

## V. Transportation and Land Use Case Studies

### Expanding Transit: A New Rural Commuter Line

#### Community Profile:

- Population: East Montpelier (2,731), Plainfield (1,333), Marshfield (1,586)
- Overview: Located just outside the capital city of Montpelier, the small, rural communities of East Montpelier, Plainfield and Marshfield are defined largely by their rich agricultural heritage and stunning landscapes as well as by strong community engagement. All three communities boast active energy committees, which are undertaking energy-saving and energy-innovating projects and working in increasingly closer coordination with each other.

#### Overview:

- In 2009, the Energy Committee Chairs of East Montpelier, Plainfield and Marshfield began discussions with the Green Mountain Transit Agency (GMTA) on starting a new commuter route from Montpelier to Marshfield, in part to help save energy and reduce the use of fossil fuels.
- The timing was serendipitous. GMTA had undertaken a survey and determined that the time was right to move from a subsidized van pool model to a full commuter route. The transit agency then applied for and was awarded a federal Climate Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant; a three-year demonstration grant by the U.S. Department of Transportation, administered by the Vermont Agency of Transportation.
- After approximately a year of public education and hosting informational meetings, an article went to the voters on Town Meeting Day, March 2, 2010. Each community needed to approve an essential 20% local match on the grant. Despite some reluctance, centered largely on the potential impact to property taxes, voters in each town overwhelmingly voted to make an annual \$8,333.33 contribution.
- GMTA wasted no time, beginning its service in late April 2010. Rural Community Transportation, a transit provider in St. Johnsbury, chose to partner with GMTA, expanding the original route from Montpelier to Marshfield all the way to St. Johnsbury!

#### Outcomes:

- The US 2 commuter offers convenient and affordable service to Twinfield Union School, Goddard College, Union Institute, the Community College of Vermont and the Plainfield Health Center, along with connections to Montpelier, St. Johnsbury, and other GMTA commuter routes like the Link Express and Waterbury Commuter. Since the commuter launched in April 2010, ridership

averaged over 41 riders a day. In January 2011, the commuter served over 50 riders a day. All ridership numbers exceeded first-year estimates of 38 trips per day.

- By more people choosing to take the bus, the service is helping to save approximately 2,600 gallons of gasoline per month.
- Expanding public transportation services is especially important given the recent economic downturn. Using the commuter option can save passengers thousands of dollars per year and keep people employed by helping them travel to outside jobs, while simultaneously preserving the tax bases of their towns.



#### Keys to Success or Lessons Learned:

- Linking the enthusiasm and volunteer support of dedicated grassroots groups with a forward-thinking transportation agency, state agencies and local leaders can manifest important results.
- The support of the select boards as well as the efforts of the energy committees was key to building the necessary public interest in the commuter line expansion. Energy committee leaders engaged town planning and conservation commissions, the Plainfield Area Community Association, local employers, health care providers and local residents before a vote on the project was needed.
- Incorporating elements, like a Park and Ride and a shelter, made using the bus more viable and attractive for people. In this case, transforming an empty gravel lot into a Park and Ride facility didn't take a lot of investment and committed volunteers made a huge difference.
- Securing federal funds to support the launch of the transit line expansion was key, helping to minimize the local financial burden and proving an important selling point.

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