access to transportation for the refugee community. The filtered results are included at the end of this document.

Based on the projections Vermont will continue to have a need for unskilled labor through 2020 including over 500 openings in production/manufacturing, hospitality and other areas, and members of the refugee community provide a dependable and reliable labor force and are sought after by employers because of their work ethic, low turnover rate and willingness to work. However, the current transportation system is not reliable, affordable and accessible enough to get people to work.

## **VII. From Beginning to End: Outcome of Our Study**

When we started this project, we were presented with the following problem statement:

*The Fort Ethan Allen Homestead at the Winooski Valley Park District provides a site for gardening and farming activities for refugees during the summer. Getting there, however, is quite an obstacle. In both cases while there are clear ways to get there either by car or bike, the users in question are almost all over the age of 55 and in many cases (certainly the farmers) return bearing tools and goods. At present VNA hires a bus twice a week (2 times a day) for \$200 while NFNA has a cargo van and driver to ferry people 15 at a time down to the farm (there are 45 participants). A more optimum and cost-effective solution needs to be found to support these important activities that provide both economic opportunity and significant supplementary food for families.*

With this as our starting point, we began by researching Ethan Allen Homestead and New Farms for New Americans. We were quickly introduced to the transportation challenges faced by community members seeking access to the Homestead, and

impressed by the creative problem solving and resource sharing between NFNA and other groups using the site. It soon became evident, though, that lack of public transport, lack of sidewalks, and distance between such resources and actual work sites were not problems unique to this location; transportation to employment is a common problem for refugees. With this understanding, we broadened our focus to address the general problem of transportation as a barrier to employment for refugees.

## **VIII. Observations, Opportunities and Recommendations**

The need for collaboration appeared as a recurring theme during our research into this issue. Our interview with the Program Coordinator of New Farms for New Americans introduced us to the ways service organizations are working together to pool resources when they identify a shared need. Our conversation with the Employment Counselor at VRRP and with the State Refugee Coordinator highlighted the networks already in place to address the employment related challenges of the refugee community. Attending a CWS meeting and engaging in discussions with stakeholders highlighted key gaps in these collaborative networks. Transportation access to employment is not a single agency or organization's issue, but it is a statewide problem facing individuals, employers, transportation providers, state agencies, and social service providers.

In order to better address the challenges of transportation access to employment we recommend the following:

1. A representative from the Agency of Transportation, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Agency of Human Services Department for Children and Families, and the Department of Labor should actively participate in a system-wide initiative to improve transportation access to employment for all Vermonters. Involvement from these agencies is critical to developing long-term solutions. We found that some were not routinely present in current collaborative efforts, if they were involved at all.
2. Many State and local permitting processes including Act 250 do not consider transportation issues beyond the automobile. Amending the permitting process to consider pedestrians and transit and to provide incentives such as reduced parking requirements to developers who design their sites to accommodate other users would help to address this issue. State transportation investment highly favors the automobile. Other forms of transportation are listed in many State transportation documents as alternatives. Unfortunately, for many refugees and others walking, biking, or taking the bus to work are not alternatives; they are the only means of transportation available. Currently basic pedestrian infrastructure

including sidewalks are considered amenities by Vtrans and often are not included in transportation projects.

3. Increase collaboration between Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) and State Agencies, and utilize the planning process as an opportunity to foster cross-sector collaboration and better coordinate with refugee service providers during plan development. Recognize growing refugee population and the unique barriers faced by this population, and include the refugee population in state and regional transportation planning. Remember that transportation alternatives including public transit, walking and biking are the only option for people without access to automobiles.
4. When the Vermont Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan is updated in the future, Vtrans should make additional efforts to coordinate the Plan development with human service agencies. The Target Population should be broadened to include refugees and non-English speakers, especially for Chittenden County. This would provide an opportunity for transportation planners to become more integrated with human service networks, such as the monthly Creative Workforce Solutions meetings.
5. The Chittenden County Regional Plan is updated every 5-8 years. The Plan was most recently updated in 2012/2013. As noted above, the Plan contains only a very limited discussion of the County's refugee population. Given that much of Vermont's refugee population resides in Chittenden County, a more thorough discussion seems warranted. This is particularly important since the plan is used to guide the use of transportation and community development funds in the County.
6. A more robust planning process that considers the refugee population may reveal opportunities to reorient or better coordinate existing resources. For example, could the Go Vermont and Go Chittenden sites be used to identify people who would be willing to provide refugees rides to and from work? Could such volunteer drivers be given "incentives" similar to regular carpool drivers using the site? Are there ways to expand CCTA's "Provide-a-Ride" program?
7. Several organizations focus on planning, development, and advocacy regarding transportation or employment. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) specifically notes transportation planning, economic development, and planning for a healthy, prosperous, and sustainable community among its priorities. The United Way of Chittenden County, through its Champlain Initiative, works to address multi-sector challenges by identifying

long-term solutions. The Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce (LCRCC) and Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) are business-focused organizations that advocate for the needs of business and foster an ethic of responsibility for the community. There is an opportunity here to strengthen or initiate more collaborative relationships with representatives from the CCRPC, the Champlain Initiative, the LCRCC and VBSR to advocate for inclusion of transportation access to employment in regional and strategic planning efforts.

8. Consider transportation access a central economic development and workforce development issue to be addressed through employer education and engagement with business networks playing a leadership role in driving the campaign to increase awareness of the issues and advocate for policy change in local communities and in the legislature. Groups such as the Regional Development Corporations (RDCs), Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), local and statewide chambers of commerce, as well as other business associations including VBSR can take the lead in raising the profile of the issues as well as working with the legislature to find business-friendly solutions and incentives like tax credits for decreasing use of single passenger vehicles and increased access to public transit.
9. Viable employer-based solutions could include implementing strategies for transportation demand management by providing resources and incentives for carpooling or ridesharing, offering free or reduced access to public transit or joining CarShare Vermont.
10. Identify grant funding sources that would allow private sector or non-profit organizations to fill the gaps in transportation access by expanding existing programs or creating new programs to meet the needs of our diverse and changing workforce.
11. Finally, it is the public sector most broadly that determines the makeup of infrastructure, including transit routes. CCTA routes are supported in part by local property taxes, and extending routes to areas or communities without service will require investment from local taxpayers. Alternative means of financing may be required to extend service to the areas of identified need listed in the report above. In addition to funding sources, communities will need to find the political will to prioritize transportation access among other competing priorities and limited resources available.

It is clear that lasting solutions require a cross-sector, collaborative approach. Transportation access to employment is a systems issue that requires better coordination between human service agencies, planning agencies, VTTrans, workforce development/economic development organizations as well as the private sector, local communities and employers. Each idea and recommendation presented here is meant to support such an approach.

## **IX. Going Forward**

The problem of mobility in rural Vermont is bigger than one organization or one population. This transportation, labor, and social welfare issue is present in all low income and limited mobility populations. The number of state and non-profit agencies, employers, and community organizations involved in providing transportation-related services demonstrates the scope of the challenge to find solutions. In addition to our previously recommended collaborations, we see an opportunity going forward to connect with existing climate change mitigation efforts regarding transportation. The innovative solutions sought by one sector may well serve the other, and joint problem solving holds the promise of expanding the scope of thinking by all involved.