

Meeting of the Norwich Energy Committee
Tuesday, 1/23/24, 7 pm, via Zoom

Attending: Rob Gere, Linda Gray, Garret Heaton, Charlie Lindner, Erich Rentz (chair), Brad Wible
Guest: Tammy Heesakker, Norwich Historical Society

1. The 11/28 minutes and the 1/23 agenda were approved by consensus.
2. Norwich Historical Society sustainability planning: Erich noted that he had been invited to the NHS meeting last week to provide guidance for their energy-related planning. Tammy explained that the NHS is undertaking a climate action plan, including improving energy efficiency for their property. Erich has provided a variety of resources and will remain their point of contact; NEC members suggested these other resources: the NEC Home Action Plan template, the GHG Inventory prepared for the Town by Eva Rosenbloom, and a Vt Law & Graduate School presentation on IRA benefits for businesses.
3. 2024 NEC Calendar discussion: various questions on program options and details...
 - WindowDressers: set for 9/26-10/2 at the Norwich Congregational Church, with Thetford participating more actively
 - Energize Upper Valley: Erich hasn't heard anything back from Hartford organizers, will check in with them
 - E-bikes: Vital Communities staff will find out whether use by Norwich of the liability waiver as revised by Norwich town counsel is OK with other parties to the loan program; if so, NEC can offer loans as in previous years; if not, NEC would need to develop other ways to highlight e-bikes.
 - Kids Climate Club: Erich got no response to his reply to the original inquiry; he will check again and Linda will inquire with the NPL librarian, as well.
 - IREC / electric lawn equipment demo: organizing a demo of electric equipment is on the project list for the IREC, perhaps in conjunction with the annual conference of the Vermont School Custodians and Maintenance Association (June 20, Hartford High School). Goal would be to get town DPW staff there; agreement to try to get local commercial lawn services as well.
 - IREC / demo of hybrids or EVs for town staff: also on the project list for the IREC.
 - Eat Low & Local: Linda reported that all 4 Norwich-based farms have confirmed that they'd like to be involved again; no suggestions for activities other than list serv posts and web resources.

There was agreement to focus in February and April on Eat Low & Local and on recruiting window-insert customers; and continue with other plans as more information comes in.

4. Rte 5 bike corridor survey: Linda reported that VTrans has compiled the survey, with results very supportive of the corridor. The report is attached to the minutes.
5. IREC (Energy Coordinator) report: Linda reported that Harry Falconer from the TRORC staff is filling in since Jeff Grout departed, and doing a great job. He's continuing work on these projects: the network and maintenance coverage for the EV station at D&W; compiling the town's net-meter credits and PPA payments; aligning the MERP energy assessment of Tracy Hall with the work of the architect consulting on Tracy Hall. He has also gotten this TRORC web page <https://www.trorc.org/programs/energy/irec/climateactionforyou/> functional; some additional edits are coming from the IREC Steering Committee.

6. Other Business:

- Charlie noted that we can get data on readers when list serv posts direct people to the NEC web site; two January posts generated 57 and 32 page-views.
- Linda reported this Norwich data from HEAT Squad: 2010 to date, 167 home energy audits, and 33 completed Home Performance with Energy Star Projects. And this Norwich data from Efficiency VT: 2019-2022, 36 Home Performance with Energy Star Projects, and 11 “other weatherization projects.”
- Garret will download solar net-meter registrations from the PUC; Linda is updating the Norwich solar spreadsheet.
- Rob and Linda reported that the Planning Commission’s Solar Siting Subcommittee has decided to develop an “enhanced energy plan,” with a kick-off public meeting tentatively on 2/20. For reference, here's the state's 56-page [guidance document](#); and the subcommittee’s [web page](#).

7. Public comment and correspondence: none

Adjourned at 8:30. The fourth Tuesday in February is 2/27.

submitted by Linda Gray

U.S. ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR PRIORITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS

LEGISLATIVE REQUEST

Sec. 32. SUPPORT FOR A ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR; SURVEY REPORT

(a) The Agency of Transportation, in partnership with regional planning commissions through the annual Transportation Planning Initiative, shall conduct a survey of municipal support for the creation of a bicycle corridor— consisting of one or more segments of bicycle lanes or bicycle paths, or both— to provide a safe means of travel via bicycle on or along a route that is roughly adjacent to U.S. Route 5 for the approximately 190 miles spanning between the State border with Massachusetts and the State border with Quebec, Canada.

(b) The survey shall address the level of interest of municipalities and regional planning commissions in prioritizing the creation of a bicycle corridor along some or all of U.S. Route 5, including the consideration of the costs of creation and benefits to the tourism industry in Vermont in general and to the municipalities along U.S. Route 5 in particular.

(c) The Agency shall provide a report on outcome of the survey to the House and Senate Committees on Transportation on or before January 15, 2024.

STUDY AREA

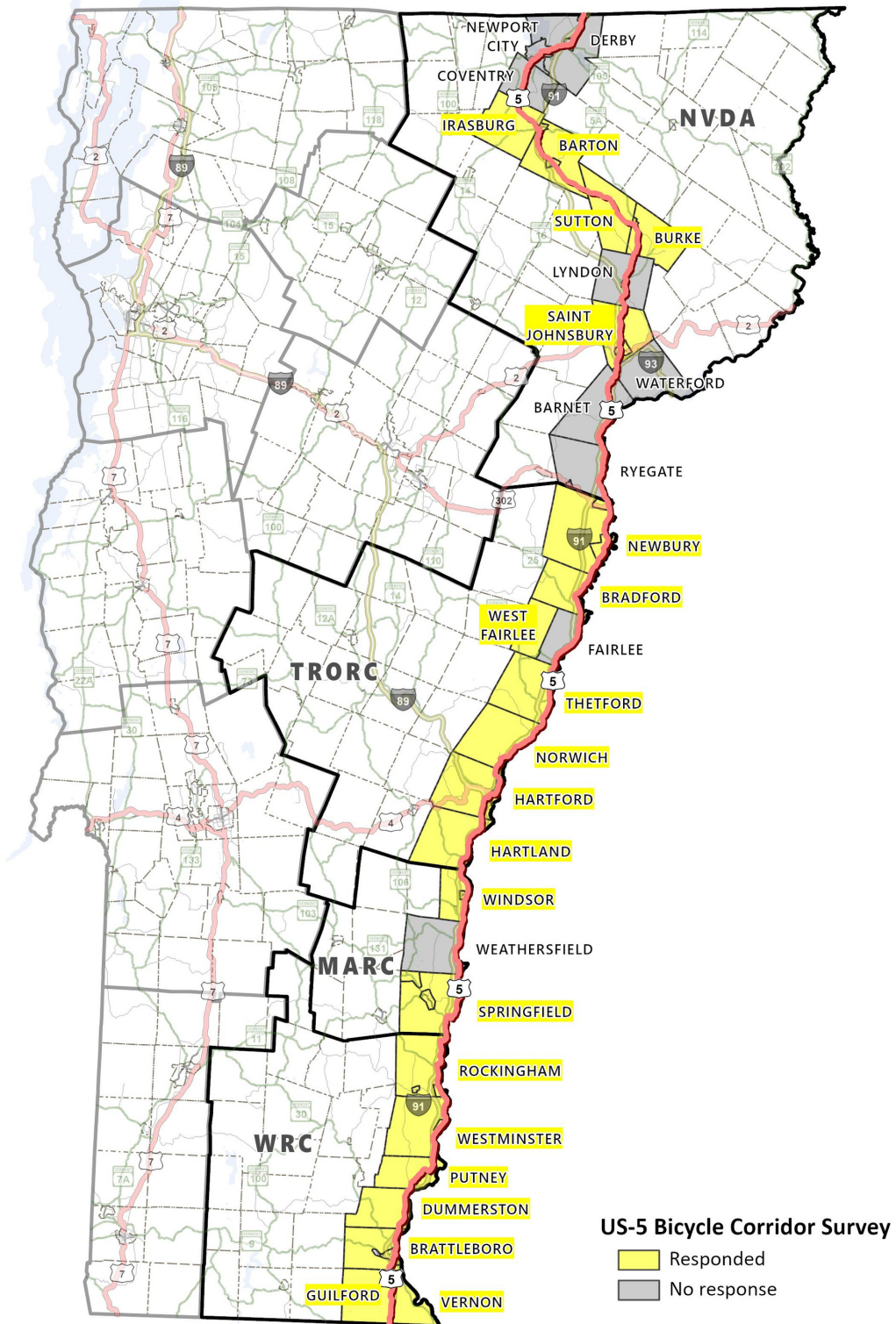
The study area encompasses a 192.72-mile stretch along U.S. Highway 5 (Route 5 Corridor), extending from the Massachusetts border to Canada. The corridor passes through a variety of landscapes, from the rolling hills of southern Vermont to the more rugged terrain as it approaches the Canadian border. The 30 towns along this corridor vary in size, character, and economic activities and residents in these towns are spread across various demographic groups, reflecting the diversity of lifestyles and interests within the region.

The population of residents residing in these towns totals 105,254, and according to the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates: the average median household income is \$63,432; the average poverty rate is 11.2%; and roughly 32% of residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. There are roughly 5,347 total employer establishments in the region and the employment rate is roughly 46.64%. Industries represented in this region include agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and aerospace among others.¹

¹ While data specific to Vermont is shared above, the Route 5 Corridor's proximity to the New Hampshire state line has a significant influence on transportation patterns. Communities in both states rely heavily on this corridor as an important connection between places of residence, business, and recreation, with town and village centers along the corridor serving an important role as river crossing locations.

U.S. ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR PRIORITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS

STUDY AREA



U.S. ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR PRIORITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS

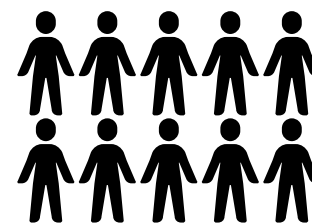
OUTREACH

On October 17th, 2023, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans) released an online survey to the four (4) Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) and thirty (30) towns along Route 5 Corridor to assess their interest in a future planning study associated with a bicycle corridor along some or all of the corridor. The survey, entitled “U.S. Highway 5 Bicycle Corridor Priority Assessment Survey” was open and available to collect responses for one (1) month. The survey was released online and an option to download a PDF version of the survey was made available for preview purposes. Each RPC was allowed one (1) response, while each municipality was allowed two responses: one (1) response from the Selectboard Chair on behalf of the Selectboard and one (1) response from the Planning Commission Chair on behalf of the Planning Commission.

AOT promoted this survey by attending three (3) RPC Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings to further explain its purpose and intent. RPC Transportation Planners then worked directly with municipalities within the study area to encourage participation and explain details further as needed. AOT staff also collected additional correspondence – emails and letters of support - from interested parties not immediately represented by the RPCs or municipalities along the Route 5 Corridor, which are attached to this report as additional information and context. Finally, AOT staff responded to two (2) press inquiries related to this effort.



30 Towns



105,254

Population of the study area



192.72 miles

of roadway from
Massachusetts to Canada



\$63,432

median household income

U.S. ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR PRIORITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The 'U.S. Highway 5 Bicycle Corridor Priority Assessment Survey' received 36 Responses. These 36 responses represented 21 of the 30 towns, as well as 3 of the 4 Regional Planning Commissions on the Route 5 corridor. The responses yielded the following information:

- **100% of respondents said that their organization is supportive of a planning study** related to a future bicycle corridor on or along a route that is roughly adjacent to Route 5 Corridor. Survey respondents were also provided the following caveat "Please note that while project funding and timeline have not been defined, the scale of this effort will require financial support in the form of local investment or funding match."
- **97.2% of all respondents said that it was Very Important or Somewhat Important to improve bicycling conditions** on or along a route that is roughly adjacent to Route 5 Corridor in their town or region.
- **35 of the 36 responders noted bicycling conditions were either Poor or Fair in their jurisdiction.** Springfield, the one outlier, responded that the conditions were excellent on or along the Route 5 Corridor and provided the following comment which provides context for this outlying response: "Route 5 through Springfield is generally easy riding and follows the CT River, so it is very scenic. The only difficult area is the area around Exit 7 of I-91 where it is confusing and lots of traffic for bikes. [sic]"

Additional qualitative evidence was collected as part of this survey and focused on existing and future activities along the corridor, destinations of interest, and areas of concern.² Responses in this section indicated that a future bike corridor along Route 5 would help create regional transportation connections to between communities and outdoor recreation opportunities, and that, in terms of existing conditions, the main impediments to bicycle activity stem from safety concerns due to roadway geometry and vehicular volumes.



100% of respondents **support** a planning study related to a future bicycle corridor along U.S. Route 5



97.2% of respondents said present bicycling conditions on U.S. 5 are either **Poor** or **Fair** in their town or region



97.2% of respondents said it was **Somewhat Important** or **Very Important** to improve bicycling conditions on U.S. Route 5 in their region

² Destinations of interest data is located entirely in the Appendices of this document given its granularity.

U.S. ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR PRIORITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS CONTINUED

Anticipated use of the bicycle corridor as reported by responders included the following:
(respondents were encouraged to choose up to 5 responses, full visual included in the appendix)

- **Exercise and Health (83.33%)**
- **Local and regional transportation (66.67%)**
- **Connection to local destinations (58.33%)**
- **Access to outdoor recreation opportunities (50.0%)**
- **Connecting to existing trail networks (50.0%)**
- Connection regional destinations (nearby communities) (44.44%)
- Commute to and from place of employment (38.89%)

Primary factors that currently discourage cycling on Route 5 as reported by responders included the following:

(respondents were encouraged to choose up to 5 responses, full visual included in the appendix)

- **Narrow Shoulders (86.11%)**
- **Significant vehicular traffic on route (63.89%)**
- **Lack of connected facilities (61.11%)**
- **Personal safety concerns (50.0%)**
- **Unsure of safe routes (41.67%)**
- Deficient / unmaintained facilities (36.11%)
- Aggressive motorist behavior (30.56%)

“The selectboard is mindful of the constraints of budget and the looming increases in our state school education taxes. We are also deeply aware of safety concerns on our roads, and the community interest in healthy activities and alternate transportation. It is impossible to predict how much financial contribution would be supported by our voters as we face these competing issues in the years to come.”

Norwich, Vermont

U.S. ROUTE 5 BICYCLE CORRIDOR PRIORITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS

NEXT STEPS

This survey concluded with a clear consensus of interest on the part of municipalities and RPCs to participate in a future planning process for a bicycle corridor along Route 5. This consensus derives from a desire to connect town and village centers to regional destinations and outdoor activities and to create safe multimodal connections along the corridor.

AOT has completed Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the On-Road Bicycle Plan which includes assessing priority bicycle corridors as well as the Bicycle Level of Comfort along the high, medium and low-use corridors throughout the State, including Route 5. AOT recommends reviewing this existing planning documentation and engaging in additional corridor planning activities along the Route 5 Corridor to identify short- and long-term improvements and/or opportunities. Such corridor planning activities may include: building upon the qualitative evidence gathered in this survey to create a more detailed understanding of existing local, regional, and state conditions along the corridor; identifying locations of interest and concern; reviewing and documenting existing planning processes and projects underway along the Route 5 Corridor at both the local and state level; and, benchmarking similar projects to further build consensus on a future vision. These opportunities can then be prioritized based on the Bicycle Corridor Priority, harmonized with AOT planning processes, and eventually implemented in future projects.

Finally, it is recommended that as part of this process, a steering committee composed of interested parties and stakeholders from RPCs, municipalities, outdoor recreation, economic development, and other non-governmental partners along the corridor be formed to provide feedback on findings and deliverables associated with the above-mentioned goals and continued outreach and engagement of stakeholders.

“Guilford aspires to have interconnected, safe bike/pedestrian trails to link its Village Centers, school and recreational facilities. The Town has wonderful character and could become a recreation 'hub' for cyclists if safe paths could be developed.”

Guilford, Vermont

“The proposed bike corridor is a fantastic idea that would greatly enhance recreational opportunities, tourism, and commuting possibilities.”

Thetford, Vermont

“This is needy route for safe passage for pedestrians and vehicles. Biking is NOT the top priority. .”

St. Johnsbury, Vermont