

# Lane Change: How charitable giving can drive greener transportation

## THE TAKEAWAY

Vermont needs fewer single occupancy vehicles and more sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit. Charitable individuals can help reduce greenhouse gas pollution and create more mobility for everyone by supporting:

- Community-led transportation solutions
- Innovative approaches in rural settings
- Smart community design



**VERMONT'S PROGRESS TOWARD** a less polluting transportation future is stuck in stop and go traffic.

The "go" part: Motor vehicle fuel efficiency and electric car registrations are up. So are public electric vehicle charging stations (310 statewide), park and ride facilities (100) and park and ride parking slots (3,200). Vermont commuting by foot and bike runs higher than the national average.

The "stop" part: Gas guzzlers dominate the roads despite increasing sales of hybrid and electric cars. Ford and Chevrolet trucks are the most popular personal vehicles registered with the Vermont DMV while the Toyota Prius hybrid sits in fifteenth place. Three-quarters of Vermonters commute to work alone in their cars and public transit use has ticked downward. Traffic levels are returning to the pre-pandemic era.

The transportation sector is the state's largest producer of greenhouse gases. Vermont has reduced some of this pollution over the past six years but lags behind climate action goals for 2025 and beyond.

**Charitable individuals can accelerate progress by supporting:**

### Community-led transportation solutions

This summer people in Vermont will be staring at sidewalks and studying roads. Eccentric hobby? Nope. The volunteers have signed on to programs at AARP Vermont to study local transportation infrastructure and improve quality of life. The goal is to reduce auto reliance and expand mobility with more sidewalks, bike trails, and safe road crossings.

AARP focuses on issues that affect adults over age 50. Along the way, it's become an advocate for compact, walkable communities, partly because surveys show that's what older people want. People in other demographics benefit, too.

About 30 percent of U.S. residents lack a driver's license because they are too young, can't afford a car, or no longer drive, said Kelly Stoddard Poor, associate director of AARP Vermont. "The over reliance on personal vehicles leaves a lot of people isolated."

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Enter town walking ambassadors and citizen sidewalk audits. Nonprofits are cultivating local voices to help show there is widespread support for better transportation design. "It's about telling the story," Stoddard Poor said.

Input from residents has spurred some communities to link existing neighborhoods to new ones with sidewalks and transit stops, and it's also helped build mobility and tourism with better local walk/bike connections to passthrough amenities such as the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.

Philanthropy can push progress by supporting the many nonprofits working on green transportation. The Old Spokes Home in Burlington offers bike commuter workshops. VBike in Brattleboro builds support for electric bikes that go farther and faster. CarShare Vermont helps make driving occasional rather than all-the-time.

Local Motion, a statewide nonprofit based in Burlington, teams with communities on bike lane demos, partners on e-bike loan programs, and works statewide to promote safe riding routes. "Safety concerns are the number one reason people say they can't or won't ride their bike," said Christina Erickson, executive director of Local Motion.

**Innovative approaches in rural settings**

This spring, nonprofit Capstone Community Action will launch an electric vehicle ride hailing service in Central Vermont.

The incubator project, called Community Rides Vermont, will start with four vehicles, and focus initially on needy Vermonters. Eventually the service hopes to manage a fleet of 15 vehicles, all electric, and provide both subsidized and market rate rides, including shared rides.

The service grew out of recognition that lack of transportation can be a roadblock for people who are trying to get out of poverty, especially in rural areas, said Sue Minter, executive director of Capstone. Without transportation, single parents can't get to high school completion classes even when childcare is free. And job seekers can't fill open positions because they have no way to get to work.



The Daybreak Fund (formerly High Meadows Fund) at the Vermont Community Foundation provided financial support instrumental to creating Community Rides. The program will harness public funds but would not be launching without private donations, Minter said. Government funding often comes with strict rules that make it difficult to try new ideas.

"Innovation in social services really depends on philanthropy. And one of the things I often like to think about is how essential innovation is to social change," Minter said. "We have to try new things. We have to take risks, or we're not really moving the ball."

## Smart transportation in community design

Vermont needs 30,000 to 40,000 new housing units by 2030 to meet demand and respond to spiking purchase and rental costs, [according to a study](#) by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency. Many communities are experiencing or anticipating a burst of new construction.

Charitable support for nonprofits that offer templates for “smart growth” community planning can help integrate green transportation into neighborhoods as they are constructed. When the built environment is compact, it’s more feasible to create sidewalks, bike paths, and public transit routes.



But replicating the walkable layout in Vermont’s historic centers with new infill development or clustered housing nearby schools, jobs, and services is easier said than done. A recent national study showed [Vermont has the largest median lot sizes in the country](#), which fosters sprawl and auto reliance. There’s all the more need then, for the nonprofit Vermont Natural Resources Council Community Design Toolkit, a smart growth guide developed with support from the Vermont Community Foundation. Additional philanthropy could help spread this valuable resource with conferences and local visioning.

Good planning goes a long way, said Jon Kaplan, bicycle and pedestrian coordinator at the Vermont Transportation Agency. Zoning varies dramatically around the state, with some communities requiring

little to no walk/ride infrastructure, and others requiring sidewalks, trails, and employer bike parking.

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South Burlington, one of the fastest growing communities in Vermont, is a good example of the power of persistence, Kaplan said. “They have a path network that they’ve planned, and they keep plugging away at it.”

He’s also encouraged to see smart transportation projects that were stuck on the drawing board for decades now finally heading for construction, such as the Exit 14 pedestrian bridge over heavily trafficked Interstate 89 in South Burlington.

“That’s a crossing I’ve heard about my whole career,” Kaplan said.

Still, nonprofits that help communities lay out good transportation infrastructure are especially needed now. “I think we’re going to be facing housing pressure and I feel like a lot of Vermont small towns are not really ready for it,” Kaplan said.

### Deeper reading:

[2021 Vermont Transportation Energy Profile](#)

[2022 Comprehensive Vermont Energy Plan](#)

*For additional recommendations about giving in Vermont, reach out to the Vermont Community Foundation philanthropy team at [philanthropy@vermontcf.org](mailto:philanthropy@vermontcf.org) or (802) 388-3355 opt. 5 to be connected with staff who can help.*

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