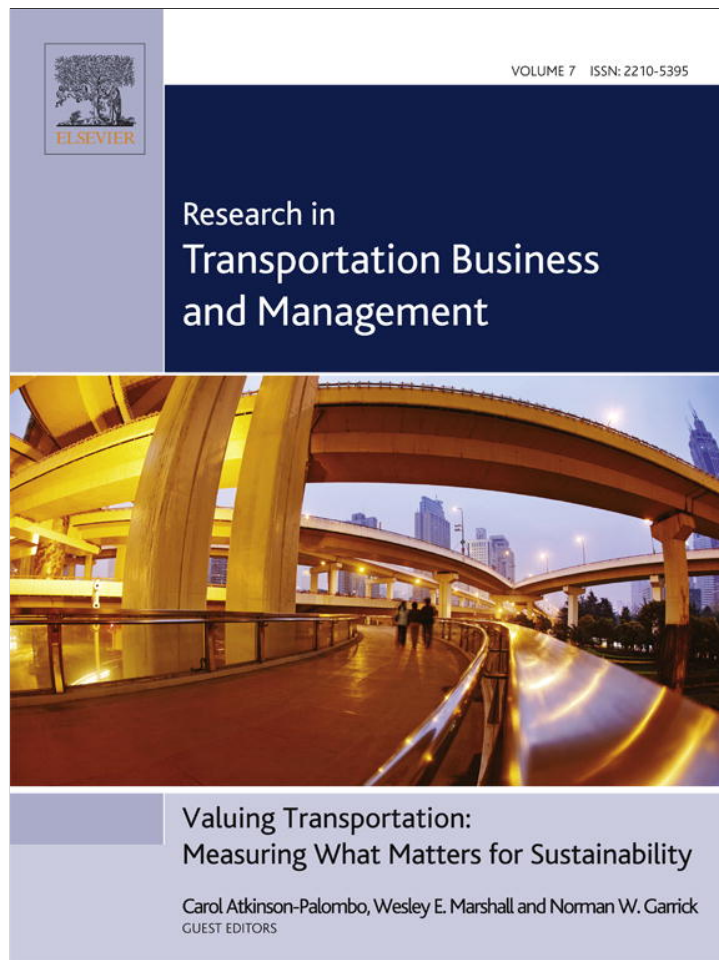


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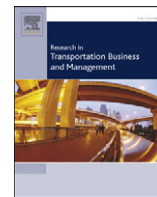
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Building sustainable communities: Immigrants and mobility in Vermont

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ABSTRACT

The theory and practice of sustainability involve engaging a delicate balance between often competing interests, usually defined in terms of the ecological, economic, and social arenas. The complexities apparent in balancing such tensions become especially evident if we consider transportation equity, specifically in the context of urban planning and managing both population growth and demographic change. This paper examines issues of access, transportation, and sustainability – in its myriad forms – for refugees settling in Vermont. With relatively homogenous populations and a lack of resettlement services common to many traditional immigrant destinations, small towns in Vermont present a particular challenge for refugees arriving from diverse locations in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Drawing on the extant literature regarding sustainable transportation, spatial mismatch, accessibility, and environmental justice, this paper details the results of a community-based project using surveys and key informant interviews in order to explore the transportation experiences and challenges faced by refugees in Vermont. In particular, the paper looks at gaps that refugees have identified in existing infrastructure as well as modes and hierarchies of transportation choice. Additionally, the paper examines the attempt to include refugee perspectives in regional transportation planning initiatives, including one county's federally supported sustainable communities plan.

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1. Introduction

The issues of equity and access in transportation have long been recognized as central to those concerned with environmental and social justice. From bus boycotts and freedom riders during the Civil Rights movement in the US through more recent social movements regarding transit planning and sustainable development, to ongoing policy debates on mobility, lifestyle, and civic engagement, transportation has emerged as a key site of struggle, engagement, and opportunity for diverse communities, planners, and policymakers alike. This paper focuses on one of the major arenas in which some of these debates play out: the planning of future urban growth and the role of both evolving transportation systems and the changing national demographic. In particular, it builds on a critical analysis of mobility by examining questions of transportation equity and access for newcomers to Vermont—in particular the refugees and immigrants who have emerged as a new source of population growth and demographic change within a primarily rural and traditionally racially homogenous state in the northeastern part of the US. What does sustainable transportation mean for such communities? How do we understand the tensions and competing demands between the various components of the sustainability model – economic, ecological and social – in the context of an immigrant population and its particular mobility needs? What aspects of their daily lives, acculturation process and longer-term

community development are being (or need to be) sustained and how? In what ways might policymakers at various levels, urban planners and transportation managers respond to or anticipate such needs?

This paper examines such questions in several parts. It begins with a review of the concept of sustainability and more specifically of sustainable transportation. It draws in particular on the extant literature on transportation equity, environmental justice, and spatial mismatch for this discussion. The paper then introduces the context of the case study by providing background on migration to Vermont and the transportation concerns of refugees in general. The next section describes a community-based survey of refugees regarding their mobility options and needs. This is followed by a section describing some of the key issues and challenges that are highlighted by this research and what these might tell us about what sustainable transportation means for these types of populations. The final two sections of the paper describe the implications of such findings for longer term transportation planning and management as well as for those concerned with the issues of mobility and equity. In particular, the paper describes the attempt by a DOT-HUD-EPA-funded Sustainable Communities Project to address the concerns of refugees in Vermont as it engages in the process of planning a sustainable future for the state's most diverse and densely populated county.

2. Sustainability and sustainable transportation

Sustainability is in many ways a battered – if still widely applied – concept. The Brundtland Commission's credo to use resources wisely,

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preserving them for generations yet to come while maintaining the possibilities for present and future growth (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) has long come under fire from multiple perspectives. For advocates of sustainability the concept was meant to capture the wealth of possibility offered by bringing together the economic, ecological and social spheres. But for many critics 'sustainability' in practice has been little more than a buzzword used to justify continued urbanization, sprawl, growth and economic development with a concomitant degradation of the biophysical world (Sachs, 1999). For others it has provided cover for maintaining current destructive practices with little more than a superficial nod to changing environmental behaviors (Shiva, 2005). On the other hand to others the concept represents a significant constraint on economic growth and a distraction from more secure financial futures. From yet another perspective sustainability is problematic because it does not adequately address redistributive or reparative justice issues and instead privileges a narrowly construed environmental agenda over social issues such as poverty and gender- or race-based disparities (Deka, 2004; Merchant, 2003; Pulido, 2000).

When it comes to the issue of transportation, sustainability has often been framed in ways that similarly prioritize the balancing of ecological and economic considerations with a focus on technological innovation. As Bae points out "[definitions] of the concept of sustainable transportation vary, but most examples allude to reduced automobile dependence, more public transit and more reliance on non-motorized modes" (Bae, 2004: 363). The environment being sustained in this case is the physical environment in terms of mitigating and reducing the effects of such factors as air pollution, noise pollution, and water quality. Such measures are always put into the context of questioning the affordability of environmental measures—can the economy be sustained with constraints to growth placed upon it? If a social component is addressed at all, the discussion often revolves around issues of 'livability'—leisure, health, and distance to amenities. The primacy of economic logic in all such approaches to sustainability can perhaps best be embodied by the notion of 'smart growth,' that advocates the development of compact cities, urban intensification and a transit- and non-motorized-oriented transportation infrastructure (Duany, Speck, & Lydon, 2009). Such a view does not necessarily challenge the fundamental need for growth but rather suggests a more efficient way to do it. Moreover, as the academic literature suggests, such approaches also tend to flatten out the realities of economic, racial and other disparities within the communities and countries that are the subjects of the sustainable development debate:

"Social equity has not received much attention in the sustainable development movement or smart growth dialogue. In fact, much of the smart growth dialogue, meetings, and action agendas have only marginally involved people of color, the working class, and low-income persons. In short, the emerging smart growth movement is missing the rich ethnic and economic diversity that characterizes many central cities, suburbs, metropolitan regions, and the nation...[race] and equity issues routinely get left out of national transportation and smart growth dialogue or are tagged on as an afterthought. Smart growth discussions take place as if America was a colorblind or race-neutral nation."

[(Bullard, Johnson, & Torres, 2004a,b: 183–185)]

For such critics, a more appropriate lens to adopt rather than that of smart growth may be that of social justice and equity.

2.1. Transportation equity

Much of the existing literature on transportation equity has focused on the key themes of access, mobility, participation, decision-making, and utility. Who pays and who benefits from the transportation infrastructure in societies? Who bears the cost of new highways

and bridges, who pays the price for diminished public transit services, and who reaps the rewards of expensive metro-rail lines? Such questions have for many years concerned regional and urban planners as well as politicians, neighborhood activists, and many others. Issues of equity and transportation have often revolved around the question of social exclusion—in which members of a given society are excluded from full and vibrant participation because of their lack of access to services such as public transit (Clifton & Lucas, 2004; Lucas, 2004a; Lucas, 2006; Lyons, 2004). Others have examined the examples of various world cities in terms of transit use (Cervero, 1998) and urban transportation planning (Loo & Chow, 2006; Lucas, 2004a; Vuchic, 1999) through the lens of livability and social as well as environmental sustainability, including the contexts of smaller European cities and their transportation modeling vis-à-vis marginalized communities.

In the US, discussions of transportation equity have a lengthy and distinguished history alongside the rise of environmental justice, civil rights, and anti-racism movements, primarily in urban centers (Bullard et al., 2004b; Deka, 2004; Hanson & Guiliano, 2004). There are two main trajectories that the relevant literature has followed. The first examines the question of displacement and the negative impact of certain transportation planning decisions upon specific communities. Such work has looked at, for example, the way that interstate highways, roads, bridges, and subways have often cut through and had disastrous consequences for low-income or racialized communities (Dluhy, Revell, & Wong, 2002; Forkenbrock & Schweitzer, 1999; Freilla, 2004). A related set of studies has focused on urban decay as a corollary of so-called "White Flight" to the suburbs (Herman, 2005; Thabit, 2003). The impacts of this process include an increase in sprawl, intensification of reliance upon the personal automobile, and – along with other factors – a continuation of racial segregation in the US (Brodtkin, 2000; Roediger, 2005).

2.2. Spatial mismatch and social justice

One of the major outcomes of residential segregation – enabled as much in the US during the twentieth century by the construction of highways as by notorious practices such as exclusionary covenants, blockbusting and redlining – has been profound impacts on marginalized communities in terms of access and utility of transportation systems. In the 1960s the spatial mismatch hypothesis based on studies such as Kain (1968) argued that jobs had followed middle-class white populations to the suburbs while African-American populations remained trapped in hyper-urbanized concentrations in inner-cities. Similar studies have shown that such trends continue and that in order to reach their jobs (primarily in the service sector), African-Americans and other marginalized groups have been forced to undertake so-called 'reverse commutes' from central cities to the suburbs (Kennedy, 2004). Indeed, this phenomenon has been so widely recognized as to have federal programs dedicated to addressing the need, such as the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC) administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) (Cervero, 2004).

Despite such shifts in employment opportunities vis-à-vis spatial settlement patterns, urban and transportation planning – and infrastructure development – have not generally been responsive to such trends. Instead, as community groups have long argued, much of urbanization in the twentieth century US has been marked by an intensification of transportation inequity. Notable examples of such activism include the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union challenge to the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority (Mann, 2004; Ramsey, 2000), and transit activism in Pittsburgh (Nogrady & King, 2004) and Baltimore (Menzer & Harmon, 2004). In such cases, community organizers have questioned the disinvestment in public transit serving poorer neighborhoods or for more heavily racialized sections of the city, often while large-scale, capital-intensive projects such as commuter rail service are simultaneously extended to mainly white and often affluent suburbs. Similar studies have noted the clear

connections between transportation reliability and economic self-sufficiency (Garasky, Needles & Jensen, 2006; Jacobsen, 2005) and socialization (Miller & Rasco, 2004; Shen Ryan, 1992). This line of analysis and critique suggests that those who advocate 'smart growth' and less-automobile-centric modes of regional development would therefore be wise to avoid planning that reinforces transportation racism and entrenches existing inequities (Bullard et al., 2004a; Haynes, Gifford & Pelletiere, 2005; Schweitzer & Valenzuela, 2004).

The academic and community-based concerns regarding transportation equity have been reflected to varying degrees within the policy-making realm in the United States. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), for example, lists "mobility" as one of its key objectives in its strategic planning:

It is our obligation to ensure that transportation is not only safe and efficient, but that it is also accessible. Transportation must be within reach of all Americans, including those with low incomes, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Where barriers to accessibility exist, we will seek to eliminate them.

[(DOT, 2010)]

Similarly, the FTA has an office of Civil Rights and Accessibility dedicated to the issue of "ensuring non-discriminatory, equitable, accessible and safe public transportation, enhancing the social and economic quality of life for all Americans" (FTA, 2010). Indeed, "affordable mobility" is one of the key priorities of the FTA, and "mobility is the right of every American" (FTA, 2010). Given such a regulatory context how equitable and accessible is transportation for marginalized (or potentially 'at-risk') communities within states such as Vermont?

3. The study site: Refugees in Vermont

According to the US Census Bureau, Vermont ranks 49th amongst US states in population and is also the second whitest state (after Maine), with over 96% of the population listed as white (US US Census Bureau, 2010a). The US Census Bureau also estimates that of the 2.1% population growth (approximately 14,000 people) since the 2000 Census, just over half of that number consists of migration into the state, including over 4300 immigrants from outside of the US, the majority of whom are part of the refugee resettlement program (US US Census Bureau, 2010b).

Refugees have been arriving in Vermont since the 1980s, mirroring in many ways the national resettlement patterns seen across the US. This has meant successive waves of resettlement including Southeast Asians during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Central Europeans and refugees from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s, and various African groups from approximately 2000 onward (Portes & Rumbaut, 2008), with some overlap between the various groups and their arrival periods. The largest refugee populations currently residing in Vermont are Bosnians and Vietnamese, with significant numbers of Somali Bantu, Congolese, Sudanese, Meskhetian Turks, Burundians, Iraqis, Bhutanese, and Burmese also present (VRRP, 2012). The last three groups represent the most recent intake to arrive in large numbers since 2008. Examining the resettlement patterns in Vermont more closely gives a sense of some of the specific challenges newcomers in Vermont face. Additionally for service providers, accommodating such a diverse set of communities – with different cultural traditions, religious beliefs, histories, and languages – poses some difficulties, especially when in many cases very small numbers of a given group may be present.

While the absolute numbers of refugees in Vermont are small compared to states such as California, Texas, or New York, the program as a whole has had a significant and successful history, with over 5500 refugees settled since 1987, almost entirely in Chittenden County, in towns such as Burlington, Winooski, and Colchester (VRRP, 2012). Refugee resettlement in Vermont is operated jointly by the office of the State

Refugee Coordinator (Agency of Human Services, State of Vermont) and the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, a field office of the Washington, DC-based US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (one of the main domestic resettlement organizations in the country). These agencies provide direct support in the form of channeling federal financial assistance to refugees for up to 8 months and language and job training as well as employment assistance for up to five years. As noted above, Vermont is a microcosm of broader national priorities, with a mix of almost all the refugee communities seen across the US (with notable exceptions such as the Cuban population in Florida) and as such represents challenges as well as opportunities for both refugees and service providers in the resettlement process.

One of the main challenges is the fact that Vermont, as a primarily rural state without major cities of the size seen in other regions and with a demographically homogenous population, is not a traditional immigrant destination. In-migration has historically come from French Canadian communities to the north, as well as from England, Ireland, and other parts of the US. Thus, refugee resettlement programs cannot rely on the same institutions and organizations that have provided social services – housing, healthcare, language and job training, transportation, childcare, etc. – that immigrant networks and service providers have developed in 'gateway' cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Chicago (Herman, 2005; Singer & Wilson, 2007) or even many of the secondary destinations that have become prominent in the past decade such as Atlanta, Seattle, Nashville, and Detroit (Massey, 2008; Singer, Hardwick & Brettell, 2008).

Besides the major resettlement entities – VRRP and the State Refugee Coordinator's office – several new groups of varying size and structure have emerged in recent years to help provide these necessary services for newcomers including the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), the Somali Bantu Community Association of Vermont, and the Vermont Bhutanese Association, though some of these are more nascent than others. Through the course of this project the researchers found that given the limited support that service providers could draw upon, a great deal of both information and resource-sharing occurred between organizations in order to support refugees in their resettlement. AALV, for example, is committed to serving all refugees beyond their original African clientele and declares that it is "proud to be able to extend its experience in mutual assistance to newly arrived refugee groups" (AALV, 2012).

As well, many state and local agencies, while not dedicated solely to refugee issues, often have staff members whose primary responsibility is geared towards resettlement. Many of these service providers have come together in monthly meetings to discuss issues, share information, and support the resettlement efforts throughout the state. In these meetings, as well as in surveys, interviews, and reviews of news stories and the academic literature, transportation concerns emerged as a recurring theme for refugees. Time and again service providers, government officials, and community members themselves listed transportation, along with housing, employment, childcare, and healthcare as one of the primary issues for refugees in Vermont. As with other 'minority' or so-called 'at risk' populations—including low-income groups, senior citizens, and the physically challenged, questions of transportation access and mobility are paramount in the daily lives of immigrants and refugees (Adie, 2010; Blumenberg, 2008; Blumenberg & Smart, 2010; Roorda, Paez, Morency, Mercado, & Farber, 2009; Venter, 2009; Weiss, 2000). In order to get to new jobs, schools, hospitals, community centers, shopping and a raft of other services necessary to help them transition to their new lives, refugees must be able to travel in a timely and cost-efficient manner. Therefore this study sets out to examine the question of transportation equity for newcomers in Vermont, especially in light of the particularities of the state—the low levels of population density and urbanization, the lack of historical immigration, the cold weather climate, and the economic and cultural context of refugees.

The need to provide support and services to the growing refugee population in Vermont has been recognized at several levels. While

the absolute numbers of refugees in the state are small compared to some other receiving regions, as a percentage of the overall population Vermont stands as one of the most active host communities in the nation. Close to 350 refugees are received each year, with an overall population estimated at somewhere in the region of 5500 individuals, based primarily in Chittenden County (VRRP, 2012). Vermont has formally participated in the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program for over 25 years, with a state-level Refugee Coordinator helping to organize service provision across national, local and state agencies and arenas. Notable programs to help refugees with their transition process have included various language and translation services, education and training, and health care services such as the Vermont Department of Health's Refugee Health Program (VDOH, 2012) and the Vermont Micro Business Development Program of the Vermont Community Action Agencies (VMBDP, 2012), an initiative that has supported new business-creation initiated by refugees. However, transportation services and access for refugees – while widely recognized as a crucial part of the acculturation process amongst both service providers and the communities themselves – remain largely unaddressed. Indeed, on a national (or for that matter international) level, there are few programs and little in the way of academic literature that directly and systematically deals with the issues of transportation equity and access for refugee populations, although recent research on immigration and transit in California (Blumenberg & Smart, 2010) and New Jersey (Chatman & Klein, 2009) has made contributions to the overall examination of transportation and equity issues for newcomers.

For refugees arriving in Vermont and in the US more generally, the question of transportation is often broached in the broadest of terms. For example, the official guidebook provided by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the US Department of State prior to arrival informs newcomers that “public transportation varies from community to community” and, outside of the major cities, “is not easily available” (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2004). The majority of the guidebook's focus on transportation is indeed on car-ownership and licensing requirements, while refugees are advised to consult local resettlement agencies for assistance with accessing public transit and other modes of transportation. It is perhaps not to be unexpected therefore, that car ownership is a popular aspiration for many refugees, as the study results have shown. Those initiatives that have focused on public transit and refugees in Vermont have been few and somewhat ad-hoc, such as a summer-long program instituted during one particular year during which a staff member at VRRP worked with incoming Somali Bantu refugees to help familiarize them with bus schedules and routes.

4. Case study: Methodology and data collection

This study examined key issues through a two-year (2008–2010) participatory, action-oriented and qualitative study that included key informant interviews with both the service providers and members of various refugee communities to understand better the relationship between this population and transportation and mobility in Vermont. As well, researchers reviewed relevant literature at the local, national and international levels as well as analyzed important economic and demographic data as part of the analysis. The central empirical element of the study was a set of two surveys – the first conducted with a group of 32 service providers, and the second a community-based survey of 300 refugees – in order to more closely explore transportation access and mobility in the state of Vermont through the lens of environmental justice.

The survey instruments were created by first conducting key informant interviews with staff at refugee agencies, transportation planning bodies, community groups and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the study conducted anonymous, semi-structured interviews with 5 Vietnamese and 10 Bosnian former refugees in

order to understand their respective experiences with transportation issues during their own resettlement in Vermont. Potential interviewees were identified using snowball-sampling or respondent-driven methods common in ethnographic research, especially with ‘hidden’ or potentially marginalized communities (Browne, 2005). During this period the research team also began to build closer relationships with the three primary refugee service organizations in Vermont—the State Refugee Coordinator's office, AALV, and VRRP. In particular these organizations and the translators and interpreters who work for VRRP and AALV were able to provide substantive feedback on the design of a community-based survey on transportation and refugees so as to achieve greater community participation. Once the survey instruments were completed, data collection commenced.

For service providers the study focused on organizations that provided support for the 0–8 month and 8-month–5-year periods of resettlement. These surveys were circulated and filled out online. As is the case for Vermont in all areas of service provision for refugees, only a handful of organizations are solely dedicated to refugees, while the majority address the needs of multiple populations. Service providers included members of school boards, resettlement agencies, housing authorities, health services and clinics, social services, early childhood education programs, and municipal community development programs. The respondents reported the number of clients they serve ranging from as few as 5 to as many as 5000. Service providers in the survey reported supporting refugees in a number of ways including assistance with needs ranging from healthcare, language training, employment assistance, tax preparation, family services, interpretation and translation, education and outreach, advocacy, mental health, civic engagement, and for over 20% of respondents, transportation assistance.

The survey for community members was also made available online but was primarily filled out, due to language restrictions, in hard copy form with the assistance of staff translators at AALV and VRRP. A member of the research team was present during the filling out of the survey, which occurred either within the organization offices, a community center, or on multiple occasions, within the home of a refugee. While the overall population of refugees in Vermont numbers close to 5500, for the purposes of this survey the target population is closer to 2500 individuals, those refugees who have been resettled between 2001 and 2010.

Participation, as noted above, was limited to refugees resettled since 2000, primarily from several African and Asian communities. Particularly well represented in the survey are refugees from Bhutan, Iraq, Somalia, Burundi, Congo, Burma, and Sudan. 21.3% of respondents reported living in a household of 1–2 persons, 31.6% reported living in a household of 2–4 persons, and a majority, 47.2% reported living in a household of more than 4 persons. 73.3% of respondent households had children, 88.8% of respondent households had more than 1 adult, while 24.5% of respondent households included someone over the age of 65. A small number (13.7%) included persons with disabilities. The majority of survey respondents were age 25 and older. All survey respondents lived within Chittenden County, with a majority residing in either Burlington, Winooski, Colchester, South Burlington, or Essex/Essex Junction.

This context of relatively large families and relatively low-income coupled with the fact that federal financial assistance for newly resettled refugees lasts only 8 months, makes it clearly of paramount importance for refugees to gain a job as quickly as possible. 31.9% of respondents reported being employed full-time, while a further 23.5% reported being employed part-time. A significant number (22.5%) reported being unemployed, much higher than both national and state averages. The employment figures are potentially skewed, however, by the participation of newly arrived refugees who have not yet gone onto the job market and the particular circumstances of the economic recession which adversely affected job markets across the globe and was felt as keenly by refugees in Vermont as elsewhere in the world. In terms of language proficiency, roughly 34.1% of

respondents saw their English skills as basic or learning, while 21.2% considered their abilities to be satisfactory; these numbers necessitated the use of translators by the research team in order to carry out the survey.

Results of the surveys and overall project are being made available to the public and to the refugee communities and service providers through the creation of a project website, currently under development, while copies of this report are being made available to the research partners as well as other interested stakeholders.

5. Findings

Several key themes and issues emerged out of the interviews and each of the surveys. Discussed below these include travel needs, modes of travel, impact on work, impact on children and childcare, obtaining driver's licenses, impact on health, and identifying underserved locations.

5.1. Travel needs

For almost all of the service providers, some form of transportation assistance was an important part of their work with refugees, including:

- Providing rides for clients to and from appointments, work, and shopping
- Helping to learn bus schedules and the public transit system
- Assistance with obtaining taxi vouchers for medical appointments
- Teaching clients how to drive.

Indeed, for many of the service providers, transportation to and from various destinations appeared to be a pivotal role that they perform in the everyday life of refugees. In terms of travel times, service providers estimated that over half of their clients live between 15–30 min away from medical services and shopping, while 40% of their clients were more than 30 min away from work and/or school.

For refugees themselves, when asked how often they needed to travel away from their homes, 28.3% of respondents said once a day or less, 32.2% said twice a day, 23.7% said 5–10 times a week, and 15.9% said more than 10 times a week. Refugees were also asked what they considered their household's most important needs for transportation. The overwhelming majority (69.3%) replied commuting to school and work, while smaller numbers of respondents mentioned shopping and errands (14.4%), medical services (12.8%), and visiting friends and relatives (3.5%).

5.2. Modes of travel

In terms of travel options, a majority of service providers felt that their clients either took the bus (61.5%) or walked (30.8%) to their destinations, while a handful used a car (7.7%); none listed bicycling as a common mode of transportation for their clientele. When asked what would be the preferred mode of travel for their clients, service providers overwhelmingly (84.6%) answered "car", while a smaller number listed "bus" (15.4%) and none felt that either walking or bicycling would be desirable options. One service provider felt that "many refugees are willing to ride bicycles, but more accessible and safe bicycle lanes are necessary". Overall, service providers felt that a majority of their clients owned either a new or used car or wanted to do so.

The form of travel most used by refugees, according to the survey, is the bus, with 57.3% indicating that this as the most common mode of transportation, followed by car (23.8%), walking (16.4%) and bicycling (2.5%). Significant numbers of respondents – well over sixty percent – also replied that they were either very familiar or somewhat familiar with bus routes, schedules, and fares. Refugee participants were somewhat more mixed on the question of whether or not they would be comfortable with having their children ride the

bus alone—40.3% replied "yes" while 39.6% replied "no"; an additional 20.1% replied that this was not applicable to them.

The survey also asked refugee participants for their opinions on public transit in Vermont, given the heavy reliance of this population on the bus. The results received were mixed and somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, a significant number reported being "somewhat satisfied" (40.2%) or "very satisfied" (16.4%) while smaller numbers responded "somewhat dissatisfied" (27%) and "very dissatisfied" (16.4%). However, when asked what their preferred mode of travel would be, an overwhelming majority of respondents (80.9%) answered "car" (as opposed to 11.7% for bus, 5.3% for walking and a mere 2.1% for bicycling) confirming the impressions of service providers that car transport is indeed an aspiration for many of their clients.

Whatever their aspirations towards car ownership and use, however, the majority of refugees in Vermont still ride the bus. In the view of the service provider respondents, a majority of their clients are either somewhat or very familiar with the public transit system and with bus routes, schedules and fares in particular. Refugees had many reasons for NOT choosing the bus, or for wanting to own and use a car instead. One of the key issues is that of a lack of bus service on evenings and weekends:

Weekends are times I and others have time to go places. Unfortunately weekend bus lines are very limited and don't come often. This not only makes it difficult to plan things outside home but also when to do them. Specifically, the Sunday services are even more limited because there is only one bus that runs to other places outside Burlington and within Burlington. This bus takes hours to come to my stop near my home and to place of destination. Extending weekend services would be such a big help!

[(R 42)]

Using bus as means of transportation in Vermont is not preferable because you do not get bus every time you want one. On weekends and nighttime, there is no bus. Thus, it is important to own your own car.

[(R 143)]

Lack of adequate service is a serious concern amongst many of the refugees, as is the absence of pedestrian-friendly routes to various destinations. For example, one of the respondents notes the lack of a bus stop near a supermarket in Colchester; access for pedestrians means walking uphill along a busy street and crossing traffic at several points. Added to the problems of no direct service and infrequent service are issues such as a lack of route or scheduling information. The unreliability of the bus for refugees is more than mere unfamiliarity and convenience, however. As the service providers surveyed also suggested, there are significant impacts on refugees' resettlement experience due to a lack of transportation. In particular, economic opportunities may be adversely affected and even thwarted by such factors.

5.3. Impact on work

Many service providers pointed out the impacts that this lack of adequate transit had for refugees' economic opportunities:

Transportation is a serious barrier to refugees looking for work. The bus schedule usually does not accommodate second and third shift workers. Even first shift workers cannot get to their destination via bus on Sundays.

[(SP 3)]

Concerns regarding transportation and work focused on two issues in particular: a lack of transit service to workplace destinations,

and a lack of adequate service for certain times. In particular, many refugee respondents echoed the concern above regarding the lack of weekend and evening (or overnight) service as a particular obstacle to their employment opportunities.

The interviews and surveys with both current and previously resettled refugees revealed multiple coping mechanisms for this lack of adequate transportation to work. For example, several of the former refugees who work at the University of Vermont and Fletcher Allen Hospital mentioned a “delicate dance” involving carpooling and the passing over of prime parking locations to coworkers coming for the next shift. Others mentioned an “early morning stroll” of workers one can see coming and going from Winooski and Colchester along one of the major streets during the early hours of the morning. In addition to the physical strain this puts on individual refugees and their families, there remains an additional stress that inadequate transportation options place on these new jobseekers. Missing work or showing up late may have severe consequences for those who may have little leeway from employers.

5.4. Impact on children and childcare

Another significant issue raised by many of the refugee respondents was that of children and childcare. Similar to the service providers, refugees in the survey were concerned about the negative impacts that diminished transportation options would have on their children's education and welfare. As noted earlier, a significant proportion of survey respondents live in households with children and with four or more family members—this would seem to bear out UNHCR statistics indicating that forty percent of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2009). Being unable to travel to and from school in a timely fashion means particular impacts on young children attempting to acclimate to new educational systems, language, and social networks. While a slight majority of respondents were comfortable with having their children ride the bus without them, well over a third replied that they would not be happy doing so.

The impact of inadequate transportation on children, childcare, and education was also a recurring theme for many of the service providers:

A lot of my Head Start children ride the SSTA van to school. The hours aren't great. Many children get to school at 10:30 and get picked up at 2pm. They are missing out on opportunities at school for education and social interactions with other children. By the time they arrive at school, open playtime is over and children are going outside. Then the children have lunch, rest time and many children leave in the middle of rest time.

[(SP 21)]

Some of my families have one car and then usually the mother takes the bus to get to ESL classes and uses the bus to get their children to school. For some families who don't have a bus pass, the expense of taking the bus can be expensive, so they walk a lot.

[(SP 13)]

5.5. Obtaining driver's licenses

Obtaining driver's licenses is a central and pressing issue for refugees in Vermont. The vast majority of respondents reported that they did not have a driver's license (56.8%), with a much smaller number reporting that they did have one (27.5%) and fewer still replying that they had had a license not in the US (5.7%). A very small number reported being in the process of obtaining a license (10%). One

problematic trend encountered was the number of unlicensed drivers amongst the refugee population:

I have a car but I don't have license and I want driver training.

[(R 22)]

Hard to get a license but easy to buy a car in Vermont.

[(R 267)]

Several respondents reported that the Department of Motor Vehicles examiners and staff were unfriendly or “mean” to non-English speakers. In one case, one refugee reported that after being told to bring an interpreter to their test, the DMV refused to use him and the applicant was unable to take their driving test. Despite this apparent desire to receive driver's training and use cars, a majority of respondents reported that they do not carpool.

This is a key concern for many service providers, with many respondents advocating increased access to training and vehicles in which to take the driver's test. Many suggested that their clients either had had some experience with driving: a license in another country, a license in the US, learning to drive, or in the process of acquiring a license in the US. Some pointed to the dangers of unlicensed driving, while others noted the benefits that accrue to refugees who had the ability to drive to their destinations, despite the illegality and multiple risks involved.

In recognition of the importance that driving a car might play in the resettlement process, service providers have provided both ad-hoc and more formalized efforts to address the issue with their clients. Ad-hoc arrangements include service providers simply driving the refugees they work with to various destinations in some instances, and providing driver's training to their clients. More formalized initiatives include a grant made available through the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation for a small group of refugees to receive driver's training with the assistance of a translator. However, this specialized program has only been able to accommodate a small number of participants (between 10 and 20 per offering), which, while noteworthy, is still inadequate in comparison to the demand.

5.6. Impact on healthcare

Perhaps the most contentious and highly visible issue regarding refugees and transportation through the period of this study had to do with the relocation of various medical services – including orthopedic, pain management, physical therapy, cardiac rehabilitation, and gynecological – from several different locations in Burlington to a hub in the town of South Burlington. While the centralization of these various offices along Tilley Drive is potentially more convenient for users, such benefits are undercut for those without access to a car by the fact that the nearest bus stop is half a mile away from the various clinics and offices—a relatively major undertaking for those with a range of medical needs and conditions. This situation was of considerable concern to a large number of stakeholder groups – including low-income, elderly, and physically challenged individuals – but had an especial impact on newly arrived refugees. Many of the respondents voiced their concerns regarding transportation for medical needs:

I have to walk in the cold with my disabled daughter.

[(R 13)]

It is to be improved the bus schedule during the night and weekend. Bus pass need to improve and permit more than 8 months because when Medicaid is expired bus pass also expires but we to go hospital for follow up and consultations.

[(R 44)]

5.7. Underserved locations

Finally, beyond the specific and notable cases of transportation inadequacies identified by refugees and service providers, the study examined the issue of specific locations that are being currently underserved in Vermont. Many respondents listed similar answers to the question “are there any particular destinations that you think are currently being underserved by the transit system in Vermont?” The top three locations mentioned were Winooski/Colchester, Shelburne, and Williston. More than half of the respondents listed Colchester/Winooski as the most underserved location for their clients, while a further third pointed to the Tilley Drive medical facilities as being a key destination currently not receiving adequate service. In general, respondents advocated for more transit options to increase refugees' access to various services and opportunities.

6. Contributions to academic literature

The study clearly suggests – throughout surveys, qualitative comments, and interviews – that there are substantial gaps for refugees in Vermont when it comes to transportation. While transportation as a whole may be difficult for the population at large in Vermont – given the climate, relatively sparse population, and lack of infrastructure – these gaps represent particular challenges for refugees in their resettlement and acculturation experiences. In particular, this research suggests that there are particular impacts that refugees feel because of inadequate transportation. These include:

- Loss of employment opportunities because of an inability to reach a specific location (especially those outside of Burlington)
- Loss of employment opportunities because of an inability to reach locations at a specific time (especially weekends, evenings and overnight)
- Reduced access to after-school and enriched educational options for children
- Inability to reach medical care and appointments
- The unreliability of public transit leads to even greater feelings of precariousness and instability for individuals already struggling to adjust to new and unfamiliar circumstances
- Dependence on the goodwill and charity of others (including service providers) to provide transportation (and a lack of self-sufficiency as a result)
- Desire for driver's education and training is restricted due to language barriers.

In the words of some of respondents:

Buses are not always available. If the work place is far away from Burlington you can't rely on public transportation. No buses on weekends and night times. Buses do not show up when needed. Buses are irregular in Essex, Colchester.

[–R39]

My feeling on transportation, it is still good if you live in Burlington, once out the city it is a big problem to get transportation. That is I mean the state or the city must develop that system to give opportunity to poor people to travel on to go to their job.

[–R40]

We are so disappointed because they disconnected the bus cards for our family, so we have to pay each time entering the bus. It is so expensive for being a refugee.

[–R41]

The substantial majority of new refugee families fall into a low-income category. In terms of transportation access, this financial

situation has both drawbacks and at least some temporary benefits. Once the proper paperwork is completed, low-income refugee families can access many of the same resources as other low-income families; for instance, free and discount bus passes are available to Medicaid recipients for the purposes of traveling to and from medical appointments. Newcomer refugees are also eligible to receive a \$15 bicycle, complete with a lock and helmet, from Bike Recycle through the Good News Garage, a “community garage” program operated by Lutheran Social Services in several states that offers affordable, safe and reliable transportation options to low-income individuals.

However, use of a bicycle is not always a practical form of transportation for long distances or if an individual is ill or disabled. Additionally, use of a bicycle is impeded nearly half of the year in Vermont by inclement weather. Therefore, securing personal ownership of a car or having access to public transportation is often vital to ensuring autonomy. Additionally, there is an acculturation dimension to automobility—it is not simply adjusting to Vermont's climate, population density, and level of urbanization that engenders a utilitarian preference for the personal vehicle but rather a desire for the ‘freedom’ and ‘maturation’ into full American citizenship which is implied through this process. Indeed, such a trend should give some pause to regional and transportation planners for whom questions of ‘smart growth’, ‘energy efficiency’, and ‘sustainability’ have become paramount in recent years. Indeed, the Office of Refugee Resettlement's own guidebook indicates the importance of car ownership in the road to ‘becoming American’ in its introduction to transportation in the US for newcomers:

When you first arrive in the United States, you will spend a lot of time walking from place to place. Soon you will start taking public transportation, and someday you will probably own and drive a car. If you learn the meaning of traffic signs and signals and other rules of the road in the beginning, you will have an easier time using public transportation and learning to drive in the United States.

[(Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2004: 37)]

Such language reinforces a linear trajectory of transportation options that move from walking to public transit to car ownership, tied seemingly to a refugee's increased levels of familiarity and establishment within their new home. The Cultural Orientation Resource Center of the Center for Applied Linguistics, author of the above guide and the organization responsible for producing both overseas and domestic toolkits to help refugees prepare for their resettlement experience in the US, does, on its website, acknowledge that the transportation question is a more complex one than simply moving towards car ownership. While much of its domestic training programs seem directed at immediate issues for refugees such as learning to navigate transit systems in relocation centers, there are overseas training sessions that caution refugees not simply to assume that car ownership is the ultimate goal:

When refugees first arrive in the US, they will need to rely on public transportation to get to work, school and shops. The public transportation system requires that refugees understand schedules and that they are on time. Refugees may think that car ownership is necessary in the US. On the contrary, it can be expensive and has many responsibilities. Rules for all travelers and drivers will be very different in the US, so refugees should always pay attention to safety rules and signs. It is the goal of this module to provide refugees with the information that they will need to feel comfortable getting around their community in the US.

[(Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2010)]

The key issue to recognize, therefore, is that the mode of transportation favored by refugees is not simply about convenience and efficiency (though these are important) but is equally concerned with success in the resettlement and adjustment process. Indeed, several

of the interviews conducted with refugees and service providers pointed towards the trend of an extended family, co-workers or group of friends purchasing a communal car as soon as financially possible in order to improve access to various services and destinations.

For the purpose of understanding transportation equity in Vermont, this study examined all of the transportation options available to incoming refugee individuals and families, analyzing in particular the pros and cons of each source and possible limitations in access. These transportation options included the Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) public bus systems, bus pass programs, Reach Up, van and car share opportunities and loan programs that assist in the purchase of personal vehicles.

Researchers spoke at length with representatives from a host of organizations that sponsored or were affiliated with the aforementioned programs and discovered that though there are various programs to cater to transportation access for low-income individuals (which could include incoming refugees), many of them are limited and/or contain substantial barriers in gaining access. Most bus pass programs usually cater only to use for medical appointments, Green Mountain Car Share requires car insurance history of the applicant, and auto loan programs most often require extensive credit history. Most refugee individuals will not have credit or insurance history. Since some families fled a hostile situation or are relocating directly from refugee camps abroad, they may no longer possess paperwork to verify their insurance or credit history. Some individuals may not have driver's licenses because they were lost or abandoned. Hence, it would seem the car and van share programs cater to more middle-class constituents and native-born United States citizens. This is further emphasized by the lack of outreach to the refugee community. For example, all of the programs only advertise in English and tend to advertise near downtown and in universities, clearly targeting a demographic that does not include refugee populations.

The CCTA offers the only comprehensive public transportation system in the greater Burlington area. The CCTA bus system has approximately a dozen bus routes that span the county, in addition to limited shuttles that travel to and from Montpelier and Middlebury an average of twice a day. The rest of the busses generally run Monday through Friday twice an hour from 6am to 6pm, and once an hour from 6pm to shortly after 9pm before ending for the night. Services end earlier on Saturday and are either very limited on Sundays or do not run at all that day.

If an individual's work or school schedule complements the bus schedule, and that individual lives in proximity to a bus route (and assuming other goods and services are also accessible by walking distance) the bus system may sufficiently accommodate that person's transportation needs. However, this system, though better than some, is inadequate in providing resources on a consistent basis. For an individual who needs to work late into evenings, or has a medical emergency that occurs on a Sunday, this system would be of little help.

The only other existing resource for refugee populations is through the Reach Up programs, which relies on volunteer drivers and taxi vouchers to fill some of the gaps in the transportation needs of the community. However, these resources are also sparse and there is a shortage of volunteers willing to chauffeur refugee families in need. This shortfall of volunteers can also be attributed by lack of advertisement to the public.

Finally, one of the most prominent issues in transportation access is proper education and awareness. On some levels, many of the programs that exist to increase transportation access, as well as the transportation options, are not properly relayed to refugee populations. In other words, many refugees are simply unaware that these programs exist or do not have the means to tap into them. This may be due to language barriers, conflicting cultural norms and limited funding on the part of the program. However, any progress in transportation equity must start with proper communication and use of existing resources before new resources can be developed.

7. Implications for managerial practice

How might policymakers as well as urban and transportation planners take up the challenge posed by changing national demographic, not only in the case of refugees but of other immigrants as well? In the context of Vermont, this is a new and emerging destination, with newcomers who are more reliant on the state and its services for assisting with their resettlement process. In many ways their pathways to 'becoming American' and participating in civic life and engagement in US culture, can seem at odds with the type of futures envisioned by the advocates of smart growth and more sustainable forms of urbanization. Personal automobility and low-density housing may, after all, be an important part of the allure of the American Dream as many newcomers understand it in both a historical and contemporary sense. It is important, therefore, to engage refugee communities about their own visions of life in a new country and find the spaces of overlap and tension between these ideals and those of their host cities and regions.

What might such engagement mean in practice? In Vermont, the most populous region – Chittenden County in the northern part of the state – is home not only to its only significant metropolitan area (around the city of Burlington) but is also the place where almost all in-migration occurs and where all but a fraction of the refugees are settled. In 2011 with the support of a HUD/EPA/DOT-funded Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program, the county embarked on a 3-year intensive visioning exercise involving a number of stakeholders—ranging from municipalities to planning bodies to community organizations and key individuals. Called the ECOS Project, the initiative describes itself as “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to engage citizens, organizations and municipalities in a conversation about the future of communities and the region as a whole” and states as its goal “to identify and implement strategies that improve Chittenden County's long-term sustainability by addressing public and private costs in transportation, housing, energy and land use and social equity” (ECOS, 2012).

Under the auspices of the regional planning authority, various stakeholders have gathered together to try and plan a sustainable future for the state's most populous and growing county. The initiative began in its first stages by defining shared values, listed as Environment, Community, Opportunity and Sustainability (hence the acronym ECOS). From these it began by conducting a basic analysis of what and how these values were currently embedded within the county. In the next phase the project began to develop a set of indicators in order to be able to track and measure how these values were or were not being achieved in the areas of housing, economy, energy, natural resources, land use, transportation, and social integration. As one might imagine, given the wide range of interested parties and contested ways in which concepts such as sustainability are framed, this has proven to be no easy task.

How do refugees and their particular transportation needs fit into the ECOS project? At present, their main voice is through service providers and the academic research community, with the State Refugee Coordinator, the executive directors of both VRRP and AALV and the principal investigator of this project all sitting on the Steering Committee for this project. The project has moreover incorporated some of the results from the survey on which this paper is built into its review of the general context. However, at a more fundamental level, the question is how will planners be able to engage refugees and other marginalized groups into the planning process? As stated:

“Serving on boards or sitting at the table is not sufficient. There must be some real power-sharing with poor people and people of color and other underrepresented groups before real change and real solutions are possible. There must be a national strategy to develop and disseminate transportation equity and smart growth messages to make sure our voices are heard loud and clear. The transportation

equity and smart growth issue has the potential for bringing together diverse community-based organizations, homeowner associations, civic clubs, academic institutions, activists and government agencies to form broad coalitions and alliances.”

[(Bullard et al., 2004b: 194)]

This suggests that those in authority and management positions would do well to consider how to better involve communities that are reliant on transportation but have a less distinct voice in decision-making and planning. This would mean, for example, to consider having notices about public hearings translated into relevant languages, providing interpreters at the same hearings, to conduct outreach with affected communities to both educate them about these types of initiatives and to receive feedback on the priorities and needs of the community members themselves (rather than their representatives or others who might speak on their behalf).

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Given the significance that transportation plays within the resettlement process, this study suggests that considerable further work needs to be done on the question of refugees and transportation in Vermont. As some of the service providers and refugees have earlier noted, further study is required to understand the specific impact of transportation on the experiences of women. Further research is also required on the experiences of children (especially vis-à-vis early childhood education and enrichment opportunities), the elderly, and the physically challenged within refugee communities.

This study is fully cognizant of the particular constraints – economic, political and social – in which public officials and both urban and transportation planners find themselves with regard to addressing the inadequacies of the transportation system in Vermont more broadly (not just for refugees). But in terms of more short-term measures, this study suggests several modest initiatives that could be considered by various stakeholder groups:

1. **Improve communication** This includes providing translations when possible, not only of bus schedules and routes, but also of transportation alternatives and notices of public meetings and opportunities to provide input to regional transportation planning bodies such as the CCMPO. Transit agencies and planning groups such as the CCTA, CCMPO and others would benefit by partnering with service providers to improve both the information that refugees have about transportation and to provide refugee perspectives and input into planning processes.
2. **Improve driver's education opportunities for refugees** The Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles should consider providing more consistent and culturally appropriate translation services (or contracting through one of the service provider agencies to do so) to increase efficiencies in the licensing process for refugees. As well the existing VSAC-funded program could be expanded to provide more spaces for refugees and for service providers to continue partnering closely with programs such as the Good News Garage to provide refugees with driving options.
3. **Provide an expanded bus pass system** One of the most common suggestions that refugees made was for local transit agencies to provide a 1–2 year

temporary free bus pass system, one that would operate beyond the scope of the Medicaid bus pass and would provide refugees with the ability to utilize the existing bus system more fully. While this research indicates the shortcomings in the current infrastructure, it also suggests that for Burlington-based residents at least, it is at least a decent start. Having more access to the bus and not having to pay at a time when refugees can least afford the extra expense (when they are attempting to create a solid financial foundation for themselves) may in turn help to create a loyal and committed ridership for the longer term.

4. **Arrange special stops** with the CCTA Several participants in this study suggested that the CCTA works with refugee groups to provide special service – perhaps twice a day – so that busses may reach a specific location (such as Shelburne Farms) to cater to the needs of a larger number of individuals for work.
5. **Work with employers** to provide shuttles Informal transportation has already been heavily utilized as this study has shown – either by individuals or organizations such as JobCorps – but it is recommended that resettlement agencies and employment outreach counselors work with employers to provide vanpools and shuttle busses in order to at least temporarily bridge the gaps in the current transportation infrastructure. Since there are several larger institutional employers of refugees in Vermont, such attempts might be more usefully regularized and formalized.

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