

## PRESS RELEASE

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The Future of Rural Transit (FRT) – Network Action Team announced today the two school districts that were selected for a feasibility study on combined school and rural transit service. Mount Mansfield Unified School District and its sending towns and Orange East Supervisory Union/Thetford Elementary were selected from a pool of applicants to participate in this feasibility study exploring the possibility of expanding sustainable transportation options for both students and the general public. The goal of the program is to prepare Vermont to have a more efficient, equitable, and cost-effective rural transportation system.

The FRT team is a broad coalition of partners led by VEIC and Vermont Clean Cities Coalition, convened by Energy Action Network. The project was chosen by the Network Members of the Energy Action Network at their summit in October 2020, because of its potential to bring innovative and equitable improvements to the transportation sector. It subsequently received a Mobility and Transportation Innovations (MTI) grant from the Vermont Agency of Transportation. The FRT team seeks to expand transportation options for rural communities in Vermont by offering combined bus services to schools and community members using electric buses. Combined public and school transportation has the potential to reduce transportation costs, increase mobility options particularly for residents of rural communities, improve health, and reduce carbon emissions.

Bruce Williams, Assistant Superintendent for the Orange East Supervisory Union was excited to have Thetford involved in this project, stating “Thetford has an unusually active citizenry around climate issues, a citizenry of problem solvers, and a forward-looking school board. With close proximity to I-91 and employment hubs at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and Dartmouth University, we are looking forward to exploring the possibility for expanded transportation options.”

Aaron Little, Transportation Supervisor for the Mount Mansfield Unified Union School District was also glad to hear that MMU was selected for the feasibility study. “We see this initiative as a unique opportunity to build on the relationship between the school and the general public transit system(s) to support local transit needs and to enhance the school bus system at non-standard times and places,” said Little.

The feasibility study is expected to be completed by September 2021 and will determine the costs and benefits of combining service, including enhanced student travel options, and increasing access to rides among the public. The project team will work closely with the selected school districts, regional planning commissions, and regional transit providers on this assessment. Building upon project findings, planning and outreach for combined transportation service pilots is likely to begin in The fall with the potential for pilot projects to be launched in 2022 deploying electric buses to serve the rural school systems and surrounding communities.

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**Energy Action Network (EAN)** is a diverse network of over two-hundred nonprofits, businesses, public agencies, and other organizations working together in a collective impact framework and supported by a backbone non-profit organization to further the Network's mission: to achieve Vermont's climate and energy commitments in ways that create a more just, thriving, and sustainable future for Vermonters.

**VEIC** is a sustainable energy company on a mission to generate the energy solutions the world needs. For over 30 years VEIC has been working with governments, utilities, foundations and businesses across North America to develop and deploy clean energy services that provide immediate and lasting change. With expertise in energy efficiency, building decarbonization, transportation electrification, and new approaches for a clean and flexible grid, VEIC brings innovative solutions to the market. VEIC is nationally recognized for developing pilots and programs that optimize energy use, reduce energy burdens for low-income customers, and advance new technologies. In addition to our full-service consulting business, VEIC administers three large-scale sustainable energy programs: Efficiency Vermont, Efficiency Smart, and the DC Sustainable Energy Utility (DCSEU). [veic.org](http://veic.org).