



A picture of a Complete Street in downtown Springfield, VT. Photo by the Vermont Agency of Community Development.

Better Connections Program

Vermont Agency of Transportation
&
Vermont Agency of Community Development

The Better Connections Program aims to create thriving, livable places with diverse transportation choices in Vermont.

CONTEXT

- Northeast.
- Rural, urban, and suburban settings.

STATE PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM

- Provides funding for local planning initiatives that focus on improvements to multimodal transportation infrastructure and strengthening economic development.
- Partnership between the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vermont Agency of Community Development, in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont Department of Health.

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT DRIVER?

Vermont's Better Connections Program seeks to align State and local investments to increase transportation options, build resilience, and strengthen economic vitality in Vermont's communities. The program's objectives are to:

- Help communities identify and prioritize their goals and projects;
- Develop an action-oriented roadmap to achieve the goals and move projects forward; and
- Link the communities to a growing network of public and philanthropic partners to help them implement their priority projects.

The grant program is led by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the Vermont Agency of Community Development (ACCD) in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and the Vermont Department of Health (VDH).

The Better Connections Program annually offers \$200,000 for planning activities that meets the program’s mission. To be eligible for funding, all projects must include a community visioning process and implementation plan. Projects must provide multimodal transportation options for residents that support economic growth of Vermont’s communities and lead directly to project implementation. Projects should also address land use and development, context-sensitive design, transportation network connectivity and roadway design, water quality, green and grey infrastructure capacity, and economic development.

Projects must demonstrate strong **stakeholder engagement** and support and show how the project will be integrated with State, regional, and/or municipal capital investments and plans.

HOW DOES THIS CONNECT THE COMMUNITY?

The Better Connections Program helps communities pursue their visions for more multimodal transit options, economic development, and community cohesion. Historically, projects that have been funded include well developed public engagement strategies, such as **design charrettes**.

In 2017, the Town of Springfield received a grant for the “Main Street Streetscape Master Plan.” This plan features a vision for improvements to public spaces and infrastructure, and a guide to leveraging private investments to facilitate the economic revitalization of downtown Springfield. This effort’s guiding principles include:

- Accessibility to the Black River;
- Putting pedestrians and bicyclists first;
- Expanding access to transit and the number of transit options;
- Creating a user-friendly downtown streetscape via **Complete Streets** design philosophies;

- Celebrating the town’s historic aesthetic by using **Context Sensitive Solutions** to inform project design;
- Respecting the surrounding landscape;
- Enhancing the town’s gateways;
- Enhancing the sustainability of storm water management and water quality of the river; and
- Building partnerships between private, public, and non-profit organizations.



A map of planned improvements from Springfield, VT’s “Main Street Streetscape Master Plan” funded via the Better Connections Program. Photo by Springfield, VT.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?



INVEST

The Better Connections Program’s grants directly enable municipalities to plan implementation-ready projects that can be tailored to each community’s needs. Furthermore, the benefits of this program are not limited to the individual projects that are developed through the funding it provides. The program allows the State of Vermont to shepherd local planning initiatives towards a common vision of better connectivity and prosperity by giving communities the tools to make planning decisions that work for them.

For more information: <http://secure.accd.vermont.gov/betterconnections/index.html>