

EAN Pitch

Richard Watts: October 20, 2017

Charge for Parking

Currently transportation is the largest contributor to Vermont's GHG emissions. More than half of that is Vermonter's driving around in our personal vehicles.

In this proposal I advocate for a research-based approach to reduce the overall pie, rather than switch the fuels used in that pie.

I liken this to the nega-watt or efficiency approach in electricity. The cheapest, cleanest watt of electricity is the watt not used. In this case, the cheapest, cleanest (and safest and healthiest), is the mile not driven in a motor vehicle – the nega-mile.

Even in rural Vermont, according to an analysis by the TRC, 39 percent of all trips were less than two miles and one-quarter were less than a mile (TRC Energy Report, page 11). While most of those trips today are in a car, we can capture more of those trips by walking, cycling, public transit, car-sharing with effective public policy.

Here I propose one very narrow approach to this, based on the research. The overall idea is for employers to work with their employees to develop transportation policies that incentivize car alternatives (walking, cycling, transit, ride-sharing) and dis-incentivize the car. All of this done in a thoughtful, reasonable way that does not penalize those without options.

There is a large menu of these TDM programs to choose from, including the RE-WIRE program that looks at total carbon budget and some of those done for hill institutions with the support of CATMA.

However, these can only work if parking costs money. Take Champlain College where we are today, they have successfully moved cars off campus and to an interceptor lot. Or UVM, where I work, about 50% of faculty and staff drive to campus every day. We can do better, but that is better than most institutions in VT. Parking is a percent of your salary and all bus rides are free and employees are guaranteed free taxi ride homes if needed.

The positive impact on the transit system is an auxiliary benefit. Every additional rider on transit (free for UVM employees and students) helps transit expand options.

But it has to start with charging for parking. And making it less convenient to drive your car while providing real alternatives that work.