

Here is the Planning Commission's **PROPOSED DRAFT REVISION** of the '**Transportation**' section of the **Bethel Town Plan**. By State Statute, the Town Plan is revised every five years. The Planning Commission will hold a duly warned public hearing in mid-June on this and, depending on comments received then, will transmit it to the Select Board, which will hold a hearing at the end of July. Public comments are appreciated. Formal adoption by the Select Board is anticipated by August 13, 2006.

VII. TRANSPORTATION

A. LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION

Bethel's land use pattern over the past four or five decades, similar to the rest of Vermont, has been a steady trend of dispersal into low-density rural areas. This has resulted in a separation by longer and longer distances of where we live, shop, and work. Many residents work and conduct much of their business outside of Bethel in nearby towns. The result of this trend has major implications on our transportation needs and opportunities.

If the pattern of low density dispersed growth continues, Bethel will become increasingly dependent on automobile travel and transportation will become more costly. Also, other trends might occur including:

- school bus transportation could increase;
- rural road maintenance costs could increase at a rate faster than increased tax revenues;
- residential development could consume important agricultural and forest land;
- air pollution will increase; and
- roadside scenery could deteriorate as new driveways and structures line back roads and state highways.

Bethel's land use planning can positively impact transportation planning priorities and costs. Bethel can advocate for high-density growth in or near existing growth centers (i.e. Bethel Village). By identifying centers that have good potential for dense development, numerous land uses can be concentrated together and be in walking distance from one another. Dependency on the automobile can be reduced. Additionally, development policies and zoning laws can create more incentives for cluster housing on smaller lots, reducing transportation costs.

B. CURRENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

1. State and Local Highways: The State uses four classification formulas to distribute financial aid to towns for road repair and maintenance. These classifications are determined jointly by the Agency of Transportation and the Select Board. Criteria used for the classifications include traffic volumes, road condition, and function. State aid to the Town is distributed on a per mile basis, decreasing from Class 1 to Class 3. No State aid is available for Class 4 roads.

Class 1 roads are the most heavily traveled town roads and are extensions of state highways. For Bethel, this includes Main Street, Church Street, and a portion of Pleasant Street in the village, totaling 0.89 miles. Class 2 roads are the major town highways and oftentimes serve

to link towns and high traffic areas such as village settlements and state highways. For Bethel, there are 11.15 miles of Class 2 roads. These are: Camp Brook Road (6.16 miles), Factory Hill-Randolph Center Road (0.56 miles), North Road (0.89 miles) and Peavine Boulevard (3.54 miles).

Class 3 roads include all town roads not Class 1 or 2 that can be driven under normal conditions all seasons of the year. They represent the “typical back road”. Class 3 roads amount to a total of 56.98 miles.

The Town, as written in 19 V.S.A. Section 310, is not obligated to maintain Class 4 Highways, excepting bridges and culverts. Class 4 roads represent the lowest order of importance to the Town. These roads are not generally maintained by the Town nor plowed in the winter. Some Class 4 roads are legal trails available mainly for pedestrians and recreational access.

2. Rail Facilities: Bethel is traversed by the New England Central Railroad (NECR) which goes from New London, Connecticut, through White River Junction to East Alburg, VT. The NECR line serves both freight and Amtrak passenger traffic. The nearest passenger station is in Randolph. The NECR has approximately four (4) miles of single track within the Town’s boundaries with two customer tracks. There are four trains per day through Bethel: AM southbound freight, AM southbound Amtrack, PM northbound Freight and PM northbound Amtrack. Within 2-3 years NECR plan to add another daily northbound and southbound freight train.

New England Central’s (NECR) major business is in pulp/paper and lumber. The NECR delivers lumber to Bethel Mills and feed ingredients to Green Mountain Mills.

As highways become more congested, diesel fuel costs increase, and limitations are placed on trucker’s hours of service, rail could become a stronger part of Bethel’s and Vermont’s transportation infrastructure.

3. Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities: As stated in Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Transportation Plan (2003), increasing the use of bicycling and walking is vital to developing a multimodal transportation system. This linking of various modes of transportation improves social and community livability, and enhances opportunities for exercise and recreation. In Bethel, the average percent of residents who bike or walk to work is 4.2 (2000 Census). Pedestrian transportation occurs mainly in the village, where people are able to park in one location and visit several businesses within the downtown area, or walk from their residence.

It should be possible to walk safely within Bethel Village. Sidewalks should be planned within the villages or new growth centers. This could mean setting aside rights-of-way for sidewalks for construction in the future when warranted.

4. Scenic Roads: Bethel has numerous scenic roads which exhibit special qualities worth preserving such as stonewalls and majestic trees. Bethel residents and visitors enjoy their country roads; therefore, is in the interest of Bethel to prudently evaluate the relationship between road improvements and the potential loss of scenery. The public should have an opportunity to discuss proposed changes with the Agency of Transportation or the Town, as appropriate.

5. Public Transportation: Public transit service alternatives are needed by people without access to a car or the ability to drive. Public transportation, as an alternative to the car, is limited in Bethel and the immediate area. Stagecoach Transportation Services, Inc. (STSI) offers both a local fixed route and human services transportation to Bethel residents. Vermont Transit Lines provides inter-city services with destinations to all major cities and towns throughout the Northeast with the nearest stop in White River Junction.

Residential and commercial land use development patterns that concentrate growth within or close by the village can help make public transit alternatives more feasible and useful in the future.

Ride-sharing informally occurs, as evidenced by the high usage of nearby park and ride lots and other parking areas. A statewide study of park and ride users indicates that people like the ride-share concept, especially for commuters working jobs in the Upper Valley Area.

C. HIGHWAY PROJECTS

1. Camp Brook Road: Summer 2002 resurfacing of Camp Brook Road was completed with the following improvements:

- Rehabilitation of the lower section of the road, improvement of the road base drainage systems, and addition of guardrails.
- Maintained existing alignment, without widening, to keep the road aesthetically as close as possible to what was there.

The average number of vehicles per day on Camp Brook Road is 1,200 (2002 AADT- average annual daily traffic, VTrans)

2. Church Street Bridge: The old bridge over the Third Branch of the White River has been deteriorating for years. Federal and state money will pay most of the cost of construction, the town's share is 5%. The project began in August 2004 with construction of a temporary bridge; expected completion November 2006.

3. River Street Bridge: In 1997, the Vermont Agency of Transportation, in cooperation with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, initiated a study to prepare an Environmental Assessment of Alternative Strategies for improving the Vermont Route 12/107 crossing over the White River in Bethel Village. This project involved establishment of a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) consisting of local and area officials. The PAC recommended building a new wider, safer, and stronger steel truss bridge in place of the existing bridge, widening the approaches to the bridge and other improvements. Currently, the project is a low priority for the VAOT; therefore, construction plans are unknown.

4. Route 107 – Vermont Route 107 is a primary state route across central Vermont linking I-89 to Route 4. It has been identified as an alternative to U.S. Route 4 for Vermont's east/west highway. However, no formal designation has taken place by the VAOT due in part to concerns expressed by residents along the Route 100 and Route 107 corridors. There is much evidence that Vermont inadequately enforces truck safety laws. Therefore, U.S. Route 4 remains designated as part of the National Highway System (NHS) and Route 100/107 is classed as a road of lesser importance. The Town does not support formal designation of Routes 100/107 as an east/west truck route across Vermont. The State of Vermont has no further plans for improvements or reconstruction of Route 107 at this time.

5. Access Management: One concern growing statewide is access management – limiting access on key corridors to preserve capacity. Access management planning can forestall or prevent costly upgrading or replacement of roads and bridges and promote a more desirable and efficient land use pattern complementing the goals and planning principles set forth in this Plan. Through the control of the location and number of curb cuts on Bethel’s major roads (Routes 12, 14, and 107), traffic flow can be better managed and major improvements, such as turning lanes, avoided. The greater the number of access points onto a highway, the higher the number of accidents. By combining access points, sharing parking, and constructing interior road systems between uses, congestion can be reduced and function of these roads maintained.

Regulatory authority for access management rests with the VAOT for state roads and the Selectboard for town highways. The law (19 V.S.A. Section 1111) provides, in addition to a reasonable safe access test, that compliance be found with the Town Plan and local regulations related to land use. Therefore, use of this Plan in determining the appropriateness of new access onto a highway should be employed.

[See Appendices A, B & C for ‘Goals,’ ‘Planning Principles,’ and ‘Recommendations for Action,’ respectively, specific to Transportation and other sections of this Town Plan.]