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Vermont Visitor Information Center Study

PREPARED FOR:

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Executive Summary

The Vermont Visitor Information Center Study was prepared on behalf of the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS), and the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) to evaluate the current system of Visitor Information Centers and develop recommendations for strategic future actions and investments that meet programmatic objectives and requirements in a fiscally sustainable manner.

This report, which summarizes the findings of the system assessment, stakeholder and study group input, and system recommendations, is organized into the following sections:

- **Section 1: Current State:** This section provides a detailed overview of the Vermont Information Centers Division (VICD) program including a history of the system, management structure and agency responsibilities, a summary of state and federal requirements, an inventory and assessment of the existing VICD system, an overview of historic funding and expenditures, a summary of visitation and utilization trends, an overview of the regression models developed for the financial analysis, and description of the Study stakeholder involvement.
- **Section 2: Scenario Planning & Alternatives Evaluation:** This section summarizes the scenario planning and alternatives evaluation process conducted to develop the Study recommendations, including descriptions of each of the scenarios and alternatives investigated, refinements made to alternatives based on feedback and research, and an overview of potential alternative delivery models for the system.
- **Section 3: Recommendations:** This section presents the final set of recommendations for the VICD network, including the alternatives recommended to be carried forward based on policymaker decisions, systemwide recommendations based on study findings, and considerations in modernizing the system for future travelers.

Key Findings

The following is a summary of key findings from this Study:

- **State & Federal Requirements:** The current VICD system meets all State and Federal requirements, including adherence to minimum facility spacing requirements and provision of sufficient truck parking along the National Highway System.
- **Visitation Trends:** The opportunity to promote the Vermont brand at the network of VICD sites provides exposure to approximately 3.3 million visitors per year. The annual system visitation has remained relatively consistent in the period between 2013 and 2019. In calendar year 2020, due to a combination of the COVID-19 pandemic (which resulted in the temporary closure of seven sites) and the permanent closure of the White River Junction Visitor Center, visitation decreased by nearly 75% across the system.

- **System Funding & Expenditures:** The current total system funding level of approximately \$5.5M per year is not sufficient to maintain the current VICD system over the next twenty-years. This study estimates that an additional \$70M would be needed over the next twenty years to fully fund the operating, maintenance, and capital construction costs for the current system.
- **System Management:** Three separate state agencies/departments (VTrans, BGS, and ACCD) are involved in operating and maintaining the VICD system. While each agency/department is focused on different aspects of the system (i.e. funding, operations, project management, traveler information), continued coordination and communication across each of the agencies/departments is critical to ensure that the system is managed holistically and in a coordinated manner.
- **Facility Maintenance and Construction:** The study's VICD facility condition assessment found instances of deferred maintenance at several sites across the state. This deferred maintenance pattern was found to be attributed to a combination of limited funding for major capital investments and limited project management staffing capacity at BGS to manage the preventative maintenance and capital construction projects on the system.

Recommendations

The Study recommendations were developed to address long-term system sustainability questions while recognizing the need for short-term actions as Vermont and the country emerge from the global COVID-19 pandemic, which was occurring simultaneous to this Study report being finalized.

System Recommendations

The following two alternatives were identified for the future VICD system:

- **Alternative 1: Maintain Existing VICD System with Annual Increase in Funding:** This alternative requires an additional 2% increase per year in operations and preservation funding (\$17M over 20 years) as well as \$34M in capital funding to maintain the current system. Since this Study was finalized just as the legislature was adjourning for the 2021 session, the prospects for receiving additional General Fund funding to operate the existing VICD system will need to be revisited with the legislature in 2022.
- **Alternative 2: Reduce the Size of the VICD System:** If additional revenue to operate and maintain the existing system is not feasible, the second alternative involves a combination of facility closures, reduction in service hours, and implementation of a Public-Private Partnership (P3) to operate a new Northwest Gateway Welcome Center in Swanton. These changes would bring the total estimated system operating, preservation, and capital costs below current funding levels over the next twenty years.
 - **Facility Closures:** Seven of the eight VICD facilities currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic would remain closed. Additional community outreach should be conducted in the vicinity of these closed facilities to identify potential alternative strategies to provide visitor information services in these areas

through a locally managed information center, the establishment of an Interstate Oasis Program site, or a P3.

- Re-Opened Facility: Under this alternative, the Derby Welcome Center, which is currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic would be re-opened to service visitors traveling from Canada on I-91. A rehabilitation project to improve accessibility at the Derby Welcome Center is currently programmed in the VTrans Capital Program for FY 2022.
- Reduction in Service Hours: Service hours would be reduced at the nine VICD facilities to capture a minimum of 80% of the visitation at each center. These changes would result in a 32% reduction in total service hours across the VICD system.
- Public-Private Partnership at Exit 21 in Swanton: A new Northwest Gateway Welcome Center would be constructed proximate to Exit 21 in Swanton to service visitors arriving from New York and Canada. This facility would replace the closed facilities in Alburgh, Georgia Southbound, and Georgia Northbound. The recommended P3 arrangement would have the private partner responsible for designing, building, financing, and maintaining the facility, while the State would be responsible for developing the overall goals and requirements for the P3, covering the incremental cost to construct the “Vermont Tourist Information” portion of the facility, making regular lease payments to the private partner to occupy the space, and providing directional signage on the interstate.

Other Recommendations

In addition to the alternatives outlined above, the Study also makes the following additional system-wide recommendations:

- Additional BGS Project Management Staff Support: Most of the minor maintenance and major rehabilitation work at the VICD sites is managed by a single project manager at BGS. Additional staff support in this area would help to leverage all of the available capital funding each year and ensure that projects are advanced efficiently and in a timely manner.
- Enhanced Coordination Between Agencies: Continue to encourage participation from all three involved agencies/departments (i.e. VTrans, BGS, and ACCD) at regular Rest Area Committee meetings to ensure continued coordination and communication across the three entities.
- Hourly Visitation Tracking Data: While the VICD staff collect and manage a robust database of visitation and operational data for all of the facilities, the visitation data is not currently tracked or reported at the hourly level. This more detailed visitation data would be useful when considering changes to a facility’s operating hours and to better understand VICD staffing needs at each facility.
- Modernization of Amenities

- Direct Restroom Access: For any new facilities, or facilities undergoing major rehabilitation, consideration should be given to providing direct access to the restrooms from the outside, so travelers can still utilize the restroom facilities outside of normal operating hours.
- Digital Information Sharing/QR Codes: Offering scannable quick response (QR) codes or curated digital displays at the centers would provide an additional way to provide traveler information to visitors who either arrive outside of normal operating hours, or who chose not to go into the center.
- Electric Vehicle Charging Stations: While current Federal regulations restrict the sale of fuel at interstate rest areas, ongoing discussions around the need for additional electric vehicle charging infrastructure may result in a loosening of the Federal restrictions and allow transportation agencies to provide EV charging stations at rest areas.
- Sustainable/Renewable Energy Demonstration Project: Look for opportunities to integrate renewable energy demonstration projects (e.g. solar panels over parking areas, compact wind turbines, etc.) into the information center sites as a way to help educate the traveling public about the importance of renewable energy and to generate a small amount of locally-sourced energy.
- Electronic Reserve-Ahead Truck Parking: While surveys indicate that Vermont is currently providing adequate truck parking along the National Highway System, future growth in truck traffic needs may compel the need for adopting an electronic truck detection and/or parking reservation system similar to those piloted on the I-95 and I-5 corridors.

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Current State

INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Visitor Information Center Division (VICD) facilities provide a network of locations primarily along the National Highway System (NHS) throughout Vermont that serve the traveling public. The primary function of the VICD system is to provide safety breaks to prevent drowsy or fatigued driving by providing safe areas to rest or change drivers¹. The facilities additionally provide travelers with access to restroom facilities, shelter from adverse weather, travel information, free coffee, free wireless internet, vending machines, Vermont promotions, and access to travel ambassadors. Serving an estimated 9,000 people each day, Vermont's system of VICD locations provides an important resource for travelers to rest, refresh, and discover important information about travel destinations across Vermont. The aim of the system is to deliver these essential safety purposes and additional traveler amenities through well-maintained facilities with exceptional customer service.

The VICD facilities are primarily the responsibility of the Department of Building and General Services (BGS) in collaboration with the Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021, it became clear to the responsible agencies that although the system serves travelers well, the operations, preservation, and capital needs of the system were becoming fiscally unsustainable. As a result, VTrans, BGS, and ACCD, sought to work collaboratively on a comprehensive planning effort to understand the current physical conditions and financial funding structure for Visitor Information Centers across the state, coordinate with stakeholders to identify issues and opportunities, identify current and future funding options, and develop an implementation plan to advance recommendations developed through a study. Although the impetus for the planning effort was already established, the planning effort really developed as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. The VICD system had to respond and adapt to the travel restrictions, facility shutdowns, and

¹ AASHTO, *Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*, 2001.

health and safety precautions. It was against this backdrop that the plan herein was developed, with the aim to guide the system sustainably into the future.

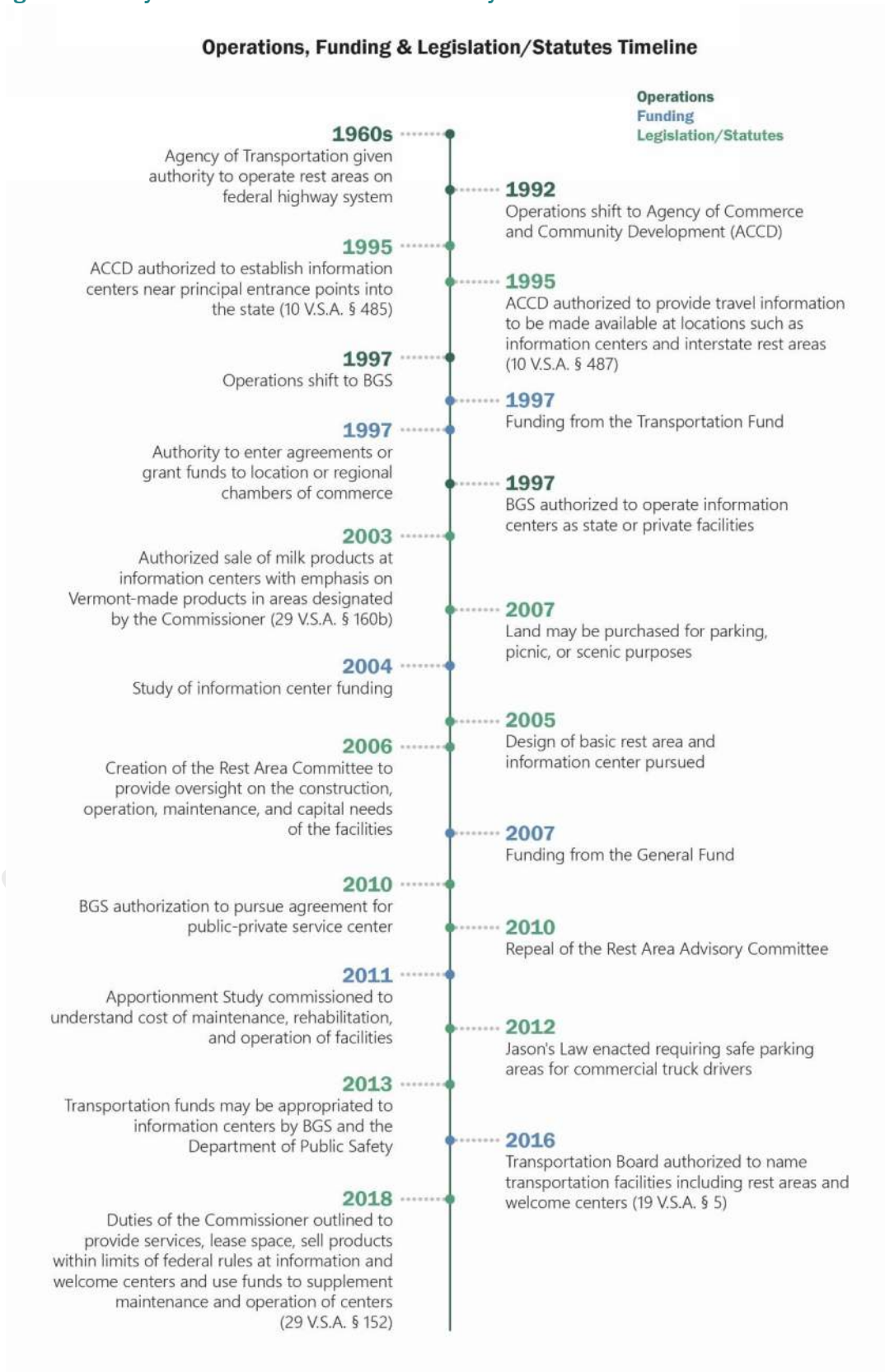
HISTORY OF REST AREAS IN VERMONT

During the construction of the federal interstate in Vermont, rest areas were constructed along the interstate system to provide basic services and safety breaks to the traveling public. These facilities were a stop gap during a time when few services were available off the federal interstate system's exits. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) was responsible for building and operating these rest area facilities. During the 1980's and 1990's, the system saw a steady increase in the number of visitors, in particular the number of tourists, utilizing the rest area facilities. Recognizing the opportunity to capitalize on the state's visitors and bolster the tourism economy, the responsibility of managing the system was turned over to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) in 1992. The ACCD was tasked with establishing official tourist information centers at principal entrance points into the state. Information about public accommodations, commercial services, and other business for the travelling public, as well as points of scenic, historic, cultural, educational, and religious interest was expected to be available at these locations. Publications, audio/visual aids, and computers were established as methods of delivering necessary information. The opportunity to market to the state's visitors is often seen as an alternative approach to billboards, which are not allowed on the state's highways, to promote Vermont's brand. At the time, this marketing opportunity was focused on a system of 24 Visitor Information Center locations with additional facilities beyond a simple parking rest area.

Through the 1990s, the Visitor Information Center system experienced increased traffic and visitors coupled with aging infrastructure. As a result, the deterioration of the system's assets proved to be a challenge for ACCD to manage and maintain, compelling the transfer of the deteriorated and deficient assets to the Agency of Administration, Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS). Between 1993-1995, the system's 24 locations were reduced to 20 through multiple legislative actions, ultimately resulting in facilities being razed in Putney, Highgate, Coventry, and Westminster.

A 1997 Memorandum of Understanding defined the responsibilities of BGS, VTrans, and ACCD in the reconstruction, maintenance, and operation of the system going forward. BGS was instructed to construct and renovate two facilities per year until all locations were complete. In 2005, an updated Memorandum of Understanding superseded the agreement between agencies to better define the roles of BGS and VTrans in operating and maintaining the VICD system facilities. This included the responsibility of continuing to coordinate with ACCD towards the goals of providing traveler services and develop community partnerships.

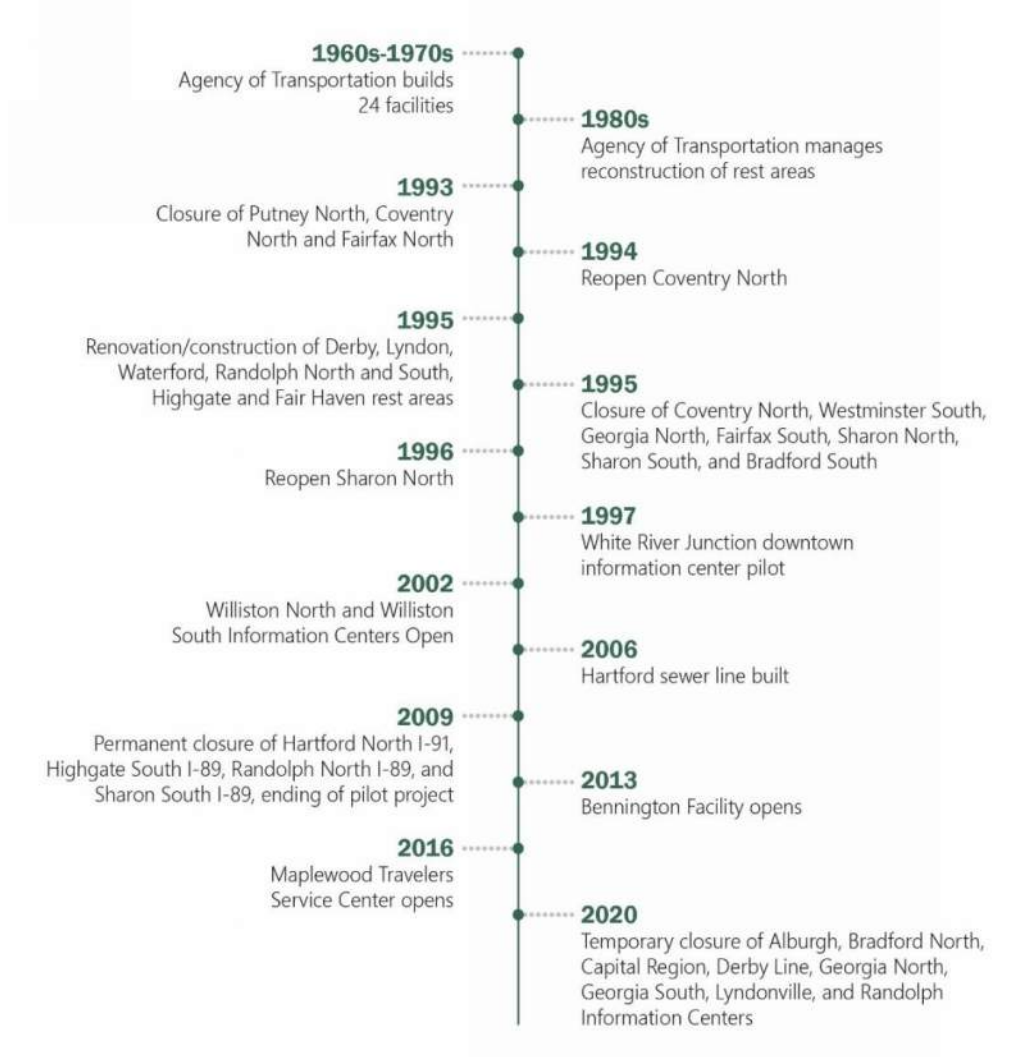
Figure 1: History of the Visitor Information Center System in Vermont



During the recession in 2009, the system was streamlined with the closure of four locations and limited hours of operation for the remaining locations. In 2009, facilities in Highgate, Sharon, Hartford, and Randolph were permanently closed. At that point, all operating and maintenance costs associated with the Visitor Information Center system were transferred to VTrans. VTrans was instructed to explore other purposes or remove structures at these locations, and they were given discretion to decide if these sites should be closed to traffic, or if they should remain open as parking areas.

In 2011, VTrans, BGS, and ACCD worked together to form the Joint Rest Area Committee and in 2012 completed a report outlining the future program for traveler information services and the promotion of Vermont businesses and products to the motoring public. The Joint Rest Area Committee report included a historic overview and information on the operations of the Visitor Information Centers at that time, including a reduction in the number of centers over the years (primarily in the mid-90s and in 2009). In 2013, BGS added a new location as part of the Bennington By-Pass project, rounding out the Visitor Information system to 17 locations.

Figure 2: Timeline of Visitor Information Center Openings, Closures, and Major Renovations



In 2020, closure of the White River Junction Visitor Center brought the number of locations back to 16. These 16 facilities provide a network of VICD locations among a broader network of roadside facilities primarily along the National Highway System in Vermont. The timeline below highlights the dates of facility openings, construction, renovations, and closures.

The COVID-19 pandemic shutdown began on March 13, 2020 with a declaration of a state of emergency and continued with guidance provided through directives and addendums as deemed necessary. As a result of the guidance, all VICD facilities were closed on March 20, 2020. With the closure of the sites' buildings, access to parking and outdoor amenities remained open and many of the locations in the network were equipped with portable toilets for travelers to use in the interim. With restrictions on capacity, mandatory mask use, and social distancing guidance, eight of the facilities were reopened in July 2020, including Fair Haven, Guilford, Hartford, Sharon, Waterford, Williston Northbound, and Williston Southbound. The other eight facilities have remained closed through the pandemic.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Operation of the Vermont Visitor Information Center locations has been the responsibility of the Agency of Transportation (prior to 1992) and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (1992-1997) in the past. Since 1997, the operation of the network's facilities has been the responsibility of the Visitor Information Center Division (VICD) within the Agency of Administration's Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS). Memoranda of Understanding between the Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the Department of Buildings and General Services from 1997 and 2005 define the responsibilities of each agency to operate and maintain the network of Visitor Information Center Division locations.

Figure 3: Bradford Visitor Information Center (Left), Guilford Welcome Center (Right)

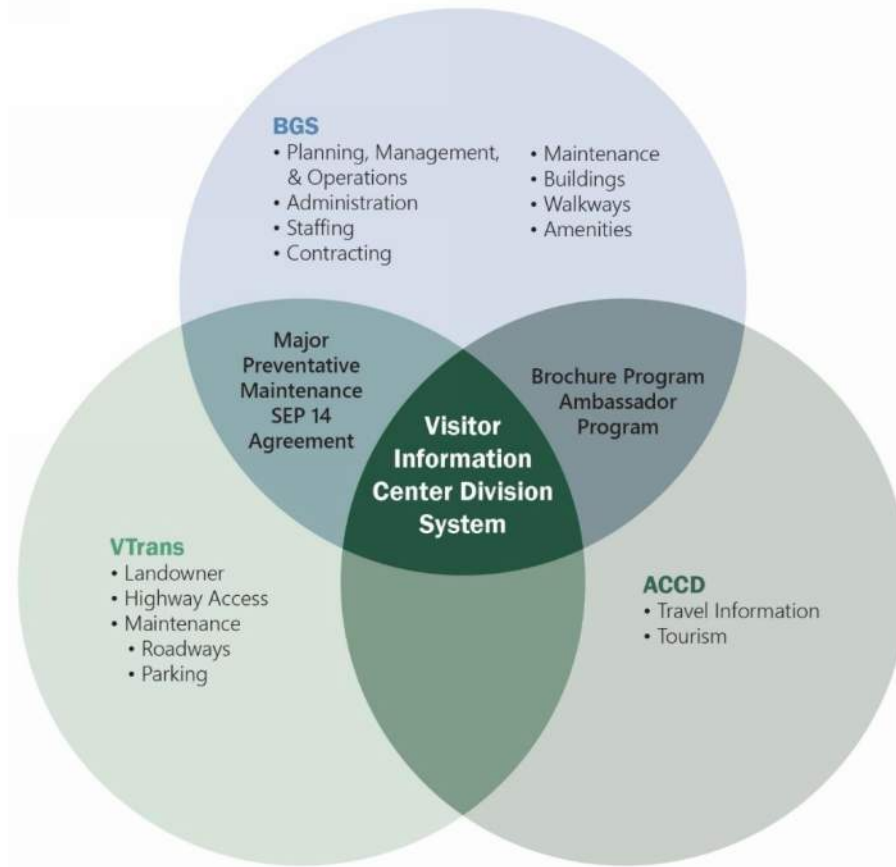


According to a 2005 Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies, coordination of activities to maintain and operate the Visitor Information Center locations should be facilitated by a collaborative committee comprised of representatives from BGS (3), VTrans (3), and FHWA (1) that meet quarterly. The representative parties are responsible for

coordination of activities through committee membership, reviewing improvement programs, collaborative development of a facilities program, reviewing annual budget proposals, and collaboration with FHWA to oversee development and implementation of the program.

The Agency of Transportation (VTrans) owns the land and VICD facilities and is responsible for activities such as programming major maintenance activities, support for right of way services, snow removal on travel lanes and parking areas, pavement and guardrail repair, site lighting maintenance, access for commercial vehicle enforcement activities, coordination with FHWA on federal-aid eligible projects, tracking contracts, and project reporting. BGS is responsible for the operation of the system including managing capital and maintenance projects, right of way planning, ensuring facilities are clean, safe, and in good repair, snow removal on walkways and sign plazas, coordination with ACCD to provide traveler services, coordination with VTrans on consultant and contractor activities, project development, and development of system budgets. Close collaboration between BGS and VTrans to develop and deliver major preventative maintenance and capital projects has been further solidified through the shared responsibilities outlined in the Special Experimental Project No. 14 (SEP 14) agreement, detailed in the *System Funding* section below.

Figure 4: Summary of State Agency Management and Operational Roles



SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

The recommendation of a 60-mile interval at which to provide a safe area for drivers to park and rest was developed through crash data assessment and published in the *AASHTO Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*². The VICD facilities are also part of the broader network of Jason's Law eligible locations, which aims to "address the shortage of long-term parking for commercial motor vehicles on the National Highway System network."³ Although there is no Federal mandate for operating visitor information centers, concerns for driver and commercial vehicle operator safety compel the State, with support from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), to operate a system of rest areas that provide safe locations for drivers to rest and recharge.

The directional distance between Vermont's interstate roadside facilities is enumerated in **Appendix A**. Compared to the AASHTO-recommended 60-mile maximum spacing between sites, 28 of the 29 state-run interstate facilities that are currently operational meet this recommendation. Facilities include VICD locations, parking areas, weigh stations, and scenic turnouts. Twenty-seven of these facilities are less than 34 miles apart. The one gap that is greater than the AASHTO recommendation is a 60.9-mile distance on I-91 northbound between the Rockingham North Parking Area and the Bradford North Rest Area. This is also the greatest distance between facilities identified as Jason's Law locations. This gap is a result of the closure of the Hartford North Rest Area. Operational VICD locations that are preventing gaps from exceeding the 60-mile recommendation include the Sharon Welcome Center, the Bradford Information Center, and the Hartford Welcome Center. It is important to note that this evaluation of recommended spacing did not include VICD locations off of the interstate, including a number of Visitor and Welcome Center locations.

When operated by the state, rest areas are subject to a number of Federal rules and regulations. Interstate rest areas may not provide any commercial goods or services where charges are made to the traveling public, with the exception of telephones and vending machines. Food and beverage sales, limited to vending machines at these locations on the interstate system, prioritizes machines operated by organizations supporting individuals with visual disabilities, as is outlined in the Randolph-Sheppard Act⁴. The limitations to the sale of goods and services at these locations align with the rule that the right-of-way "shall be devoted exclusively to public highway purposes."⁵ Advertising at information centers is allowable under certain provisions, as long as it occurs inside buildings and is not legible from the highway⁶. Additional detail on Federal and State requirements and policies can be found in **Appendix B**.

² AASHTO, *Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*, 2001

³ Jason's Law, S.1187, 112th Cong. (2011), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/senate-bill/1187/text>.

⁴ 23 CFR 111 Agreements relating to use of and access to rights-of-way – Interstate System

⁵ 23 CFR 1.23 Rights-of-Way

⁶ 23 CFR 752 Landscape and Roadside Development

SYSTEM INVENTORY

Although the various types of roadside facilities provide overlapping functions, distinguishing between the facility types is imperative to understanding the functions they serve from a safety and tourism perspective as well as the mechanisms by which they provide those functions, through federal, state, or private funding.

Visitor Information Center Division Network

- › **Information Center (7 facilities):** These facilities have direct access to the interstate, provide refuge for brief safety breaks, and provide additional amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information;
- › **Welcome Center (8 facilities):** These facilities provide the same set of amenities as the Information Centers, but are located near the border of Vermont with a focus on providing gateway services for travelers coming into the state along the major corridors of entry;
- › **Visitor Center (1 facility):** These facilities are located off the interstate network without direct access to the highway and provide similar amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information.

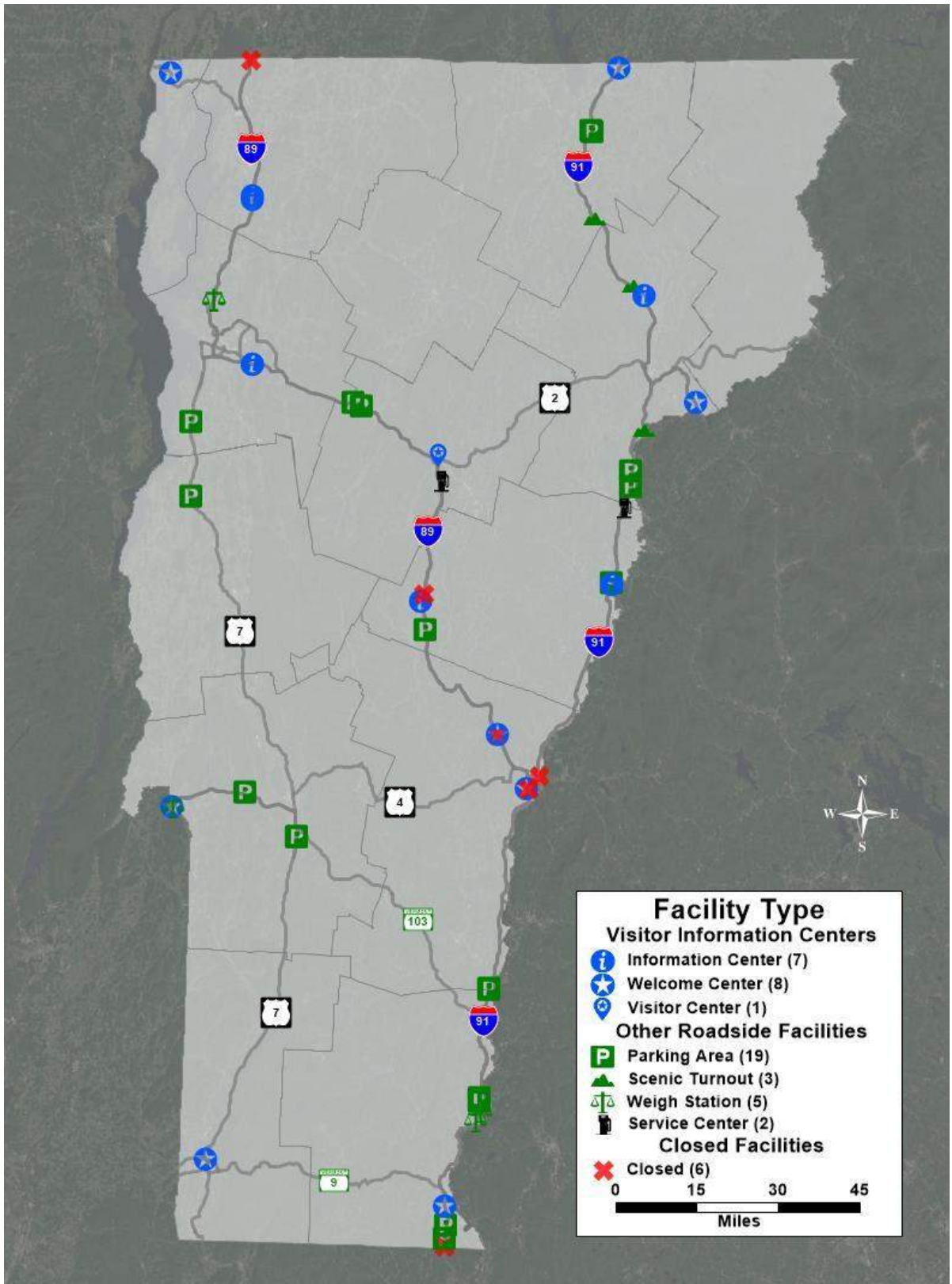
Other Roadside Facilities

- › **Service Center (2 facilities):** Through public/private partnerships with the state, Service Centers are locations that provide restroom facilities and traveler information as well as additional services including food and fueling. The state provides official signage on the highway directing travelers to these locations and facilitates the traveler information and marketing efforts through brochures at each location. In exchange, the private entity manages and operates the facilities. The Maplewood Travelers Service Center in Berlin is open 24 hours a day to provide a full suite of services to travelers just off I-89. The P&H Truck Stop, located in Wells River, provides a similar suite of services to travelers just off I-91. Both locations provide traveler information through dedicated space for the VICD Brochures Program.
- › **Weigh Stations (5), Parking Areas (19), and Scenic Turnouts (3):** These facilities have direct access to the highway and provide varying levels of refuge for brief safety breaks but lack additional amenities.

In addition to the various open roadside facilities depicted below in **Figure 5**, there are a number of roadside locations on the National Highway System (NHS) network that previously served the traveling public and are now closed. The state-owned rights-of-way and some infrastructure exist at six such closed locations across the state.

It is important to note that the current system inventory referred to above and herein generally reflects the system qualities as operated pre-pandemic, unless otherwise noted. The system inventory, operations, and maintenance patterns prior to the pandemic were the focus of the assessments for this Study. The additional context provided by the management of the system through the pandemic (i.e. full closure of the system facilities in March 2020 and reopening of only eight facilities in July 2020) was considered carefully as noted throughout this report.

Figure 5: Roadside Facilities along the National Highway System in Vermont

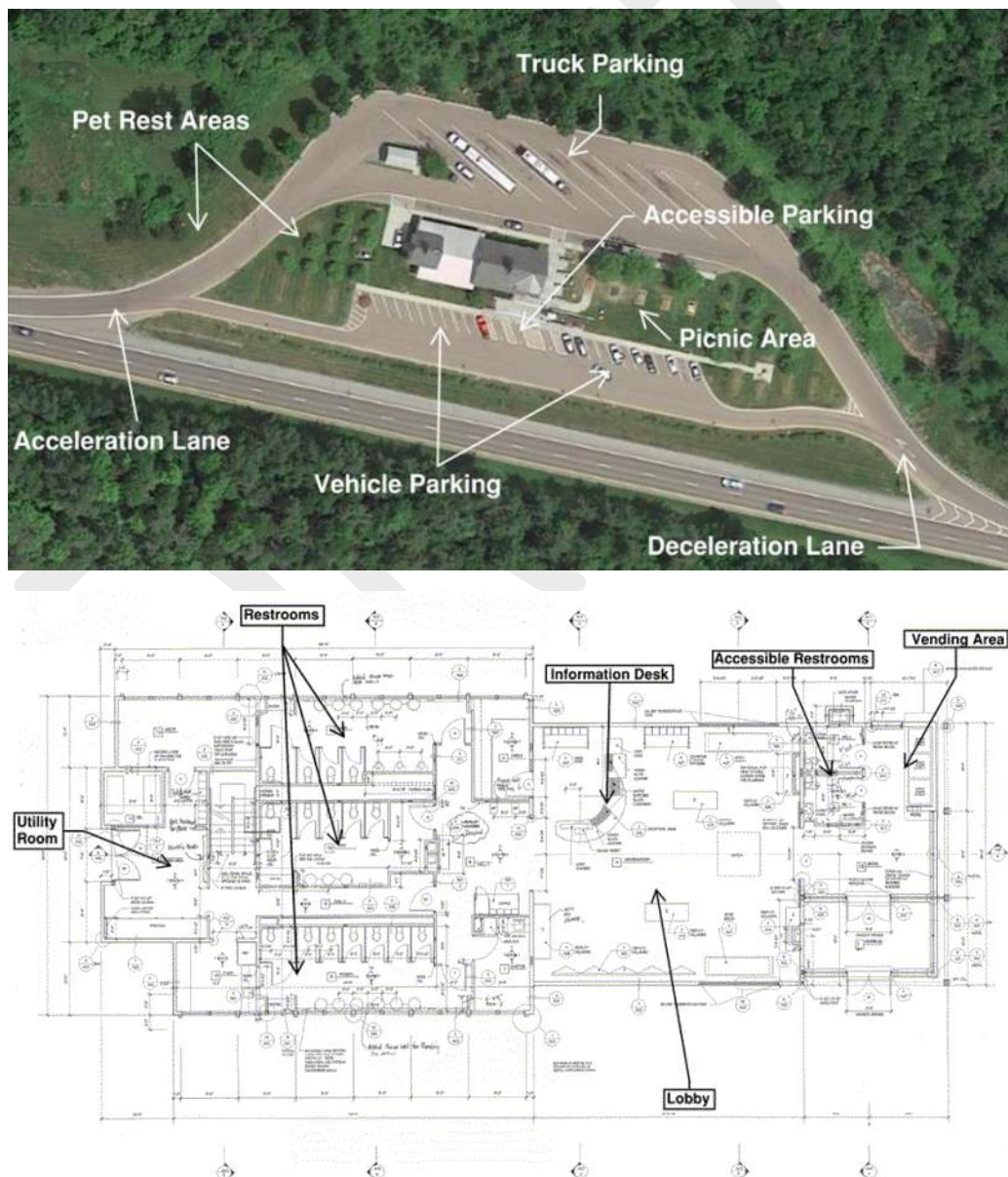


ANATOMY OF AN INFORMATION CENTER

Visitor Information and Welcome Center sites have several defining features which include the information center building, vehicle parking areas, picnic areas, and pet rest areas. The information center’s interior typically includes amenities that are important for enhancing the visitor experience - among these are a lobby with an information desk and displays for brochures and pamphlets, clean and accessible restrooms, and a vending area.

The Williston Northbound Information Center (*shown below*) is an example of an Information Center with the features and amenities described above. The adjacent daily traffic volume on I-89 was 36,000 vehicles and in 2019, over 220,000 people visited this facility.

Figure 6: Williston Northbound Information Center



FACILITY CHARACTERISTICS AND CONDITION ASSESSMENTS

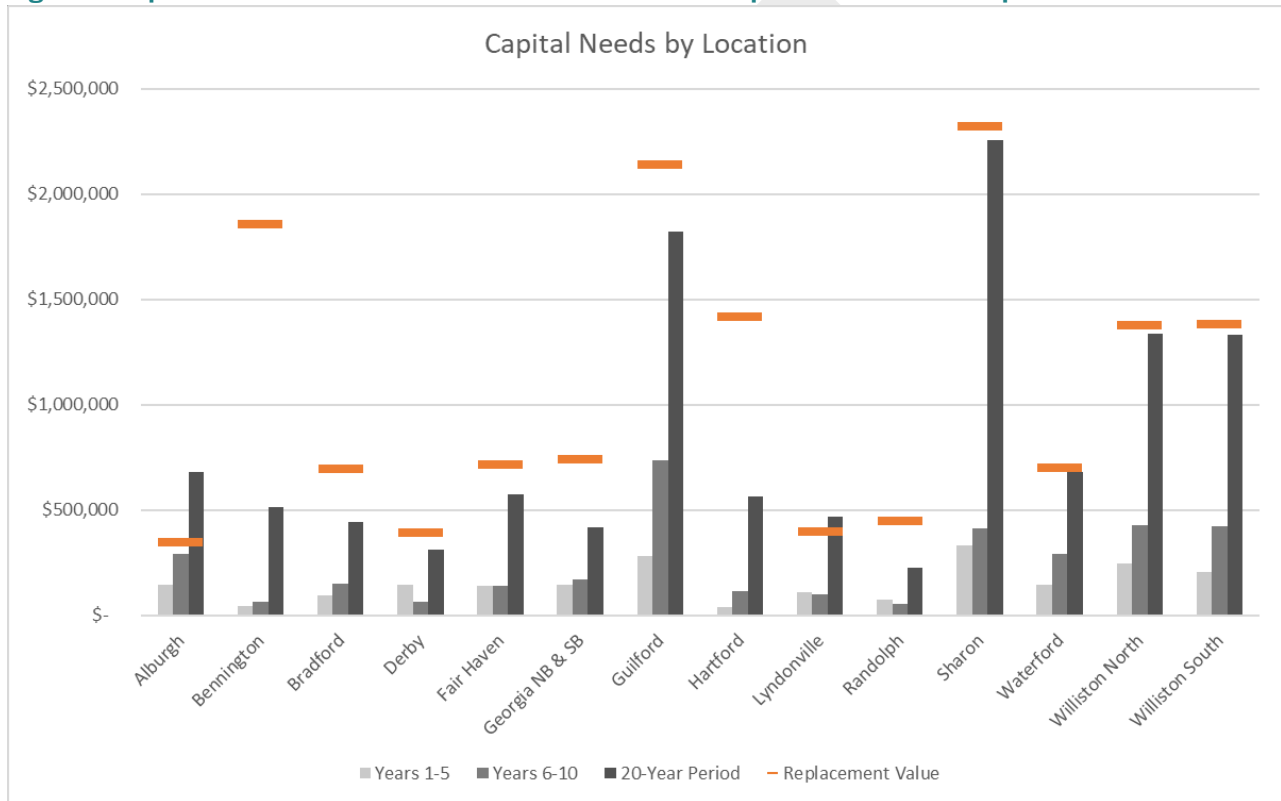
A summary of key characteristics for each location in the VICD network is included in Table 1 below. The category, location, facility size, year built or renovated, hours of operation, services, staffing, parking supply, and adjacent roadway estimates of average daily traffic for each site are included in the inventory.

Table 1. Visitor Information Center Site Characteristics

Site	Center Designation	Location	Date of Construction	Building Area (Square Feet)	Land Area (Acres)	Car Parking Spaces	Truck Parking Spaces	Restrooms	Adjacent Facility Traffic 2018
Alburgh	Welcome	US 2	1996	1,150	1.72	11	2*	4	4,900
Bennington	Welcome	US 7	2013	7,500	9.3	75	11	16	10,900
Bradford NB	Information	I-91 N	1995	2,290	3.2	17	3	9	5,600
Derby SB	Welcome	I-91 S	1968	1,300	1	21	10*	7	3,200
Fair Haven	Welcome	US 4	1980	2,345	4.3	32	7	10	1,800
Georgia NB	Information	I-89 N	1968	1,230		15	8*	8	22,000
Georgia SB	Information	I-89 S	1999	1,230		13	7	8	22,000
Guilford NB	Welcome	I-91 N	1999	7,130	13	107	20	24	18,300
Hartford SB	Welcome	I-91 S	1964	750	6.2	25	10	7	19,800
Lyndonville SB	Information	I-91 S	1973	1,300	0.9	22	8*	8	4,800
Montpelier	Visitors	US 2	--			0	0	2	7,500
Randolph SB	Information	I-89 S	1970	1,470	11.3	18	10*	7	16,700
Sharon NB	Information	I-89 N	1960s	7,440	7.23	56	9	13	18,800
Waterford NB	Welcome	I-93 N	1982	2,340	1.8	26	8*	7	6,200
Williston NB	Information	I-89 N	1960s	4,600	5.3	31	11	21	36,300
Williston SB	Information	I-89 S	1960s	4,600	3.5	33	9	21	36,300

Full condition assessments of the facilities at all Welcome Center and Information Center locations in the system were assembled during the period from 2014 to 2019⁷. These condition assessments tabulated the capital needs for the facilities over the next 20 years by inventorying all of the systems and components in place, observing their current condition, identifying the need to repair, replace, or modernize systems or components, and estimate the anticipated renewal or replacement costs. The capital needs over the 20-year time horizon are summarized according to these assessments for each location in **Figure 7**, noting that the capital needs reported at each time frame are cumulative.

Figure 7. Capital Needs for each Visitor Information Center Compared to a Current Replacement Value



Assuming a \$300 per square foot replacement cost as a consistent metric across the system, an estimate of the current replacement cost for each location was assessed for comparison⁸. New facilities, like Bennington (2013) and Hartford (2012), have a significantly larger gap between the anticipated capital needs and the current replacement value than older facilities in the system, like Waterford (1982), Randolph (1970), and Derby (renovated 1988). Based on this comparison, the 20-year estimated capital needs for Alburgh and Lyndonville would exceed current replacement values. The capital needs, as determined through the individual location assessments, is expected to be approximately \$11.6M out to a 20-year time horizon, based on current dollars (i.e. not adjusted for inflation or increasing costs of construction).

⁷ Various Facility Condition Assessments prepared for BGS by EMG with site visit dates and reports from 2014 to 2019.

⁸ Based on the figures used in the Facility Condition Assessments by EMG, a range of \$175 to \$300 per square foot cost was applied to the existing square footage of the facility to determine a current replacement value. The upper limit of this range was used to determine current replacement values for each location for consistency.

FUNDING AND EXPENDITURES

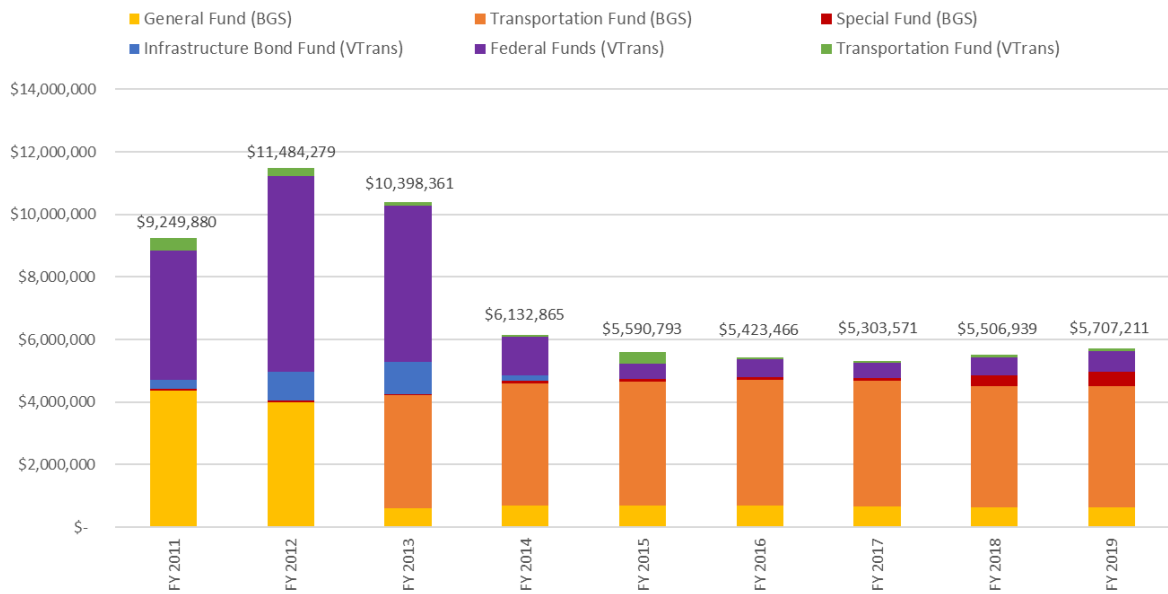
System Funding

The annual appropriations to operate, maintain, and preserve the Visitor Information Center system are generated through two primary funding streams. Daily operations, staffing, and routine maintenance activities within the VICD system are funded through BGS's Visitor Information Center Division budget, which includes revenue from the State's General and Transportation Funds. These budget items include appropriations for staff salaries and benefits, buildings and grounds operating expenses, routine cleaning, maintenance, and repair services, and support of promotional programs (e.g. wireless internet services). It is important to note that marketing through the brochure program and refreshments through the coffee program are self-funded endeavors that expand upon the amenities available at the various VICD facilities and are budgeted through Special Funds.

In addition to the operating budget through BGS, annual appropriations through the VTrans Rest Area program provide support for major preventative maintenance projects at the Visitor Information Centers. Although historically these types of major maintenance projects were supported through state-dedicated funds, VTrans has been approved to use federal-aid funds to support a limited scope of major preventative maintenance projects. This is made possible through the Special Experimental Project No. 14 (SEP 14), which outlines alternative contracting procedures to fulfill major preventative maintenance, preservation, and repair needs of the system. The projects that are funded through the SEP 14 program are developed by BGS in collaboration with VTrans' Municipal Assistance section, managed by BGS Project Managers, and administered according to the Bulletin 3.5 Contracting Procedures and VTrans' Project Development Process Manual.

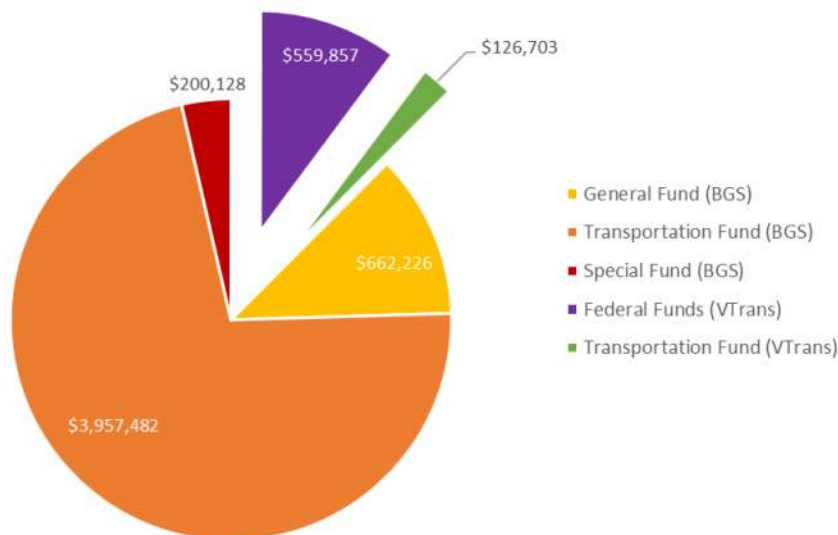
The funding through both appropriation mechanisms in the annual state budget are summarized for fiscal years 2011 through 2019 in **Figure 8**. From FY 2007 to FY 2012, the program was funded primarily through the General Fund. Large Federal Fund appropriations earmarked for a new facility at the Hartford Southbound Information Center and for the new Bennington Welcome Center were allocated in FY 2011 through FY 2014. The base operational funding transitioned back to the Transportation Fund as new facilities came online in 2012 and 2013. Since FY 2015, the base operations and major preventative maintenance programs have been nearly level-funded with similar total annual appropriations of approximately \$5.5 million.

Figure 8: VICD Facilities Annual Budget Appropriations as Passed (FY 2011 - 2019)



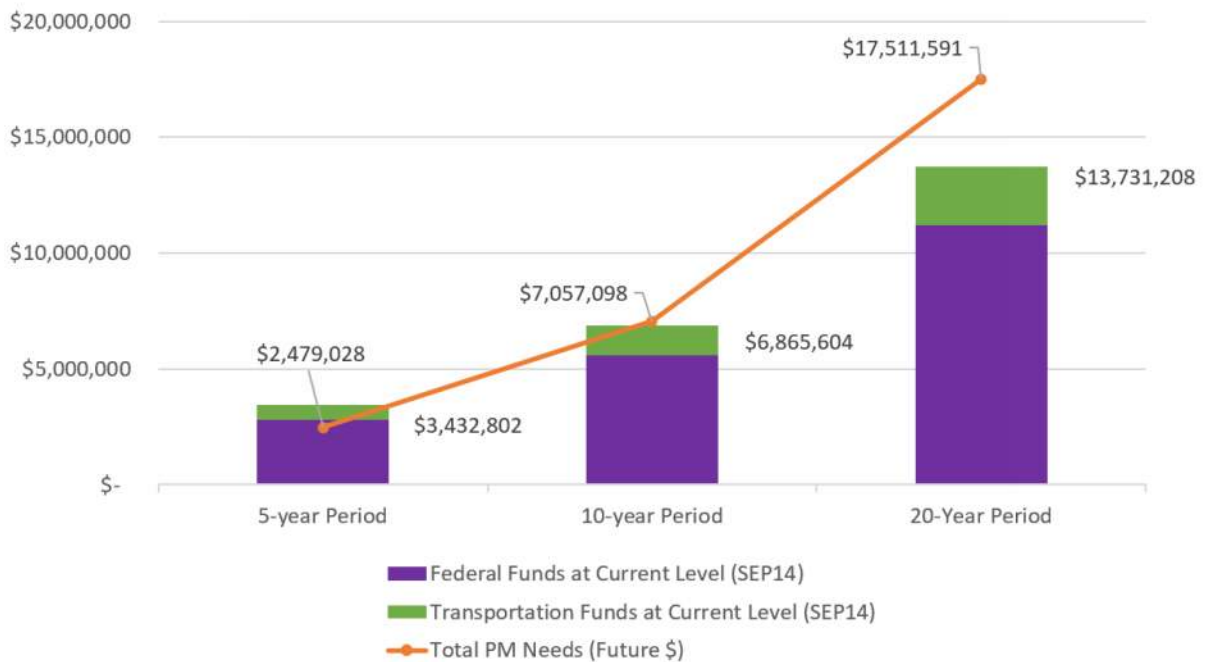
Given the relatively steady funding from FY 2015 through FY 2019, the average appropriations by funding source are summarized in **Figure 9**. Over the last five years, operations and routine maintenance of the system’s facilities has been supported through BGS Information Center appropriations at approximately \$4.8M per year on average, or approximately 88% of the system funding. Capital projects and major preventative maintenance have been supported through VTrans Rest Area program appropriations at approximately \$687,000 on average per year. The VTrans appropriations of just over 12% per year on average are shown exploded from the pie chart below. It is important to note that these appropriations are budgeted with program funds that, through the SEP 14 agreement, require BGS project management to follow project development and contracting protocols in close collaboration with VTrans.

Figure 9: VICD Facilities Average Annual Budget Appropriations (FY 2015 - 2019)



The preventative maintenance needs of the system, as summarized by the individual Facility Conditions Assessments, are expected to total approximately \$17.5M over the next 20 years considering inflation, wage increases, and construction cost escalations. Facility conditions reports were used to determine the preventative maintenance needs. Assuming the current level of VTrans Rest Area appropriations remains constant over the same 20-year time horizon, the total anticipated funding for major preventative maintenance of approximately \$13.7M will not be adequate to address the system’s needs as shown in the comparison in **Figure 10**. It is important to note that Rest Area appropriations serve not only the Visitor Information Center locations, but also the broader network of weigh stations, parking areas, and scenic turnouts, where allocations may be required for pavement and other projects. These figures also do not include any anticipated capital funding required for construction of new facilities at the existing network of locations.

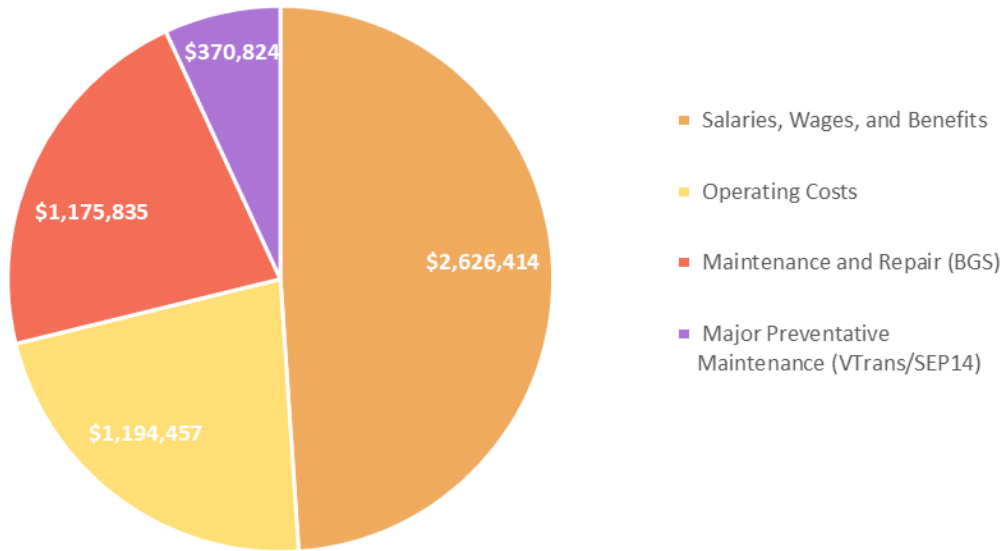
Figure 10: Preventative Maintenance (PM) Adjusted for Inflation and Anticipated SEP 14 Funding (level funding)



System Expenditures

As shown below in **Figure 11**, salaries, wages, and benefits comprise approximately half of the VICD system expenditures. Over the past five years, this category of expense has been consistently just over \$2.5M. The operating costs (e.g. heating, paper products, etc.) and routine maintenance and repair categories of spending have averaged approximately \$1.25M over the last five years.

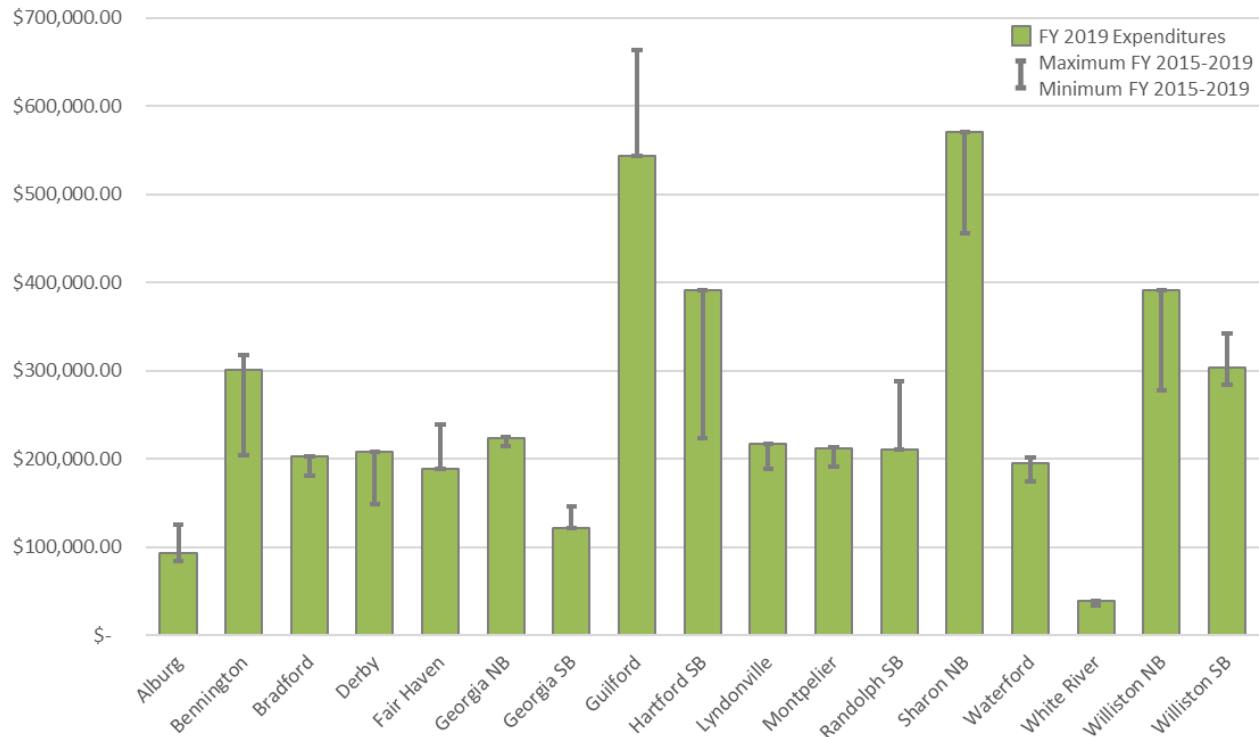
Figure 11: Average Annual System Expenditures (FY 2015-19)



The expenditures made to major preventative maintenance projects funded through VTrans and the SEP 14 agreement are the lowest of the spending categories. Spending on major preventative maintenance projects has varied over the past five years from about \$135,000 to over \$600,000, averaging about \$370,000 during this period. The total appropriations for these major preventative maintenance projects have often exceeded actual expenditures, indicating that the program is not able to leverage all of the budgeted funds within a given year. From FY 2015 through FY 2019, the budgeted funds available for the major preventative maintenance projects has exceeded expenditures anywhere from \$130,000 to \$540,000. Of the \$2.8M total made available through SEP 14 over the last five years, less than 50% of those funds were expended.

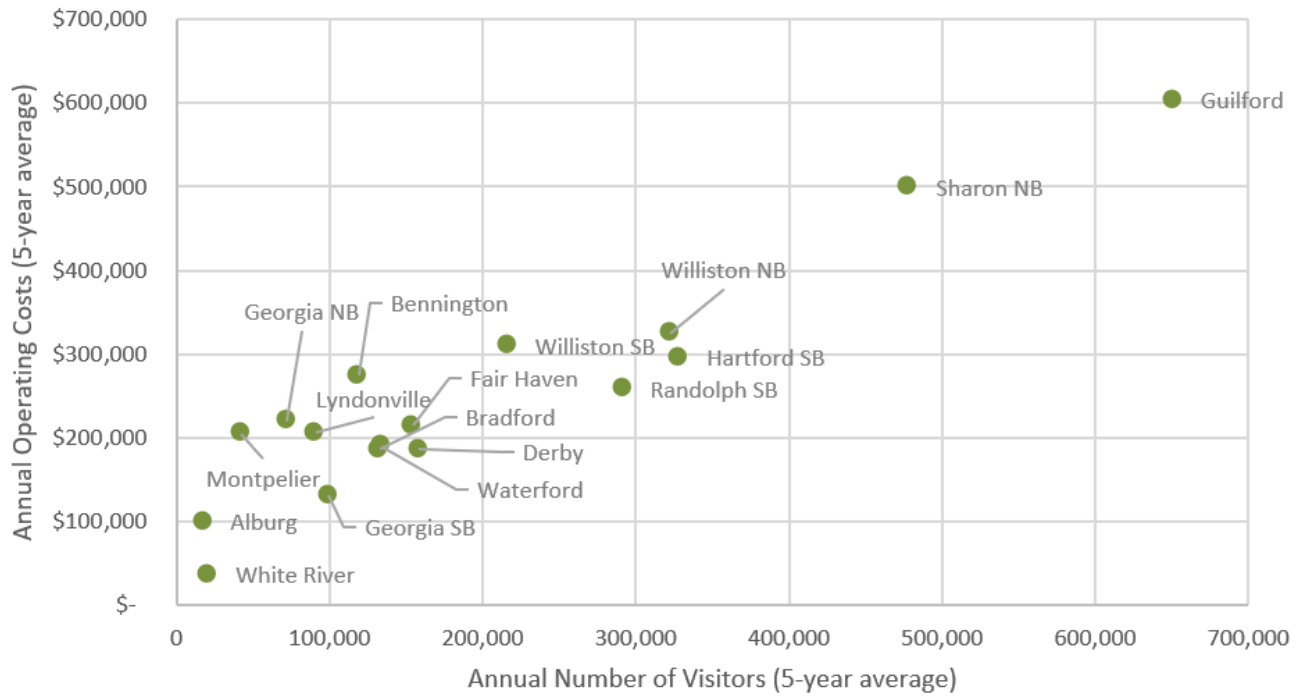
System operating and routine maintenance expenditures vary by Visitor Information Center location as shown in **Figure 12** below. These expenditures are generally correlated with the number of annual visitors, where the locations with the highest operating expenses also see the greatest number of visitors. Similarly, the locations with the greatest variance, as indicated by the error bars depicting the minimum and maximum expenditure years in **Figure 12**, had corresponding changes to the number of visitors. For instance, Sharon has seen an increase in the number of visitors over the depicted period and has similarly seen an uptick in the operating expenses.

Figure 12: Operating & Routine Maintenance Expenditures for FY 2019 by Location



The correlation of visitors to operating costs are further explored in Figure 13, where the average number of visitors at each location is compared to average operating costs over the last five years. The facilities with the most visitors, Sharon and Guilford, see approximately 480,000 and 650,000 visitors and have annual operating expenses of approximately \$500,000 and \$600,000, respectively. The locations with the least number of visitors (less than 50,000 annually), include White River Junction, Alburgh, and Montpelier. Of these locations, Montpelier’s operating expenditures average approximately \$200,000, while Alburgh and White River Junction have operating expenditures under \$100,000. The White River Junction Welcome Center closed in 2020.

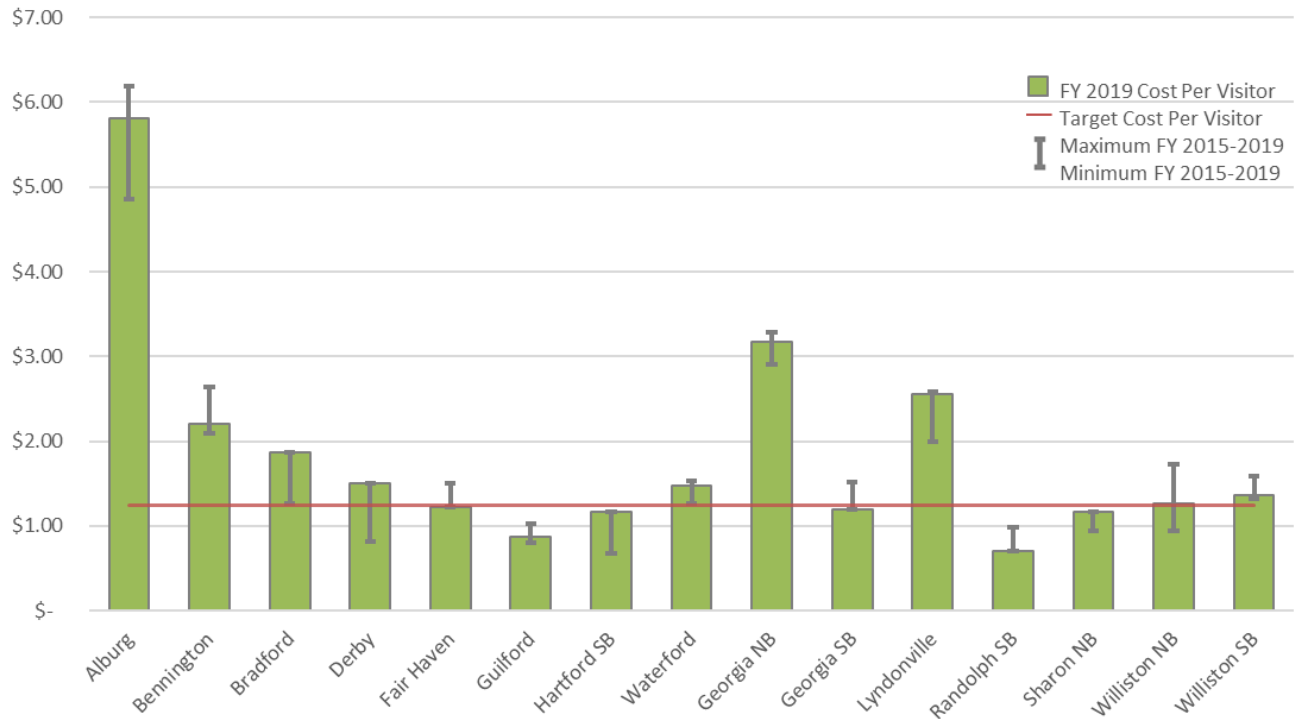
Figure 13: Number of Annual Visitors vs. Annual Operating Costs (based on five-year averages FY 2015-2019)



One of the recommendations from the 2012 *Report to the General Assembly* was an aggregated target of \$1.25 per visitor cost for the system⁹. For FY 2019, operating and routine maintenance expenditures aggregated for the entire system were \$1.57 per visitor. Although the recommendation was intended for the aggregated expenditures averaged for the system as a whole, a comparison of the spending levels by visitor at each individual location to the target provides a metric to gauge the contributing costs for each location (see **Figure 14**). Fair Haven, Georgia Southbound, Guilford, Hartford Southbound, Randolph Southbound, and Sharon had costs per visitor in FY 2019 below \$1.25, indicating that these locations help to draw the average cost per visitor down closer to the targeted average for the system.

⁹ BGS, VTrans, and ACCD, *Future Program of Travel Information Services and Promotion of Vermont Businesses & Products to Motoring Public*, Report to the 2012 General Assembly, 2012.

Figure 14: Cost per Visitor by Location (FY 2019)



VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS & UTILIZATION TRENDS

Visitor Characteristics

According to a survey conducted in 2011 and reported in the 2012 *Report to the General Assembly*, when asked what the primary reason was for visiting a rest area, respondents overwhelmingly noted visiting rest areas to use the restroom facilities (72%). These participants indicated that clean restrooms and 24-hour services were extremely important and access to maps, brochures, current road condition information, Wi-Fi services, and knowledgeable and friendly staff were very important in their experiences at rest areas. Respondents also indicated that they prefer rest areas with their own on- and off-ramps (75%), and that a lack of rest areas on the route was the main reason for choosing not to stop.

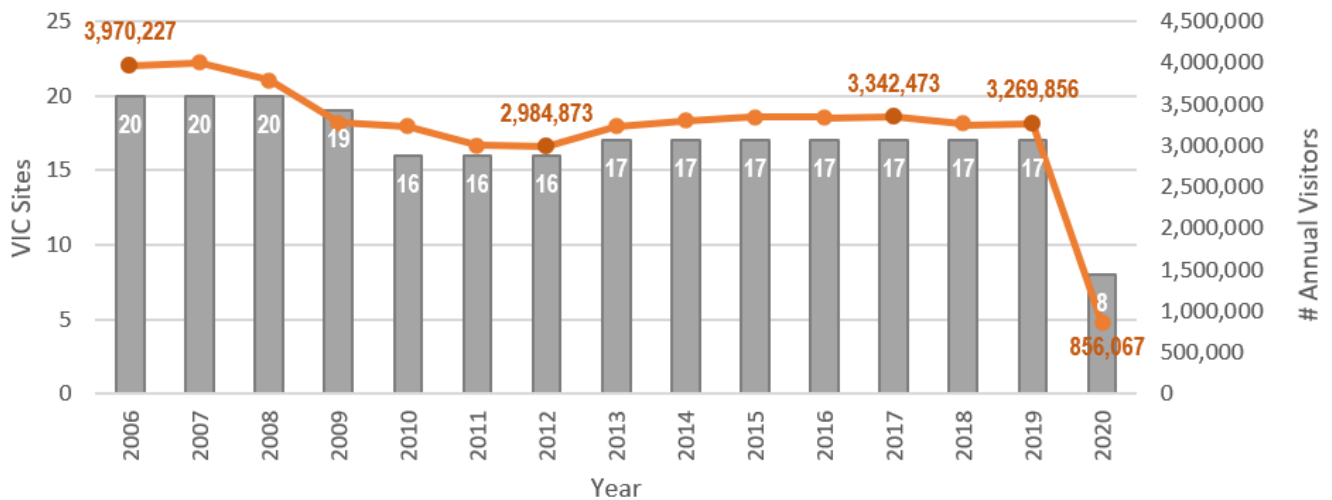
A second survey conducted by the University of Vermont in 2014 found that 87% of Welcome Center visitors were from out state and 65% visitors were over 50 years of age. These visitors indicated that the activities they intended to participate in during their visits were predominantly sightseeing, shopping, food and drink experiences, and visiting farms or farmer’s markets. The most important attractions were natural, Vermont-made products, and seasonal recreation. Visitors of all ages indicated that brochures served as the most influential print media at Welcome Centers. Many (41%) intended to buy Vermont products

while visiting and more than half (55%) intended to stay in Vermont overnight. The Welcome Centers provide a gateway into the state from an external catchment area and provides a captive audience with intentions of spending money while visiting Vermont to which the Vermont brand can be promoted.

Visitation and Utilization Trends

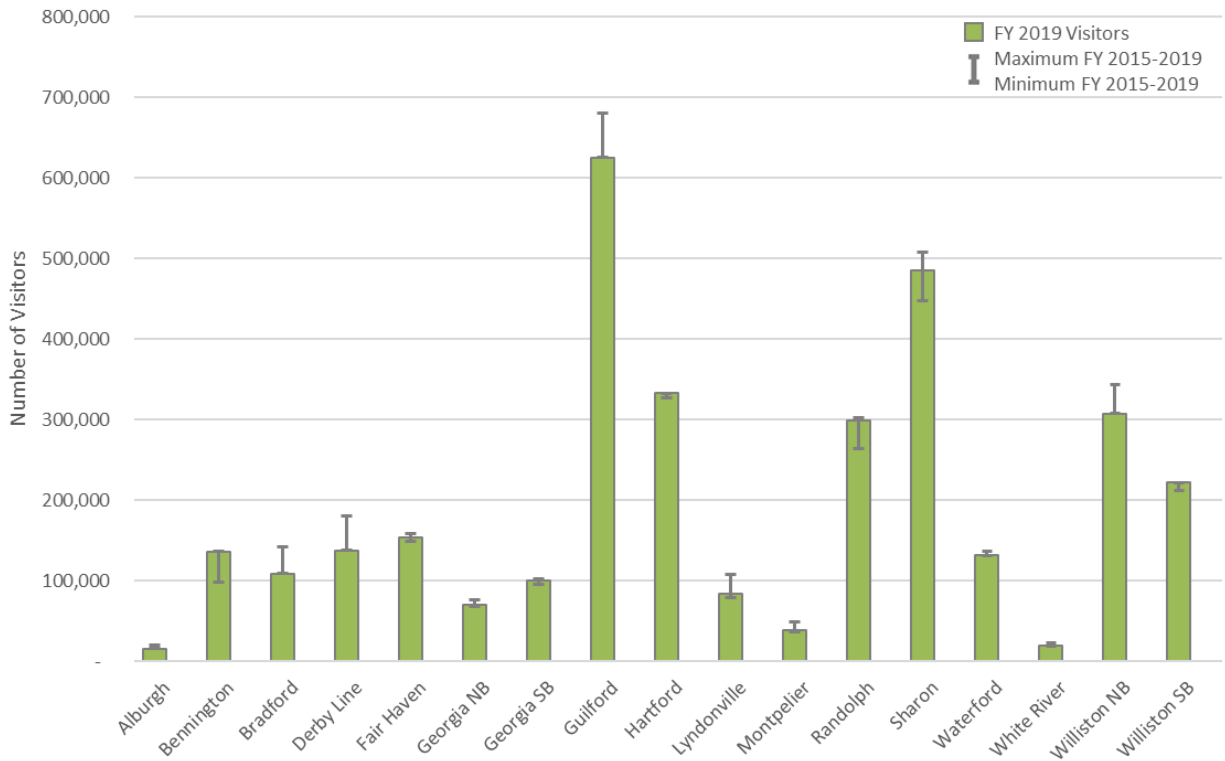
The opportunity to promote the Vermont brand at the network of VICD sites provides exposure to approximately 3.3 million visitors per year, as shown in **Figure 15** below. These counts only include individuals that utilize the building facilities, so it is likely that the network serves even more travelers than is indicative of this metric. The number of annual visitors has been relatively consistent since the Bennington Welcome Center came online in 2013. The number of locations remained consistent at 17 sites from 2013 until 2020, when the White River Junction Visitor Center was closed bringing the system to 16 active sites. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of all VICD buildings in March 2020, with eight of the facilities reopening in July 2020 to serve travelers. The travel restrictions, capacity limitations, and hours of operation reductions (i.e. open 10 AM to 6 PM) at the eight reopened facilities were factors in the significant decrease in visitation in calendar year 2020, as depicted in **Figure 15**.

Figure 15: Visitor Information Center Locations and Total Annual Visitors by Location (CY 2006-2020)



The number of visitors at each facility in the VICD network in 2019 ranged from approximately 17,000 visitors at the Alburgh Welcome Center to approximately 600,000 visitors at the Guilford Welcome Center. The number of visitors to each site has remained fairly consistent with minimal variance over the period from 2015 to 2019 as indicated in by the total visitors and error bars seen in **Figure 16**.

Figure 16: Number of Visitors by Location (FY 2019)



FINANCIAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT

Modeling the Future of the System

Regression Models

A number of simple regression models provided the basis for informing future projections. The dependent variables in the models included: visitors, permanent staff, temporary staff, salary costs, contract costs, and other costs. For each future scenario explored the coefficients for explanatory variables associated with the series of regression models was applied in a manner that then estimated predicted values for the dependent variables for any particular scenario. The section below details the constraints applied in each scenario. Additional details on the models are included in Appendix C.

Model Assumptions

There were a number of global assumptions that were made consistently to the future scenarios. Visitors, staffing, and operating costs were estimated based on the models that were estimated. Capital costs associated with each scenario were estimated based on the historical data and capital plans. The evaluation period for each scenario was assumed to be through 2040. To translate to present value costs, a discount rate of 4.25% was applied. The capital replacement cycle for the facilities was assumed to be 50 years from the original construction or 30 years from major renovation. Rates for salaries and other costs were

grown at 2.25% and 1.25% per year, respectively, across the evaluation period. Costs for new facility construction were carried at \$750 per square foot with a growth rate of 1.25% per year. In some scenarios, additional costs were assumed for locations that were re-envisioned to be restroom-only facilities in place of serving as full information or welcome centers. For these repurposed facilities, costs to decommission the existing facility (at \$75 per square foot) and build a new restroom facility (at \$500,000 each) were carried in the scenario. Costs for upgrading sewer and water at the time of the repurposing were also carried in the scenarios, with an estimate of \$1M for sewer and \$750,000 for water upgrades.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Study Committee members from each of the agencies involved in the Visitor Information Center Division operation, maintenance, and decision-making made up the primary stakeholders through which the phases of the study were vetted. The stakeholders provided guidance, invaluable data resources, and feedback to the study team during their five meetings held over the course of this study. The details of these meetings including meeting agendas, presentation slides, and meeting notes, are included in the Appendix. In addition to the larger Study Committee meetings, other smaller group and one on one conversations were conducted on an as-needed basis to uncover further details regarding the system.

The Study Committee was comprised of representatives from across all of the involved agencies, including:

Agency of Administration, Department of Buildings & General Services (BGS)

<i>Deb Ferrell</i>	<i>Executive Manager of Government Business Services</i>
<i>Erik Filkorn</i>	<i>Principal Assistant</i>
<i>Jennifer Fitch</i>	<i>Commissioner</i>
<i>Peter Hack</i>	<i>Project Manager</i>
<i>Marc O’Grady</i>	<i>Deputy Commissioner</i>
<i>Lisa Sanchez</i>	<i>Vermont Information Centers Division Manager</i>

Agency of Transportation (VTrans)

<i>Tina Bohl</i>	<i>Municipal Assistance</i>
<i>Costa Pappis</i>	<i>Policy and Planning Manager</i>
<i>Dave Pelletier</i>	<i>Planning Coordinator – Project VTrans PM</i>
<i>Rob White</i>	<i>Project Delivery Bureau Director</i>

Agency of Commerce & Community, Development, Department of Tourism & Marketing

Sara DeFilippi Sales and Marketing Specialist

Kenneth Jones Economic Research Analyst

Heather Pelham Commissioner

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Roger Thompson FHWA Vermont Division Office, Safety Engineer

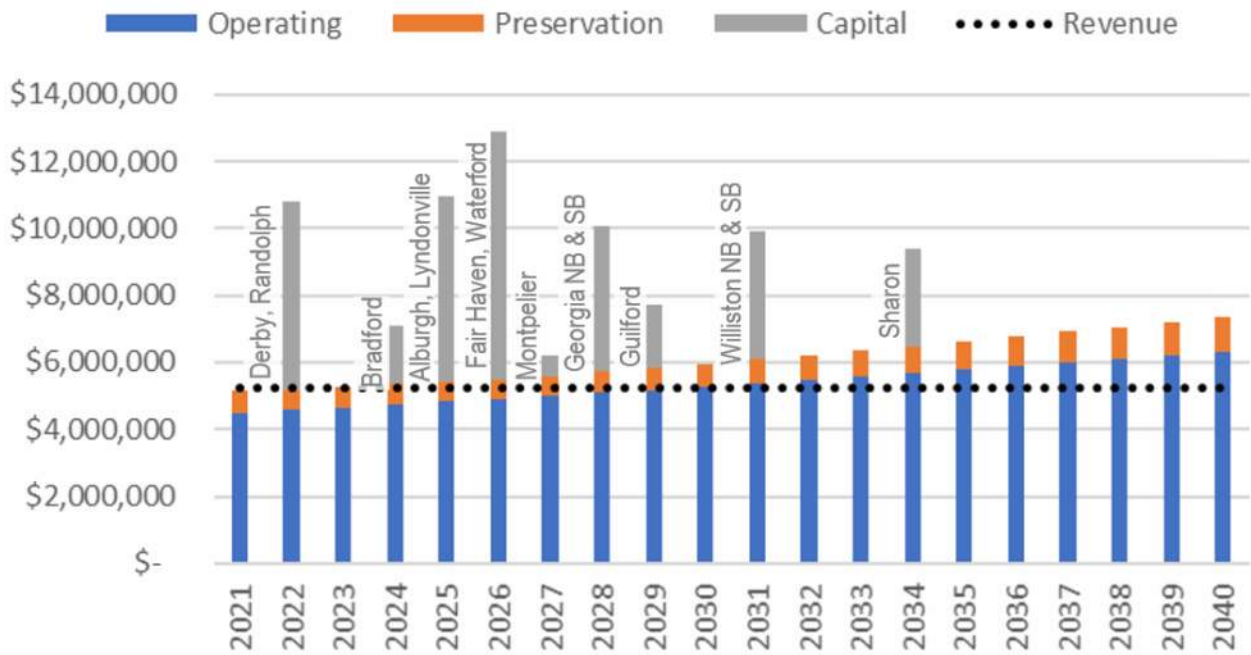
In addition to these regularly engaged parties, the project team presented an update on the project to the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA) in November 2020 and February 2021 to solicit their feedback and keep the group abreast of the study process and outcomes. Details from the meetings with VAPDA, including meeting agendas and presentation slides, are included in the Appendices.

2

Scenario Planning and Alternatives Evaluation

Based on the understanding of the current state of the VICD system as described in the previous section, with relatively level funding and incrementally increasing costs over the last five years, a “Status Quo” scenario was explored. This preliminary projection of revenue and expenditures targeted current funding levels and assumed the system would continue to operate as is without constraining costs (**Figure 17**). This investigation revealed a \$12M shortfall in system operating and preservation funding over the 20-year evaluation period. Once capital costs are taken into consideration, the gap in funding increases to approximately \$45M over the 20-year evaluation period.

Figure 17: 20-Year Financial Projection for "Status Quo" Scenario



Given the anticipated funding shortfalls that would occur provided neither the revenue nor the expenditures are adjusted or constrained, a number of scenarios were developed to explore alternative futures for the system. Several options were explored with the aim of narrowing the scenarios to a few viable future alternatives to evaluate provided input from the various stakeholders in the process, including the study Steering Committee and Agency representatives and leadership.

INITIAL SCENARIOS

The initial set of scenarios fell into three general categories: 1) Maintain Minimum Service Levels, 2) Status Quo, and 3) System Expansion. The minimum service level scenarios aimed to meet various requirements of the system through minimum acceptable service levels. The status quo scenarios aimed to leverage the existing system services and funding mechanisms as a known point from which adjustments could be made. The system expansion scenarios envision enhancements or expansion of the system to serve the future travelers' needs.

Scenario A: Maintain Minimum Service Levels

The first set of scenarios that were developed were focused on constraining the costs of the system through targeted reductions. Key constraints necessary to define for a viable set of alternatives that considered reductions to the system were the allowable minimums for the system. Compliance with standards or other guidance helped to shape the feasible minimums for the system, including consideration for the AASHTO safe rest area spacing recommendations, long-term truck parking stipulated in Jason's Law, and Vermont Statutes for establishing information centers near principal entrance points to the state.

According to the AASHTO *Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*¹⁰, states should provide reasonable opportunities for safety breaks, with a recommendation of parking areas every 60 miles or less. This is of particular concern for limited access or rural contexts where other opportunities to safely park and rest may not be available. Based on this guidance and as previously discussed, the current system provides adequate spacing on the interstate facilities when the parking areas and VICD locations are considered in conjunction, with the exception of one 61-mile gap.

Based on the implementation of Jason's Law, adequate long-term parking for commercial motor vehicles should be provided on the National Highway System. Of the eligible sites in Vermont, surveys have indicated that truck parking on the system is adequate. Impacts to the long-term truck parking in a reduction scenario would need to be considered to remain in good standing.

According to Vermont State Statute *10 V.S.A. § 485*, official tourist information centers shall be "established near the principal entrance points into the State" and "at such other locations as the Agency deems appropriate." This statute in 1968 placed the Agency of Commerce and Community Development in charge of establishing a network of strategically located information centers that could deliver information to the travelers on "public accommodations,

¹⁰ *Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*, AASHTO, 2001

commercial services for the travelling public, other businesses, and points of scenic, historic, cultural, educational, and religious interest.”

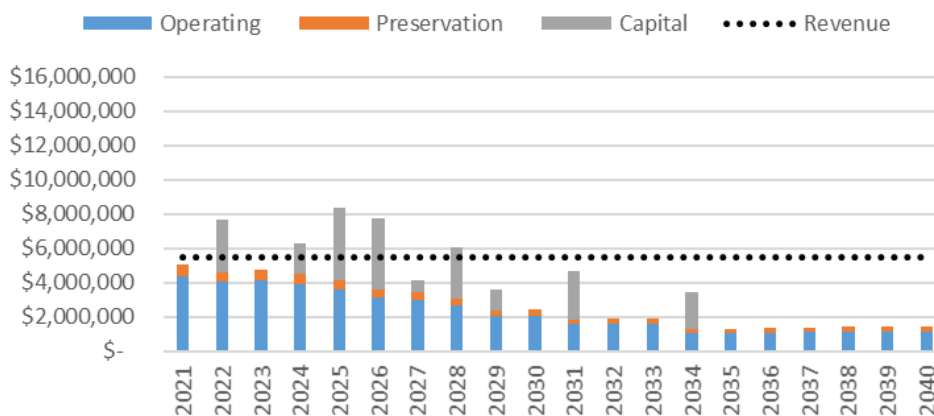
Preliminarily, there were four different arrangements that explored reductions to the system. Although not necessarily alternatives that would be pursued, these arrangements were explored to better understand the tradeoffs involved in various scenarios where a minimum level of service is provided compared to the system as it operates today.

A1: Repurpose all VICD Facilities

The first scenario that was evaluated was to close all of the existing facilities at the end of their useful lives, repurposing the sites with restroom-only facilities. A 50-year time horizon from construction was used as the metric to determine the end of a building’s useful life – unless the facility had been recently rehabilitated, in which the useful life was determined to be 30 years from the last major rehabilitation. Costs to decommission the existing facility (at \$75 per square foot) and build a new restroom facility (at \$500,000 each) were carried in the scenario. Costs for upgrading sewer and water at the time of the repurposing were also carried, with an estimate of \$1M for sewer and \$750,000 for water upgrades. It is noted that these costs would vary depending on the site needs but provided a consistent cost assumption for those water and wastewater systems that have not been updated more recently.

Although this scenario would reduce the operating and preservation costs associated with the system to about half of the projected level-funding revenues, there are tradeoffs to the service provided to the traveling public. As a result, it was estimated that visitation to the Visitor Information Centers, and opportunities for ambassadors and brochures to direct the traveler experience, would be expected drop by 25% over the 20-year study horizon under this alternative.

Figure 18: Future Financial Projection – Repurpose All VICD Facilities Alternative

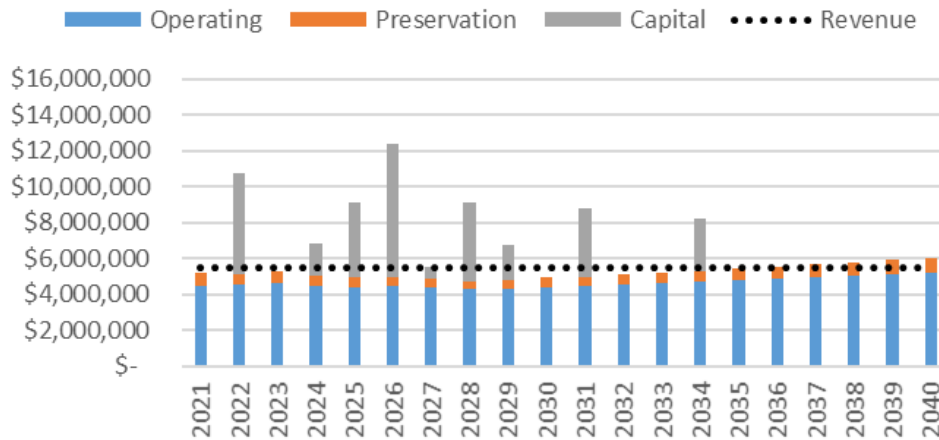


A2: Repurpose Selected VICD Facilities

A scenario in which selected facilities are repurposed at the end of their useful lives to surface parking with restroom facilities was explored. Similar to Scenario A1, useful life for these purposes was assumed to be 50 years (or 30 years with a recent major rehabilitation). Facilities with relatively low visitation would be closed and repurposed to restroom-only facilities at the end of their useful life under this alternative. For these purposes, Bradford, Georgia

Southbound, Lyndonville, and Montpelier were selected as the facilities to be repurposed. All other facilities were assumed to be replaced in kind as they approach the end of their useful life.

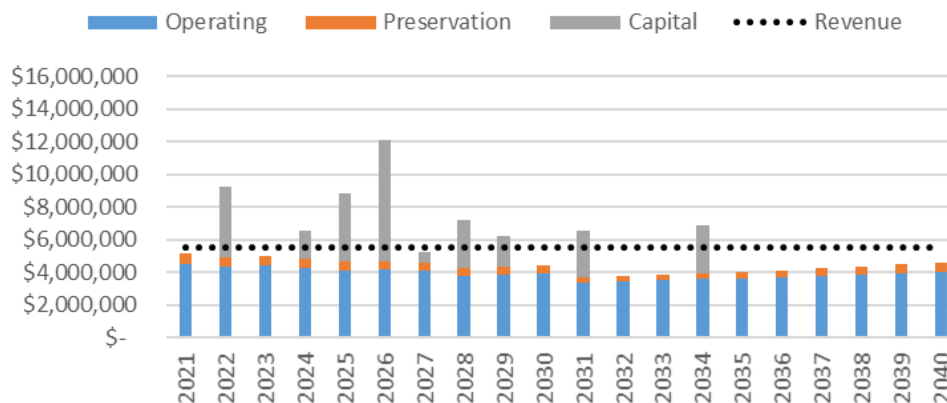
Figure 19: Future Financial Projection – Repurpose Selected VICD Facilities Alternative



A3: Maintain Welcome Centers; Repurpose Information Centers & Service Centers

In this alternative, the Welcome Centers are maintained to provide those gateway services to out of state travelers while all other locations would be replaced at the end of their useful life with restroom-only facilities. Maintaining the surface lots and restrooms would continue to provide safe places to park and serve the traveling public with clean restrooms interior to the state. For this alternative, Bradford, Georgia Northbound, Georgia Southbound, Lyndonville, Montpelier, Randolph, Williston Northbound and Williston Southbound were assumed to be replaced with restroom-only facilities within the study horizon.

Figure 20: Future Financial Projection – Maintain Welcome Centers Alternative



A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

The fourth alternative explored in the “maintain minimum service levels” was largely modeled on A3, with the addition of strategically locating public-private partnership service centers to augment the reduced system. These P3’s would be likely located near the centers proposed to be repurposed so as to provide additional amenities to travelers in the absence of an information center. There are generally four pathways that were explored for delivering this arrangement.

Various options for the potential utility of P3's exist for consideration for Vermont's Visitor Information Centers. Four alternatives are considered and explained here to provide clarity of how a P3 model may work and to suggest that conditions exist to enable the model to work. That is not to say Vermont would not "give up" certain things in the process, as will be described. Rather, it is to suggest that if approaches are needed to reduce operational costs in ways that minimize negative impacts to existing services, then a P3 is a potentially viable path to meet those goals. A more detailed overview of Alternative Delivery Models, including P3's is provided later in this chapter.

Summarized below are two variants of an *Operation & Maintenance Contract* model, a *Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintain* model and a *Build-Own-Operate* model that were examined. Of these alternatives, the first utilizes new or existing facilities on the interstate system, while the last three target services off of the interstate system.

Option 1: Operation & Maintenance Contract Utilizing Facilities on the Interstate System

In this option, the state provides the opportunity for private entities to lease access to facilities, new or existing, on the interstate system. The State would outline in a lease agreement the requirements laid out in statute as minimums that the private partner must provide

The challenge in this option is the value proposition for the private entity. Due to the restrictions of selling services or products at facilities on the interstate system, the private entity may be happy to bid to operate the facility(s) but at close to the full value the state is paying today. If on interstate signage is included as part of such an agreement, consistent with the precedent set at the Maplewood facility in Berlin,; then there is at least a minimal, non-trivial value being captured for the private operator in terms of marketing of their business and services. In this case, the state may see a slightly lower operational cost from the private entity.

Overall, operating costs may be marginally lower in this model due to a private company choosing to pay less, not offer benefits or utilize a higher percentage of part-time employees which may result in lower satisfaction from visitors. It may also attract political attention that is typical in any case where employee groups determine a loss of quality jobs (real or perceived).

While this option may help marginally with operating costs moving forward it does not address the funding necessary to support future capital needs.

Option 2: Operation & Maintenance Contract Utilizing Facilities off of the Interstate System

In this option the state provides the land and a completed facility, including a space that would meet the tourism needs of the traveling public occasionally referred to as "The Vermont Room". As it is off of the interstate system, the facility may include retail space and fuel / energy services. The State would outline in a lease agreement the requirements laid out in statute as minimums that the private partner must provide including 24/7 operation, clean restrooms, and adequate parking.

As this offsite facility would provide the preponderance of traveler services, signage on the interstate would be provided to guide the traveling public to these "state-sanctioned" facilities.

Due to the potentially high value proposition for the private partner resulting from the enhanced exposure from the interstate signing, the concept in this model is that the private partner would pay an annual fee to the State for the right to operate the facility. These fees, in turn, could be used to offset the costs to provide staff to operate the “Vermont Room” tourism-based services located at the facility.

This option is anticipated to greatly reduce operating costs to the State, as the ongoing staffing costs would be offset by the fees paid by the private entity managing the facility. The private entity would also cover all of the maintenance and operating costs for the facility. However, this approach does still require the State to pay to design, permit, and construct the facility. Lastly, one would expect visitation would decrease as measured against on-interstate services simply due to the additional distance from the interstate.

Option 3: Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintain off the Interstate System

In this option the state acquires and provides land necessary for providing an off-interstate facility. The private entity then builds and finances the facility and operates and maintains the same, again within the constraints the state includes as minimum conditions in the lease agreement.

Since the private entity would finance the facility, one should expect the annual lease fee to still be positive for the State but significantly less than Option 2.

As with option 2, the on-interstate signage alerting travelers to the existence of a state-sanctioned rest area would be an important incentive for the private entity. Also, the same truck parking and restroom facilities necessary in Option 2 would remain on the Interstate system.

This option leaves the State with only a financial obligation to provide support for the truck parking facility on the operating front. It also minimizes capital needs by having the private finance the facility needs. As with option 2, one should again expect a decrease in visitation as measured against on interstate facilities.

Option 4: Build-Own-Operate Facilities off the Interstate System

In this option, the State’s role in establishing and operating off-interstate facilities is as narrow as possible. The State establishes the minimal requirements for the facility, provides the directional signage on the interstate and continues providing truck parking and restrooms on the interstate system.

The private sector then sites the facility (within an acceptable distance from an interstate exit), builds and finances it, operates and maintains it as any private owner would. The State should accept very minimal lease payments from this model (for the benefit of the interstate directional signage), but it is relieved of the most significant financial requirements related to construction, maintenance, and operating costs.

As with the previous two models, one should expect visitation to the sites to decline under this scenario as measured against on-interstate facilities.

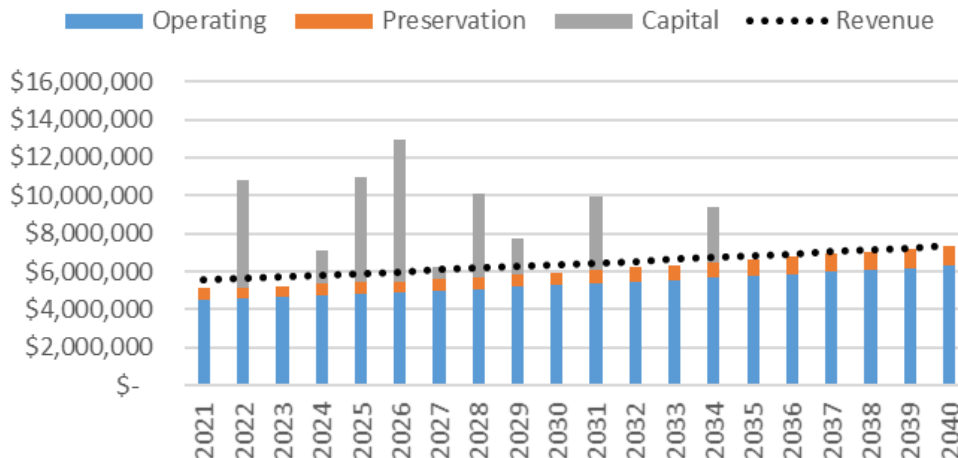
Scenario B: Maintain Current Facilities

The three scenarios explored in under the Status Quo scenario aimed to maintain the existing footprint of the system at 16 facilities, while making adjustments to other factors in order to make the scenario financially viable over the 20-year study horizon.

B1: Existing System + Additional Funding

The first scenario maintains the operations and maintenance of the 16 facilities in the system at current service levels. This effectively means continued service as the system was run prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the same hours of operation, staffing levels, maintenance schedules, etc. In order to maintain the system at this service level, an additional \$13M in operations and preservation funds would be required over the study time horizon, or an almost 2% per year increase in the current (pre-pandemic) funding. It is important to note that this increase in funding does not include the capital funds required to still reconstruct the existing facilities in kind (or right-sized) when they reach the end of their useful life. These capital costs would total approximately \$34M over the course of the 20-year study period to reconstruct all but the most recently built facilities in Bennington and Hartford.

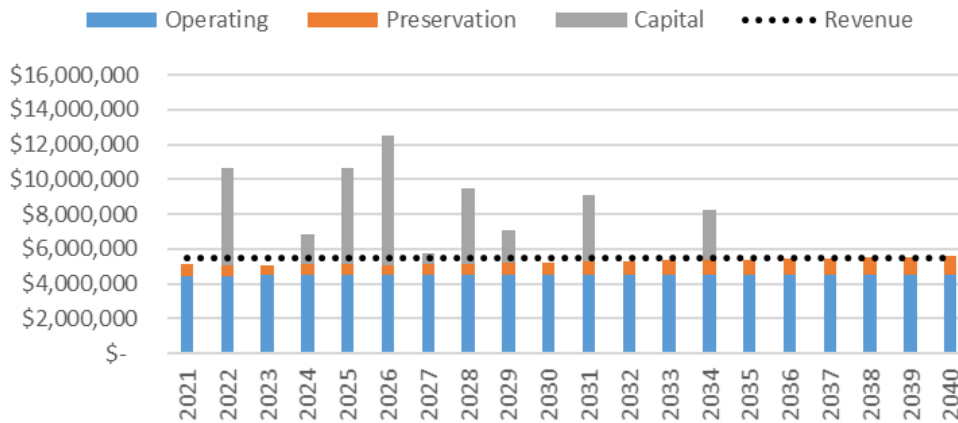
Figure 21: Future Financial Projection – Existing System + Additional Funding Alternative



B2: Existing System + Reduce Spending

The second Status Quo scenario that was explored included maintenance of the existing facility footprint while reducing spending primarily through staffing reductions. In this exercise, a 45% reduction in staffing levels would be required to meet the operation and preservation budget needs at the present funding levels. Such a drastic reduction in staffing could present challenges in providing adequate staff coverage at the 16 operable facilities. Although the reduction would yield a balanced budget for the system over the 20-year study horizon, it again would not account for the \$34M in capital funds needed to reconstruct the existing facilities as they reach the end of their useful life.

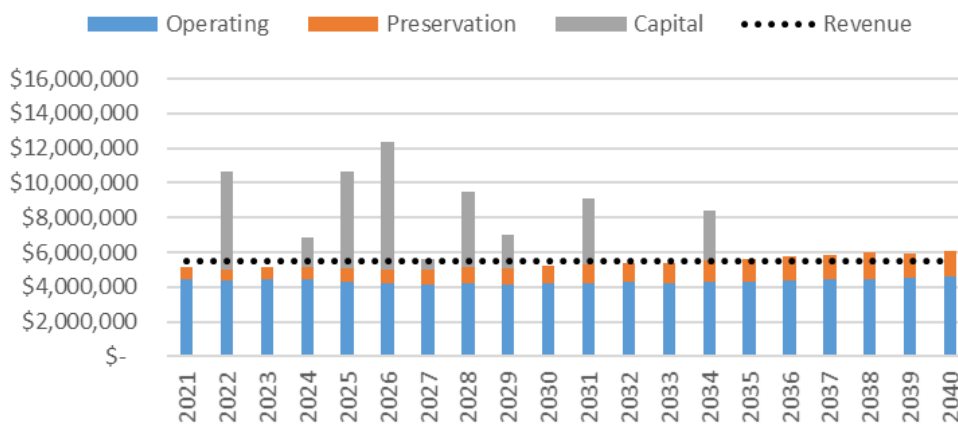
Figure 22: Future Financial Projection – Reduced Spending Alternative



B3: Existing System + Contract Operations

One other alternative to maintain the footprint of the existing system was to explore a shift from the current staffing model to that of a contracted labor force. As previously discussed, these alternative staffing models are already in place in Bennington, Williston Northbound, Williston Southbound, and Georgia Southbound. This scenario explores the transition of staffing for all 16 sites to be contracted in similar fashion to the existing agreements. Assuming contracted labor costs increase over time due to inflation, but not accounting for other rising costs, the system costs would nearly break even over the 20-year study horizon while maintaining the existing funding structure. Like the other status quo scenarios, the contract operations approach does not account for the \$34M in capital funds necessary over the study time horizon to replace the existing facilities as they reach the end of their useful life.

Figure 23: Future Financial Projection - Contract Operations Alternative



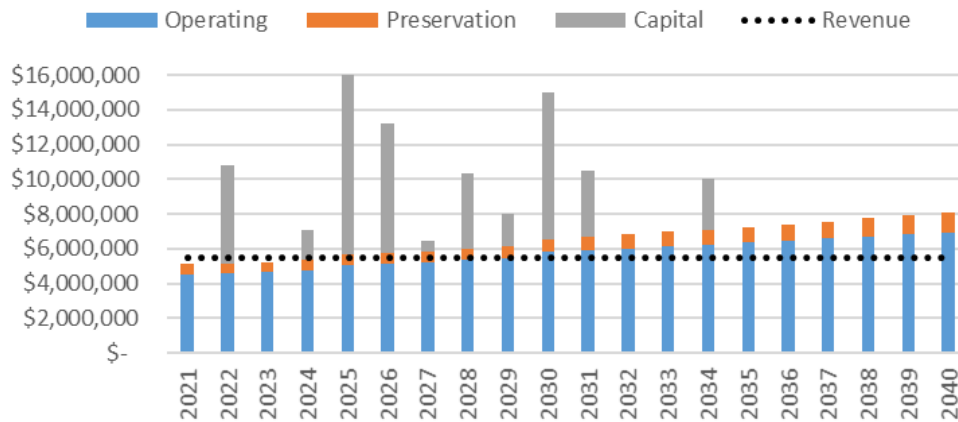
Scenario C: Add New Facilities

C1: Add Two New VICD Facilities

Expansion of the system from its current state was another scenario that was explored to better understand the possibilities of a future system. The alternative evaluated in this scenario

focused on expansion of the VICD system through the addition of two new facilities. In order to support the scenario, the funding required for operations and preservation would need to be increased by approximately 20% over the 20-year period. For the purposes of this analysis, specific locations for these potential new sites were not identified. According to the modeling and historic trends of other locations in the system, the expansion of the system by two strategically located sites would increase visitation by approximately 9% over the study period.

Figure 24: Future Financial Projection – Add Two New VICD Facilities Alternative



EVALUATION OF INITIAL SCENARIOS

An evaluation matrix was developed to summarize various performance metrics for each alternative and to facilitate comparisons between the alternatives. The performance metrics evaluated for each alternative include cost (operating and capital), cost per visitor, estimated visitation counts, number of facilities in operation, total operating hours, and staffing levels.

The evaluation matrices for each of the three initial scenarios are shown on the following pages.

Figure 25: Evaluation Matrix - Scenario 1 (Maintain Minimum Service Levels)

		Minimum Level		
Description	Units	A1 Surface Lots with Restrooms Only	A2 Maintain Selected Locations	A3 Maintain Welcome Centers
Cost				
Operating & Preservation	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$53,068,841	\$104,554,276	\$88,192,621
Capital	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$22,862,582	\$32,644,371	\$28,902,109
Change in O & P Costs	Change from Average 2015-2019 Funding Levels	-52%	-5%	-20%
Cost per Visitor	Non-Discounted Avg Operating Cost/Visitor (2021-40)	\$1.16	\$1.50	\$1.47
Change in Cost/Visitor	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-28%	-7%	-9%
Visitation				
Total Visits	Total # of Visitors (2021-2040)	45,714,499	69,661,453	59,880,923
Change in Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-40%	-8%	-21%
Total Tourism Visits*	Total # of Tourist Visitors (2021-2040)	3,078,082	27,025,036	17,244,506
Change in Tourism Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-91%	-18%	-48%
Operations				
Facilities	Change in # of Facilities from Current Level	0	0	0
Total Size**	Change in Total Square Footage from Current Level	0%	0%	0%
Operating Hours	Change in Total Operating Hours from Current Level	13%	77%	50%
Staffing	Change in State Staffing from Current Level	7%	72%	58%

* Tourism Visits were estimated as the total number of visitors stopping for purposes beyond using the restroom (i.e. seeking traveler information)

** Facilities scheduled for replacement were assumed to be replaced with a facility with the same footprint, except those facilities currently over 6,000 sf or under 2,000 sf, which were assumed to be reconstructed with a 6,000 sf footprint maximum or 2,000 sf minimum. Restroom only facilities were assumed to be 500 sq ft.

Figure 26: Evaluation Matrix - Scenario 2 (Status Quo)

		Status Quo		
Description	Units	B1 Additional Funding	B2 Reduce Spending	B3 Contract Operations
Cost				
Operating & Preservation	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$122,027,425	\$105,458,833	\$107,800,420
Capital	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$33,887,973	\$33,887,973	\$33,887,973
Change in O & P Costs	Change from Average 2015-2019 Funding Levels	11%	-4%	-2%
Cost per Visitor	Non-Discounted Avg Operating Cost/Visitor (2021-40)	\$1.61	\$1.51	\$1.47
Change in Cost/Visitor	Change from Status Quo Alternative	0%	-6%	-9%
Visitation				
Total Visits	Total # of Visitors (2021-2040)	75,605,544	69,691,319	73,376,403
Change in Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	0%	-8%	-3%
Total Tourism Visits*	Total # of Tourist Visitors (2021-2040)	32,969,127	27,054,902	25,540,716
Change in Tourism Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	0%	-18%	-23%
Operations				
Facilities	Change in # of Facilities from Current Level	0	0	0
Total Size**	Change in Total Square Footage from Current Level	0%	0%	0%
Operating Hours	Change in Total Operating Hours from Current Level	100%	50%	100%
Staffing	Change in State Staffing from Current Level	100%	50%	54%

* Tourism Visits were estimated as the total number of visitors stopping for purposes beyond using the restroom (i.e. seeking traveler information)

** Facilities scheduled for replacement were assumed to be replaced with a facility with the same footprint, except those facilities currently over 6,000 sf or under 2,000 sf, which were assumed to be reconstructed with a 6,000 sf footprint maximum or 2,000 sf minimum. Restroom only facilities were assumed to be 500 sq ft.

Figure 27: Evaluation Matrix - Scenario 3 (Add New Facilities)

		System Expansion
		C1
Description	Units	Two New Facilities
Cost		
Operating & Preservation	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$76,817,327
Capital	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$18,768,874
Change in O & P Costs	Change from Average 2015-2019 Funding Levels	-30%
Cost per Visitor	Non-Discounted Avg Operating Cost/Visitor (2021-40)	\$1.55
Change in Cost/Visitor	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-4%
Visitation		
Total Visits	Total # of Visitors (2021-2040)	49,608,772
Change in Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-34%
Total Tourism Visits*	Total # of Tourist Visitors (2021-2040)	17,823,253
Change in Tourism Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-46%
Operations		
Facilities	Change in # of Facilities from Current Level	0
Total Size**	Change in Total Square Footage from Current Level	0%
Operating Hours	Change in Total Operating Hours from Current Level	45%
Staffing	Change in State Staffing from Current Level	53%

* Tourism Visits were estimated as the total number of visitors stopping for purposes beyond using the restroom (i.e. seeking traveler information)

** Facilities scheduled for replacement were assumed to be replaced with a facility with the same footprint, except those facilities currently over 6,000 sf or under 2,000 sf, which were assumed to be reconstructed with a 6,000 sf footprint maximum or 2,000 sf minimum. Restroom only facilities were assumed to be 500 sq ft.

REFINED ALTERNATIVES

Through discussions with the project Study Group, the scenarios were narrowed to a set of the most viable candidates and refinements to those scenarios were made based on feedback and further research. The field was narrowed to four potential alternatives, including: 1) maintaining the existing system with additional funding, 2) maintaining the existing system with reductions to service, 3) strategically repurposing or closing facilities, and 4) consolidating services in the Northwest Region with a new facility.

Alternative 1: Maintain Existing VICD System with Additional Funding

Refinements were made to the scenario that maintains the current system while providing additional funding to fill the gap between historically level funding levels and rising expenditures (i.e. scenario B1 above). Adjustments to modeling assumptions including costs and useful life approximations were made based on feedback from stakeholder input. A refined alternative resulted that would maintain the system of 16 facilities requiring approximately 1.9% of additional revenue per year to cover projected operating and system preservation costs. This does not include capital costs, which, given rising costs and deferred maintenance, are anticipated to total approximately \$34M over the next twenty years.

Alternative 2: Maintain Existing VICD System with Reduced Service Levels

A second refined alternative was carried forward that sought to maintain the existing system of 16 locations, but targeted level funding year over year through progressive reductions to service levels. Like Alternative 1, the refinements carried forward from Scenario B2 included adjustments to model assumptions including costs and useful life projections. Over the 20-year analysis period, a 50% cut in staffing levels and service hours were necessary to operate under a level funding scenario. Estimates of staff reductions included reductions from the existing 25 permanent staff positions to 13 and the existing 32 temporary staff positions to 15. These staff reductions were combined with reductions in hours of operation at each site of approximately 2.5% per year to reach 50% reductions compared to current levels by 2040. As outlined, these reductions could represent either limited numbers of open hours per day, days per week, or seasonal operation at each site, depending on anticipated visitation and staffing availability. With reduced staff and hours of operation at sites throughout the system, it is anticipated that current funding levels could sustain the system through 2040. However, limiting staff and hours of operation to these reduced levels could pose logistical challenges for appropriately staffing sites, would reduce visitation and limit tourist interactions, and would likely result in further deferred maintenance at the facilities.

Alternative 3: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities

Refinements to the Scenario A2, where selected facilities were repurposed (i.e. converted to parking with restroom-only structures), was further refined in Alternative 3. The refinements for this alternative were focused on identifying potential candidate locations for either closure or repurposing. Visitation trends, adjacent annual average daily traffic volumes, cost per visitor, and facility age were all examined and ranked for the facilities to guide the identification of candidate locations for closure or repurposing. **Table 2** below shows the individual and combined rank order of each site based on these identified metrics.

Table 2. Evaluation Metrics Used to Identify Candidate Locations for Closure or Repurposing

Facility	Year Constructed	Year Rehab	Average Annual Visitation (2015-19)		Adjacent AADT (veh/day)		Average Cost/ Visitor		Years Since Construction/ Rehab		Total Rank	
			Visitation	Rank	AADT	Rank	Cost/ Visitor	Rank	Rehab	Rank	Rank	Rank
Alburg Welcome Center	1996		17,918	1	4,900	3	\$5.56	1	25	4	9	1
Lyndonville Information Center	1973	1996	90,636	4	4,800	2	\$2.29	5	25	4	15	2
Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Unknown	1998	42,458	2	7,500	6	\$4.89	2	23	8	18	3
Bradford Information Center	1995		132,871	7	5,600	4	\$1.43	7	26	3	21	4
Derby Welcome Center	1968		158,480	10	3,200	1	\$1.20	11	53	1	23	5
Waterford Welcome Center	1982	1997	133,751	8	6,200	5	\$1.42	8	24	6	27	6
Georgia Northbound Information Center	1968	1999	72,314	3	22,000	13	\$3.05	3	22	9	28	7
Fair Haven Welcome Center	1980	1997	154,504	9	8,400	7	\$1.39	9	24	6	31	8
Bennington Welcome Center	2013		119,360	6	10,900	8	\$2.30	4	8	16	34	9
Georgia Southbound Information Center	1999		99,253	5	22,000	13	\$1.33	10	22	9	37	10
Randolph Southbound Information Center	1970		292,028	12	16,700	9	\$0.88	16	51	2	39	11
Williston Southbound Information Center	1960s	2002	216,759	11	36,300	15	\$1.43	6	19	12	44	12
Guilford Welcome Center	1999		651,483	16	18,300	10	\$0.93	14	22	9	49	13
Williston Northbound Information Center	1960s	2002	322,757	13	36,300	15	\$1.19	12	19	12	52	14
Sharon Northbound Information Center	1960s	2005	478,783	15	18,800	11	\$1.04	13	16	14	53	15
Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	1964	2012	329,081	14	19,800	12	\$0.90	15	9	15	56	16

It is important to note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, all VICD locations were initially closed in March 2020. Decisions to reopen a portion of the system in July 2020 were guided by anticipated visitation at each site. Eight facilities reopened in July 2020 and have remained

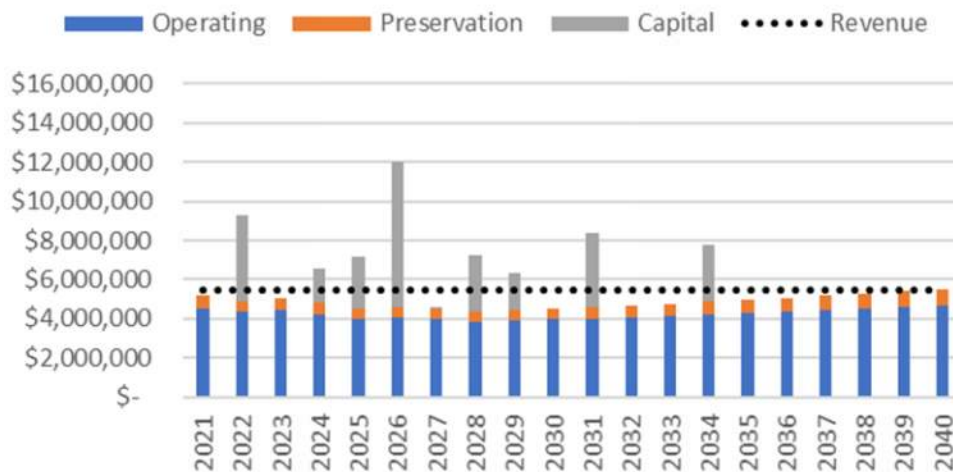
open with limited hours, services, and restrictions to provide adequate social distancing during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The combination of COVID-19 reopening status and rank order metrics provided the framework for identifying candidate closure or repurposing locations. The top five candidate locations according to their total rank across metrics (**Table 2**) included Alburgh, Lyndonville, Montpelier, Bradford, and Derby. These locations also remained closed throughout the pandemic. The remaining three facilities that were not reopened in July 2020 included Georgia Northbound, Georgia Southbound, and Randolph Southbound. For these locations, Georgia Northbound ranked third for least visited and highest cost per visitor, Georgia Southbound ranked fifth for least visited location, and Randolph ranked second for years since major rehabilitation or reconstruction. This list of eight locations was checked to ensure that closure would not leave a gap in the system of greater than 60 miles, per the AASHTO recommendations.

The facilities identified as candidates for repurposing included Lyndonville, Bradford, Randolph Southbound, and Georgia Southbound. With this scenario, the existing facilities at these candidate sites would be decommissioned and repurposed with a restroom-only facility with existing parking. Facilities that were identified as candidates for closure were off the interstate system and therefore not serving the same purpose in terms of driver safety and truck parking that might compel repurposing. These locations included Alburgh and Montpelier. For the repurposed and closed facilities, opportunities to provide traveler services and amenities through alternative means should be investigated. Public-private partnerships may be viable in nearby locations to help fill the gap of traveler services with an amenable private partner.

Overall, this alternative would reduce the operations and preservation costs for the system to \$97M total over the 20-year analysis period. A typical reconstruction, rehabilitation, and preventative maintenance schedule should continue, with capital costs of about \$28M over the 20-year time horizon. Although this alternative is likely to result in reduced visitation and limit the number of tourist interactions due to the closure and repurposing of selected sites, the delivery of these services through other means may provide a model for future diversification of traveler services delivery.

Figure 28: Financial Projection for the Repurpose/Close Selected Alternative



Alternative 4: New Northwest Gateway Welcome Center

A fourth alternative was considered to rethink the Welcome Center and gateway services in the northwest region of the state. With the closure of the Highgate Welcome Center in 2009 and the considerations for Alburgh, Georgia Northbound, and Georgia Southbound as candidate locations for closure in the refined Alternative 3, the opportunity to consolidate services from multiple locations into a single, new Welcome Center was examined. With the convergence of VT-78 and I-89 in Swanton, such a facility could be strategically located to capture a high percentage of those travelers coming into Vermont from northern New York and Quebec.

The model for development and delivery of these services could take one of three forms: 1) construct a new VICD Welcome Center, 2) reconstruct the Georgia Southbound Information Center as the new Welcome Center, or 3) pursue a public-private partnership opportunity at Exit 21 in Swanton. Constructing a new Welcome Center along the I-89 corridor would replace three aging facilities and provide the gateway services that were eliminated with the closure of Highgate. A new facility on the interstate corridor would require property acquisition and site development, which could be relatively expensive. The site for the Georgia Southbound Information Center could be rehabilitated and the facility reconstructed to serve as the new Welcome Center, consolidating the three existing locations into this one repurposed site. This would eliminate the right-of-way acquisition and site development costs, requiring less capital to rehabilitate the site and build the new facility. The repurposing of the Georgia Southbound site may also provide an opportunity to continue the delivery of services through contract agreements with the Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce, as they currently provide the staffing and operations through agreement with VICD. Alternatively, a public-private partnership could be pursued to locate and develop a site just off of Exit 21 in Swanton. In a mutually beneficial agreement, the private partner would likely be responsible for designing, building, financing, maintaining, and operating the facility while the VICD would develop the requirements for the center, pay for the construction of a dedicated space (i.e. a “Vermont Room”), lease dedicated space from the private partner, staff the dedicated space, and provide directional signage on the interstate for the facility.

ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODELS

Current Partnerships

Beyond the collaboration among the three State Agencies, there are a few locations in the network that leverage local partnerships to provide staffing for daily operations and ambassadorship with the aim of limiting the cost burden to VICD. The Georgia Southbound Information Center and two Williston Information Centers are operated in collaboration with the Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce. The Bennington Welcome Center is similarly operated via a contract with the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce. A separate grant program supported staffing at the White River Junction Welcome Center prior to its closure in 2020.

Along with local partnerships, Service Centers provide an alternative to delivering amenities to the traveling public. These public-private partnerships have been explored in the past both to right-size the system while maintaining the delivery of amenities like parking, restrooms, and travel information to the traveling public just off the interstate network. There are two such facilities that are considered public-private partnerships within the state as they provide traveler amenities like parking and restrooms, in addition to goods and services like food and fuel, while also providing official traveler information through the Brochures Program. These are the Maplewood Travelers Service Center in Berlin and the P & H Truck Stop in Wells River.

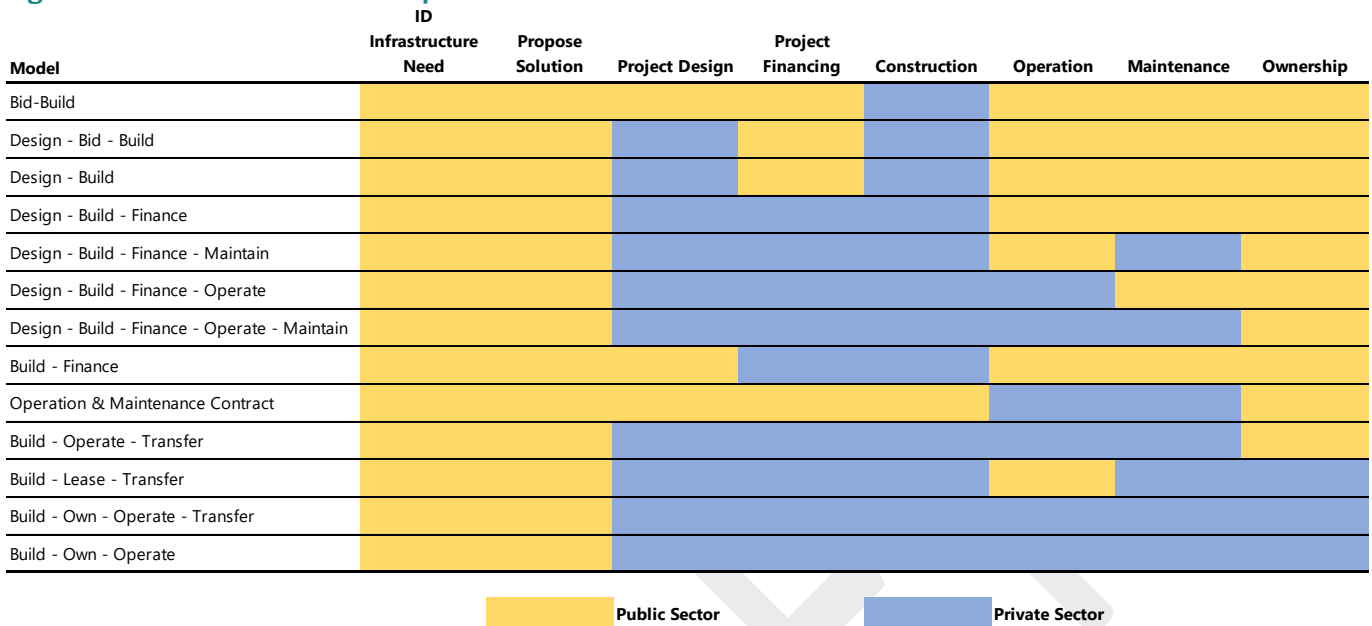
Public-Private Partnerships Definition and Background

Public-private partnerships (P3) are a cooperative arrangement between two or more public and private entities, typically of a long-term nature. They may be created to complete a project and/or to provide services to the general population. In a typical P3, the private entity bears the burden of up-front financing in return for a good rate of return that, due to the public nature of the venture, carries relatively lower risk. This is “typical” as it is normal for government to be challenged to raise capital investment while the private sector often has ready access to working capital.

More than a dozen P3 delivery models exist, with the roles of the public and private partners changing depending upon the model (see **Figure 29**).¹¹ For example, in a *Design – Build – Finance – Operate – Maintain* model, the public agency identifies an infrastructure need, proposes a solution and owns the infrastructure, while the private partner performs all other functions. On the other hand, in a P3 designed as an *Operation and Maintenance Contract*, the public partner identifies the infrastructure need, proposes a solution, designs, finances, builds, and owns the infrastructure while the private partner operates and maintains the facility. The proliferation of alternative models suggests that P3’s are a viable method to consider when there is a real or perceived benefit for both the public and private partner.

¹¹ Different Levels of Private Sector Engagement in PPP Contracts; Wikipedia; Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public%E2%80%93private_partnership

Figure 29: Public-Private Partnership Models and Roles



Enabling P3 Legislation

Vermont has adopted broad language to enable, under certain condition, VTTrans to enter into public-private partnerships. At a summary level, VTTrans may accept proposals that are deemed to be in the public interest, consistent with criteria duly developed and adopted by VTTrans¹².

The criteria must consider:

- › The benefits of the proposal to the State transportation system and the potential impact to other projects currently prioritized in the most recently adopted Transportation Program;
- › The extent to which a proposal would reduce the investment of State funds required to advance the project that the proposal addresses; and
- › The extent to which a proposal would enable the State to receive additional federal funding that would not otherwise be available.

Depending on the scale of the project (greater than \$2M) and whether it is included in the current year’s Transportation Program, VTTrans may either be directly authorized to advance the P3 or may be required to seek legislative approval.

Federal statute (*23 CFR § 752.8 Privately operated information centers and systems*) also specifically enables and allows for privately-operated information centers. While this section of law does not specify the idea of a P3, it lays out the general framework of such an arrangement in statute.

¹² Vermont Agency of Transportation Public Private Partnership Program Guidelines, Adopted 01/31/2019. Available at: <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/sites/aot/files/contractadmin/documents/P3/P3%20Guidelines%20Signed.pdf>

Figure 30: Illustrative Example of P3 Opportunities at I-89 Exit 4 in Randolph



P3 Models in Other States

An overview of selected P3 implementations is summarized below:

› Arizona – “Safe Phone Zones”

Geico sponsorship of rest areas. Safe Phone Zone signs on highway feature the Geico Gecko image and in return Geico manages the maintenance and operations while ADOT still owns the rest stops.

› Minnesota – Brainerd Lakes Area Welcome Center

Special State legislation created a unique P3 with the Brainerd Chamber, Crow Wing County, Minnesota DOT,. A gift shop featuring local products helps financially support the operating costs of the facility. The site provides separated, short-term truck parking, bathrooms, and vending machines. The site is operated as a rest area and has 30 truck parking spaces that are easily accessible from either direction of travel on the highway. Private gas station facilities are located approximately 15 miles from the site that offer additional services such as gas, food, and some commercial truck services.

› Virginia – Safety Rest Stop Sponsorship

Each sponsorship package starting bid is for a 12-month contract and includes:

- Valuable interstate “Sponsored by” signage preceding the safety rest area entrance,

- giving your brand exposure to millions of impressions annually
- “Sponsored by” signage located at the Safety Rest Area site
- Access to advertise in up to three additional on-site locations
 - Additional advertising locations are available at up to three additional VDOT approved locations and are at the sponsor’s expense.

Interstate Oasis Program

The Interstate Oasis Program was established in SAFETEA-LU in 2005 to provide additional opportunities for traveler services adjacent to the interstate and create additional truck parking capacity. An Interstate Oasis is defined as an off-freeway facility, such as a truck stop, that supplements rest areas and is not within public right-of-way.¹³ In order to be eligible for this designation the identified facility must offer products and services to the public including phones, fuel, oil, and water, provide 24- hour access to restroom facilities, have parking for heavy trucks and automobiles, and be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.¹⁴ The designated facility must also include criteria relating to the appearance and layout of the facility and must be within 3 miles of an Interstate interchange.



While this federal initiative does not specifically reference P3’s, it essentially lays out the framework for the minimum public benefits that must be provided for a state to enter into such an agreement with a private partner. Examples include:

› **Utah**

Under the program, the State puts up a sign to advertise these rest stops as public-private rest stops, and the service stations had to agree to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week; provide water and large restrooms (with at least five stalls); provide extra parking; agree to meet certain standards of cleanliness; and to allow inspections by UDOT. The benefit for businesses is more customers, which helps offset higher maintenance costs. The benefit for UDOT is limiting the need to build and operate additional public rest areas.

› **Idaho**

In 2018, the state closed an interstate rest area and entered into Oasis agreements with three private stations at three separate exists to fulfill the service needs previously provided on the interstate system. It was the latest in a series of such Oasis agreements. Of note, it was prompted by an aging facility, Jerome East, as a way to avoid the capital reconstruction costs.

While the Oasis program has not experienced a great deal of uptake from states, it does frame out a path to a potentially successful P3 model and does so by addressing the important federal

¹³ Interstate Oasis Program. Talking Freight Seminar. July 19,2006. Hari Kalla. FHWA.

¹⁴ Fact Sheets on SAFETEA-LU Highway Provisions. Interstate Oasis Program. FHWA.

barrier to any P3 on the public lands of the interstate. The federal government provides that “vending machines are the only commercial operations allowed...” on an interstate system¹⁵. This eliminates most paths to a successful partnership between a state and a private partner. A recent California study suggests Oasis may be a path to solving their critical truck parking shortage without violating this federal statute.¹⁶ In their study they concluded that, “[b]y entering into a private-public partnership through the Oasis program, Caltrans and other state agencies can leverage private dollars and management expertise to build out further rest stop infrastructure without violating federal laws against commercial activity at public rest areas. Allowing commercial activity at public rest areas could help alleviate funding problems for maintaining, improving and expanding parking access.

IDAHO DOT Oasis Site Requirements

- A facility shall be **no more than three miles** from an interstate highway interchange...
- Access routes can **safely and conveniently accommodate** all vehicles...
- Provide a physical layout that includes **safe entry and exit, on-site traffic circulation** for all vehicles...
- Maintain modern, sanitary **restrooms** with free drinking water...
- Provide a sufficient number of **well lighted parking spaces**...at no charge...for parking durations of up to 10 hours...
- Offer **public telephone** and **food**, as well as motor vehicle **fuel, oil** and **water**;
- **Staffed** by at least one person at all times.

¹⁵ Section 111, of Title 23, United States Code, 23 CFR 752.5

¹⁶ Putting a Price on Truck Parking; Polovin, M; Collaborative Sciences Center for Road Safety, Fall 2019, UC Berkeley SafeTREC. Available at: https://safetrec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/cscrsfinalreport_martapolovin.pdf

3

Recommendations

The set of recommendations for the VICD network presented below was developed through an investigation of the current system's operations, a review of State and Federal requirements, an evaluation of various alternatives, and discussions with the Study Committee and other stakeholders. Provided both the present context in which half of the 16 VICD facilities are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the longer-term financial limitations of the current system, both short-term decisions regarding reopening plans as well as longer-term system-wide strategies for sustainably operating the system were considered in the proposed recommendations.

This report recommends two viable alternatives for further consideration based on the findings of this study:

- › **Alternative 1: Maintain Existing VICD System with Annual Increase in Funding:** This alternative seeks to maintain the current (pre-pandemic) system of 16 facilities and sustain the system operations and preservation activities through a 2% annual budget increase over the next 20-years.
- › **Alternative 2: Reduce the Size of the VICD System:** The alternative involves a combination of actions including: 1) maintaining the eight facilities currently open during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2) re-opening the Derby Welcome Center, 3) further evaluating the opportunity to consolidate centers in the Northwest Region, 4) assessing alternative service delivery models to strategically replace the services lost due to proposed closures, and 5) closing or re-purposing the remaining facilities

In addition to the two recommendations noted above, general recommendations are also provided at the end of this chapter for the overall system as well as recommendations for modernizing the amenities and traveler services at the centers.

ALTERNATIVES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

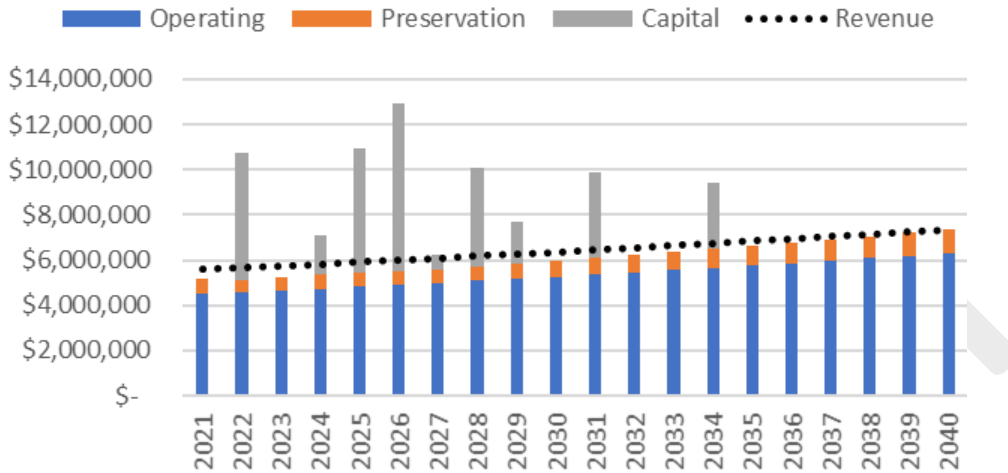
Alternative 1: Maintain Existing System with Additional Funding

With a commitment to ongoing annual operations and preservation budget increases of approximately 2% per year, sustaining the 16-facility system out to the study horizon year is financially feasible. Although the capital needs for regular rehabilitation and reconstruction schedules are above and beyond the incremental budget increase, connecting the system with

sustainable revenue to support operations and preservation of the existing system is the critical path for this recommendation.

Figure 31 below shows the 20-year financial projection for this alternative, with the increased annual revenue matching expected operating and preservation funding (blue and orange bars) over the 20-year timeframe. The costs for capital construction and major rehabilitation (gray bars) for this alternative is estimated at approximately \$34M over the 20-year planning horizon.

Figure 31: Financial Projection of Alternative 1 – Maintain Existing System with Additional Funding



Alternative 2: Reduce the Size of the VICD System

The recommendations for a reduced footprint of the VICD system include maintaining the eight facilities currently open during the COVID-19 pandemic, re-opening the Derby Welcome Center, and strategically replacing the services of the other seven facilities through a combination of repurposing, consolidating, or shifting to other service delivery models. The recommended actions for the individual facilities are summarized in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: Recommended Action by Facility

Facility	Recommended Action
Alburg Welcome Center	Remain Closed
Bradford Information Center	Remain Closed
Georgia Northbound Information Center	Remain Closed
Georgia Southbound Information Center	Remain Closed
Lyndonville Information Center	Remain Closed
Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Remain Closed
Randolph Southbound Information Center	Remain Closed
Derby Welcome Center	Re-open
Bennington Welcome Center	Keep Open
Fair Haven Welcome Center	Keep Open
Guilford Welcome Center	Keep Open
Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	Keep Open
Sharon Northbound Information Center	Keep Open
Waterford Welcome Center	Keep Open
Williston Northbound Information Center	Keep Open
Williston Southbound Information Center	Keep Open
New: Northwest Gateway Welcome Center	New

Facilities Recommended to Remain Open or Re-Open

The eight currently open facilities in the system include Bennington, Fair Haven, Guilford, Hartford, Sharon, Waterford, Williston Northbound, and Williston Southbound. For these facilities, plus the Derby Welcome Center, which is recommended to re-open, regular maintenance and rehabilitation schedules should be followed to ensure that the necessary preventative maintenance is addressed in a timely manner.

An evaluation of the hourly visitation at sites remaining open was conducted to identify opportunities to reduce operating hours to serve 80% of 2019 visitation. The target to serve 80% of visitation aligns with the approach taken to determine which facilities would reopen in July 2020 to serve travelers during the pandemic. **Table 4** below shows the results of this assessment which identified recommended reduced hours by facility. As shown, the total operating hours at these sites would be reduced by approximately 32% from pre-pandemic service hours. It is recommended that the facilities target these reduced hours of operation as part of the interim reopening plan and then adjust from there as needed to best service the traveling public.

Table 4. Targeted Hours of Operation to Serve 80% of Visitors

	Bennington	Fair Haven	Guilford	Hartford	Sharon	Waterford	Williston NB	Williston SB
07:00 - 08:00	8	11	54	40	39	9	31	30
08:00 - 09:00	29	25	72	53	75	16	98	44
09:00 - 10:00	25	30	91	58	73	21	66	32
10:00 - 11:00	25	34	150	66	79	25	60	30
11:00 - 12:00	27	38	177	55	93	31	53	37
12:00 - 13:00	30	35	200	66	97	31	58	38
13:00 - 14:00	28	40	139	71	100	35	57	42
14:00 - 15:00	37	42	190	81	114	42	62	45
15:00 - 16:00	41	44	161	108	160	41	75	60
16:00 - 17:00	42	41	161	130	152	45	84	71
17:00 - 18:00	35	42	111	118	131	36	84	75
18:00 - 19:00	23	35	96	63	95	27	51	43
19:00 - 20:00	9		43		49		23	20
20:00 - 21:00	12		27		33		17	17
21:00 - 22:00			21		23		12	14
22:00 - 23:00			16		14		9	11
2019 Average Daily Visitation	372	418	1708	909	1327	359	841	607
2019 Hours of Operation	7 AM - 9 PM	7 AM - 7 PM	7 AM - 11 PM	7 AM - 7 PM	7 AM - 11 PM	7 AM - 7 PM	7 AM - 11 PM	7 AM - 11 PM
Time Period Selected	8 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 7 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	8 AM - 6 PM	8 AM - 7 PM
Percent Served	85.88%	83.08%	80.70%	82.88%	82.46%	85.58%	82.97%	85.08%

Facilities Recommended for Closure/Repurposing/Consolidation

For the facilities that are to remain closed following the COVID-19 pandemic, follow up actions are recommended as outlined below. The aging facilities in Bradford, Lyndon, and Randolph should be razed and replaced with a restroom-only structure, with the auto and truck parking remaining. Since the Montpelier Capital Visitor’s Center is located in a historic structure in

downtown Montpelier, the recommendation is to terminate operations and seek other uses for the space. Further, collaboration with local and regional partners in these four locations should be pursued to investigate options for providing services like travel information and tourism support through alternative delivery models (i.e. locally-funded tourism information centers similar to facilities in Stowe, Woodstock and Manchester, Oasis sites, P3’s, etc.).

Northwest Gateway Welcome Center P3

The remaining three facilities, Georgia Northbound, Georgia Southbound, and Alburgh, should remain closed with the aim of consolidating their services in a new Northwest Gateway Welcome Center that is managed and operated under a public-private partnership arrangement. Planning for this new gateway facility should start with identifying the framework for a public-private partnership agreement. Feedback should be gathered on the existing public-private partnerships (i.e. Maplewoods, P&H Truck Stop) from the perspective of the state as well as from the private proprietors, as this information will be invaluable to setting advantageous terms in any P3 agreement going forward. As noted previously in this study, FHWA’s Interstate Oasis program requirements can serve as a starting point for the State to use to develop their P3 requirements. These requirements include offering products and services to the public including phones, fuel, oil, and water, providing 24- hour access to restroom facilities, having ample parking, and being staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week

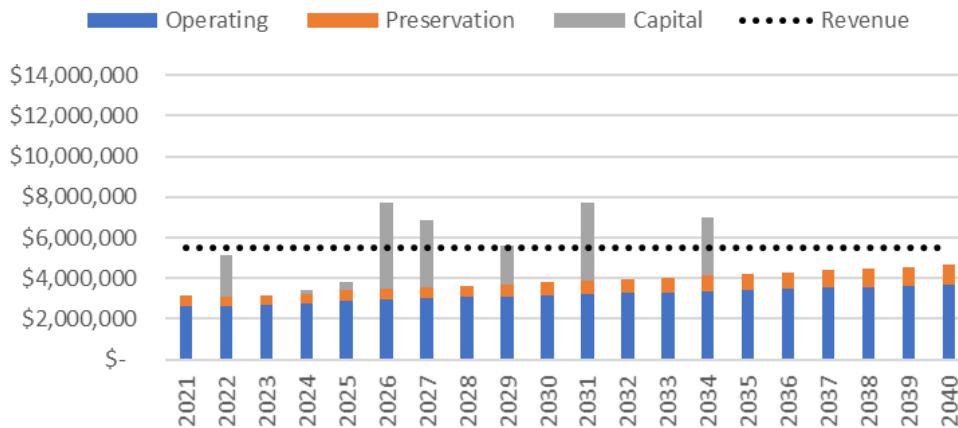
As envisioned, the private partner would design, build, finance, maintain and operate the facility, while the State would establish requirements for the facility, fund the construction of a dedicated space to serve as a tourism information center, lease the dedicated space from the private entity, staff the dedicated space, and provide directional signage to the facility on the interstate. The location of the new gateway facility should be proximate to the I-89 Exit 21 interchange in Swanton (ideally less than 1/2 mile) to provide easy access for travelers coming from the north in Quebec as well as those coming from the west through the Champlain Islands from New York and Canada. The public/private model allows for the provision of a broader set of services and amenities directed to the public – including fuel and food sales. The location just off of the Swanton interchange may also provide a conduit for more tourism activity in and around the Village of Swanton.

[INSERT EXAMPLE P3 SITE PLAN, FLOOR PLAN & DESCRIPTION]

A successful public-private partnership brokered for this new gateway facility could serve as a model for other locations where a public-private partnership could help to fill future gaps in the system or get services directed to travelers more strategically. It could also serve as a model to better serve those areas where past or present closures limit the interactions of the state’s ambassadors with travelers.

Figure 32 below shows the 20-year financial projection for this alternative, with current funding levels exceeding expected operating and preservation funding (blue and orange bars) over the 20-year timeframe. The costs for capital construction and major rehabilitation (gray bars) for this alternative is estimated at approximately \$19M over the 20-year planning horizon.

Figure 32: Financial Projection for Alternative 2 – Reduce the Size of the VICD System



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Research into the existing state of the system, extensive data gathering, and discussions with various system stakeholders revealed a number of findings regarding the overall VICD system. These findings were developed into a few baseline recommendations for the system going forward.

One issue that was identified was a shortage of BGS project management staff to manage the needed major preventative maintenance projects for the VICD system facilities. The SEP14 Agreement spells out the major preventative maintenance projects for the VICD system facilities that are eligible for federal funds and can be programmed through VTrans. This agreement, borne in part from actions following the recommendations of the 2012 Report to the Legislature, has been viewed as successful. However, of the \$2.8M in federal funds appropriated to the VICD system through the SEP14 agreement between 2015 and 2019, only half of those funds were spent. This discrepancy between funding allocated by VTrans through the rest area program for major preventative maintenance projects and the expenditures year over year proved to be a symptom of the shortage of project management resources at BGS. Although there is one full-time project manager working to systematically program the necessary preventative maintenance projects and maximize the utilization of these funds, more project management support and staff could further leverage this advantageous agreement and Federal funds.

The data inputs utilized for the modeling and projections in this study hinged largely on the visitation data and other metrics that are meticulously collected and managed by the VICD administrators. This data was invaluable to this effort, but moreover, helps to track trends and adapt operations and programming appropriately to optimize the services provided to the traveling public. There are some opportunities to improve tracking for the system. Although visitation data is collected on the daily scale at each location and for the first and last hour, hourly data would provide more insights for right-sizing hours of operation at the system’s facilities. In addition to the visitation metrics based on counts at the building doorways, improved understanding of the traffic volumes onto each site would provide more data to develop meaningful capture rates, where some portion of the adjacent facility traffic is likely to

use the site for parking, and some portion of those using the site for parking are likely to use the building's amenities. These rates could prove useful in making adjustments to the system's operations.

According to a 2005 Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies, coordination of activities to maintain and operate the Visitor Information Center locations were facilitated by a collaborative committee comprised of representatives from BGS (3), VTrans (3), and FHWA (1) that met quarterly. The representative parties were responsible for coordination of activities through committee membership, reviewing improvement programs, collaborative development of a facilities program, reviewing annual budget proposals, and collaboration with FHWA to oversee development and implementation of the program. Although this committee was absolved through Act 123 Section 55 in 2010, the collaborative approach to the system remains. Continuation of the collaborative quarterly meetings will ensure that the system is helping to align with the mission of each agency would be advantageous. Furthermore, provided the traveler information and ambassador elements of the system facilities, ACCD should have representation in the committee and be a proactive member in the collaborative oversight of the system.

The closure of the system's facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic provided some lessons learned on how the system operates and serves travelers. During the closure from March to July of 2020 and beyond for some locations, many of the sites were outfitted with portable toilets for health and safety reasons, ensuring travelers stopping in search of a restroom had someplace to go while the facility buildings were closed. The possibility of having external access to just the restroom areas at the system's facilities is one way in which the sites may optimize the hours of operation. Being able to keep restrooms accessible while the remaining facility is closed would provide flexibility in operations and staffing logistics.

MODERNIZATION OF SYSTEM AMENITIES

Modernization of the Information and Welcome Centers will be imperative over the next 20 years. As facilities are reconstructed, rehabilitated, and maintained, there may be opportunities to adapt the amenities and services available at these locations to meet the needs of the future traveler and future infrastructure. Although it is not certain what the next advances will be in information, data, energy, or vehicle technologies, there are some ideas that could gain traction in the near term.

Data technologies are one area where future needs of the system may need to adapt. On the traveler information side, the smart phone has put information at the fingertips of the majority of tourists to the state, but travelers will still need a safe place to park and rest or use the restroom. The provision of wireless internet access at each of the VICD locations was a step forward for the system to ensure that travelers that were stopping had access to information. The next data connectivity may be offering additional guidance on tourism opportunities through data connections like scannable quick response (QR) codes at the Information or Welcome Centers. Other states have created curated traveler experiences or digital marketing opportunities that are shared through digital displays, like those found at some of the I Love NY Welcome Centers and Virginia Welcome Centers. Something like this might not replace the travel ambassador experience to help connect travelers to curated experiences during their visit,

but it may open opportunities to connect travelers with information during off-hours or when ambassadors are unavailable.

Another data technology consideration for the system is the proximity of these sites to interstate corridors and the possibility of data storage and server space to serve the next generation of autonomous or connected vehicles on the infrastructure side. It is yet to be seen what the data capabilities will need to be on the physical infrastructure, but the system of sites adjacent to major travel corridors may be able to serve a broader purpose in data connectivity and warehousing.

Energy is another area where the services provided at these locations may adapt to future conditions. For starters, there are the energy and water needs of each facility. Lighting, heating, cooling, water, and waste management drive a portion of the costs to operate these facilities. Vermont's efforts to date to reduce the system's energy usage and showcase unique wastewater treatment methods through the Living Machine have been highlighted by FHWA in a guidance on Sustainable Rest Area Design and Operations¹⁷. Upgrading to LED lights, installing energy efficient pumps, heating, cooling, and ventilation systems, improving insulation, and other energy efficiency improvements have all been part of the maintenance strategy for the system. Like the Living Machine, other locations in the system may lend themselves to other green infrastructure demonstration projects. As facilities are replaced or repurposed, opportunities to employ sustainable infrastructure systems like sustainable building practices, geothermal heating and cooling, solar energy generation, and others may arise. Connecting these green infrastructure practices with educational materials and displays to showcase the projects provides travelers with a unique user experience.

The energy needs of the next generation of vehicles is also a consideration in the modernization of the system. Currently, the fleet is still predominantly fueled by gasoline or diesel. As plug in electric vehicles become more ubiquitous, these locations may serve as charging locations in an effort to reduce range anxieties and connect travelers with information and amenities while they wait for their vehicles to charge. Although these sites are technically able to have electric vehicle charging stations now, like those sites found along interstates in neighboring New York, the federal statutes limit the sale of fuel. Therefore, the cost burden would fall to the state for any charging. Until federal mandates on this change, the viability of charging infrastructure at the system's facilities is likely limited.

For commercial truck traffic, there are additional considerations for potential future services. Electrification for the purposes of truck parking is available at many service plazas and major truck stops. These systems allow trucks to park and drivers to plug in to utilize accessories and other onboard systems without running their engines. Depending on changing trends to truck traffic and truck parking utilization, other strategic investments that could prove to be useful are parking reservation systems and parking availability detection systems for trucks. Although Vermont generally has adequate truck parking currently, based on Jason's Law survey results¹⁸,

¹⁷ FHWA, 2017. Sustainable Rest Area Design and Operations, Report Number FHWA-HEP-18-006

¹⁸ FHWA, 2019. Jason's Law Truck Parking Survey Results and Comparative Analysis.

future truck traffic may compel the need for adopting detection or reservation systems truck parking like those piloted on the I-95 corridor or the I-5 corridor¹⁹.

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¹⁹ FHWA, 2018. National Coalition on Truck Parking: Technology and Data Working Group – *Best Practices for Truck Parking Availability Detection and Information Dissemination*.

APPENDICES

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Appendix A: System Inventory

Table A-1. Spacing of Vermont’s Interstate Roadside Rest Area Facilities based on Directional Distance to Nearest Facility

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility (Miles)
Vernon South Parking Area	3.14
Randolph Southbound Information Center*	3.44
Guilford North Parking Area	4.23
Ryegate North Parking Area	8.23
Derby Line Welcome Center*	9.19
Coventry North Parking Area and Weigh Station	10.8
Wheelock North Parking Area	11.03
Barton North Parking Area	12.52
Bradford Information Center*	13.05
Ryegate South Parking Area	15.02
Williston Southbound Information Center*	15.02
Springfield South Parking Area	15.42
Putney North Parking Area	15.54
Waterbury North Parking Area	16.91
Southeastern Vermont Welcome Center*	17.41
Georgia Northbound Information Center*	19.9*
Westminster South Parking Area	20.55
Barnet North Scenic Turnout	20.98
Waterford Welcome Center*	24.56
Lyndonville Information Center*	25.26
Coventry South Parking Area and Weigh Station	25.67
Williston Northbound Information Center*	28.01
Georgia Southbound Information Center*	28.84
Hartford Welcome Center*	28.91
Randolph South Parking Area	29.9
Bradford South Parking Area	31.7
Waterbury South Parking Area	33.28
Sharon Welcome Center*	56.2
Rockingham North Parking Area	60.9

* VICD Location

Table A-2. Directional Spacing of Vermont’s Interstate Roadside Facilities based on Route

I-89 North

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility	Gap Between Facilities if Removed
Sharon Welcome Center*	56.2	68.8
Waterbury North Parking Area	16.91	73.1
Williston Northbound Information Center*	28.01	44.92
Georgia Northbound Information Center*	19.9	47.91
* VICD Location		

I-89 South

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility	Gap Between Facilities if Removed
Georgia Southbound Information Center*	28.84	48.34
Williston Southbound Information Center*	15.02	43.86
Waterbury South Parking Area	33.28	48.3
Randolph Southbound Information Center*	3.44	36.72
Randolph South Parking Area	29.9	33.34
* VICD Location		

I-91 North

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility	Gap Between Facilities if Removed
Guilford North Parking Area	4.23	6.53
Guilford (Southeastern Vermont) Welcome Center*	17.41	21.64
Putney North Parking Area	15.54	32.95
Rockingham North Parking Area	60.9	76.44
Bradford Information Center*	13.05	73.95
Ryegate North Parking Area	8.23	21.28
Barnet North Scenic Turnout	20.98	29.21
Wheelock North Parking Area	11.03	32.01
Barton North Parking Area	12.52	23.55
Coventry North Parking Area and Weigh Station	10.8	23.32
* VICD Location		

I-91 South

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility	Gap Between Facilities if Removed
Derby Line Welcome Center*	9.19	10.41
Coventry South Parking Area and Weigh Station	25.67	34.86
Lyndonville Information Center*	25.26	50.93
Ryegate South Parking Area	15.02	40.28
Bradford South Parking Area	31.7	46.72
Hartford Welcome Center*	28.91	60.61
Springfield South Parking Area	15.42	44.33
Westminster South Parking Area	20.55	35.97
* VICD Location		

I-93 North

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility	Gap Between Facilities if Removed
Waterford Welcome Center*	24.56	27.6
* VICD Location		

Table A-3. Directional Spacing of Facilities considered to be part of the Jason’s Law Network

Facility Name	Distance to Nearest Facility (Miles)
Alburgh Welcome Center	5
Barnet North Scenic Turnout	21
Barton North Scenic Turnout	13
Bennington Chain-Up/Down Site	17
Bennington Welcome Center	3
Bradford North Rest Area	13
Bradford South Parking Area	32
Charlotte Parking Area	18
Clarendon North Parking Area	51
Clarendon South Parking Area	48
Colchester North Weigh Station	15
Colchester South Weigh Station	13
Coventry North Parking Area	11
Coventry South Parking Area	26
Derby South Welcome Center	10
Fair Haven Welcome center	22
Fairhaven Weigh Station	22
Ferrisburgh Parking Area	10
Georgia North Rest Area	20
Georgia South Rest Area	15
Guilford North Parking Area	4
Southeastern Vermont Welcome Center	15
Hartford South Rest Area	29
Ira Parking Area	11
Lyndon South Rest Area	25
Putney North Parking Area	16
Putney North Weigh Station	3
Putney South Weigh Station	18
Randolph South Parking Area	4

Randolph South Rest Area	34
Ryegate North Parking Area	8
Ryegate South Parking Area	15
Sharon Rest Area	57
Rockingham North Parking Area	61
Springfield South Parking Area	16
Vernon Rest Area	4
Waterbury South Parking Area	33
Waterford North Rest Area	25
Waterbury North Parking Area	17
Westminster South Parking Area	2
Wheelock North Scenic Turnout	11
Williston North Rest Area	13
Williston South Rest Area	16
Wilmington Chain-Up/Down Site	27

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Appendix B: Summary of State and Federal Regulations Related to Rest Areas

Federal Regulations

23 CFR Part 752 – Landscape & Roadside Development

23 CFR § 752.2 - Policy

(c) The development of the roadside to include landscape development, safety rest areas, and the preservation of valuable adjacent scenic lands is a necessary component of highway development. Planning and development of the roadside should be concurrent with or closely follow that of the highway. Further, the development of travel information centers and systems is encouraged as an effective method of providing necessary information to the traveling public.

23 CFR § 752.3 - Definitions.

(a) Safety rest area. A roadside facility safely removed from the traveled way with parking and such facilities for the motorist deemed necessary for his rest, relaxation, comfort and information needs. The term is synonymous with “rest and recreation areas.”

(c) Information centers. Facilities located at safety rest areas which provide information of interest to the traveling public.

(d) Information systems. Facilities located within the right-of-way which provide information of interest to the traveling public. An information system is not a sign, display or device otherwise permitted under 23 U.S.C. 131 or prohibited by any local, State or Federal law or regulation.

23 CFR § 752.5 – Safety Rest Areas

(a) Safety rest areas should provide facilities reasonably necessary for the comfort, convenience, relaxation, and information needs of the motorist. Caretakers' quarters may be provided in conjunction with a safety rest area at such locations where accommodations are deemed necessary. All facilities within the rest area are to provide full consideration and accommodation for the handicapped.

(b) The State may permit the placement of vending machines in existing or new safety rest areas located on the rights-of-way of the Interstate system for the purpose of dispensing such food, drink, or other articles as the State determines are appropriate and desirable, except that the dispensing by any means, of petroleum products or motor vehicle replacement parts shall not be allowed. Such vending machines shall be operated by the State.

(c) The State may operate the vending machines directly or may contract with a vendor for the installation, operation, and maintenance of the vending machines. In permitting the placement

of vending machines the State shall give priority to vending machines which are operated through the State licensing agency designated pursuant to section 2(a)(5) of the Randolph-Sheppard Act, U.S.C. 107(a)(5).

(d) Access from the safety rest areas to adjacent publicly owned conservation and recreation areas may be permitted if access to these areas is only available through the rest area and if these areas or their usage does not adversely affect the facilities of the safety rest area.

(e) The scenic quality of the site, its accessibility and adaptability, and the availability of utilities are the prime considerations in the selection of rest area sites. A statewide safety rest area system plan should be maintained. This plan should include development priorities to ensure safety rest areas will be constructed first at locations most needed by the motorist. Proposals for safety rest areas or similar facilities on Federal-aid highways in suburban or urban areas shall be special case and must be fully justified before being authorized by the FHWA Regional Administrator.

(f) Facilities within newly constructed safety rest areas should meet the forecast needs of the design year. Expansion and modernization of older existing rest areas that do not provide adequate service should be considered.

(g) No charge to the public may be made for goods and services at safety rest areas except for telephone and articles dispensed by vending machines.

23 USC § 111. Agreements Relating to Use of and Access to Rights-of-Way—Interstate System

a) In General.—

All agreements between the Secretary and the State transportation department for the construction of projects on the Interstate System shall contain a clause providing that the State will not add any points of access to, or exit from, the project in addition to those approved by the Secretary in the plans for such project, without the prior approval of the Secretary. Such agreements shall also contain a clause providing that the State will not permit automotive service stations or other commercial establishments for serving motor vehicle users to be constructed or located on the rights-of-way of the Interstate System and will not change the boundary of any right-of-way on the Interstate System to accommodate construction of, or afford access to, an automotive service station or other commercial establishment. Such agreements may, however, authorize a State or political subdivision thereof to use or permit the use of the airspace above and below the established grade line of the highway pavement for such purposes as will not impair the full use and safety of the highway, as will not require or permit vehicular access to such space directly from such established grade line of the highway, or otherwise interfere in any way with the free flow of traffic on the Interstate System. Nothing in this section, or in any agreement entered into under this section, shall require the discontinuance, obstruction, or removal of any establishment for serving motor vehicle users on any highway which has been, or is hereafter, designated as a highway or route on the Interstate System (1) if such establishment (A) was in existence before January 1, 1960, (B) is owned by a State, and (C) is operated through concessionaries or otherwise, and (2) if all access to, and exits

from, such establishment conform to the standards established for such a highway under this title.

b) Rest Areas.—

1) In general.—

Notwithstanding subsection (a), the Secretary shall permit a State to acquire, construct, operate, and maintain a rest area along a highway on the Interstate System in such State.

2) Limited activities.—

The Secretary shall permit limited commercial activities within a rest area under paragraph (1), if the activities are available only to customers using the rest area and are limited to—

(A) commercial advertising and media displays if such advertising and displays are—

(i) exhibited solely within any facility constructed in the rest area; and

(ii) not legible from the main traveled way;

(B) items designed to promote tourism in the State, limited to books, DVDs, and other media;

(C) tickets for events or attractions in the State of a historical or tourism-related nature;

(D) travel-related information, including maps, travel booklets, and hotel coupon booklets; and

(E) lottery machines, provided that the priority afforded to blind vendors under subsection (c) applies to this subparagraph.

3) Private operators.—

A State may permit a private party to operate such commercial activities.

4) Limitation on use of revenues.—

A State shall use any revenues received from the commercial activities in a rest area under this section to cover the costs of acquiring, constructing, operating, and maintaining rest areas in the State.

20 USC 6A Section 107 – Operation of Vending Facilities “Randolph-Sheppard Act”

a) Authorization

For the purposes of providing blind persons with remunerative employment, enlarging the economic opportunities of the blind, and stimulating the blind to greater efforts in striving to make themselves self-supporting, blind persons licensed under the provisions of this chapter shall be authorized to operate vending facilities on any Federal property.

b) Preferences regulations; justification for limitation on operation

In authorizing the operation of vending facilities on Federal property, priority shall be given to blind persons licensed by a State agency as provided in this chapter; and the Secretary, through the Commissioner, shall, after consultation with the Administrator of General Services and other heads of departments, agencies, or instrumentalities of the United States in control of the maintenance, operation, and protection of Federal property, prescribe regulations designed to assure that—

(1) the priority under this subsection is given to such licensed blind persons (including assignment of vending machine income pursuant to section 107d-3 of this title to achieve and protect such priority), and

(2) wherever feasible, one or more vending facilities are established on all Federal property to the extent that any such facility or facilities would not adversely affect the interests of the United States.

Any limitation on the placement or operation of a vending facility based on a finding that such placement or operation would adversely affect the interests of the United States shall be fully justified in writing to the Secretary, who shall determine whether such limitation is justified. A determination made by the Secretary pursuant to this provision shall be binding on any department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States affected by such determination. The Secretary shall publish such determination, along with supporting documentation, in the Federal Register.

Jason's Law

(a) **Establishment.** — In cooperation with appropriate State, regional, and local governments, the Secretary of Transportation shall implement a pilot program to address the shortage of long-term parking for commercial motor vehicles on the National Highway System.

(b) **Allocation Of Funds.** —

(1) **IN GENERAL.** —The Secretary of Transportation shall allocate funds made available to carry out this section among States, metropolitan planning organizations, and local governments.

(2) **APPLICATIONS.**—To be eligible for an allocation under this section, a State (as defined in section 101(a) of title 23, United States Code), metropolitan planning organization, or local government shall submit to the Secretary an

application at such time and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(3) **ELIGIBLE PROJECTS.** —Funds allocated under this subsection shall be used by the recipient for projects described in an application approved by the Secretary. Such projects shall serve the National Highway System and may include the following:

(A) Constructing safety rest areas (as defined in section 120(c) of title 23, United States Code) that include parking for commercial motor vehicles.

(B) Constructing commercial motor vehicle parking facilities adjacent to commercial truck stops and travel plazas.

(C) Opening existing facilities to commercial motor vehicle parking, including inspection and weigh stations and park-and-ride facilities.

(D) Promoting the availability of publicly or privately provided commercial motor vehicle parking on the National Highway System using intelligent transportation systems and other means.

(E) Constructing turnouts along the National Highway System for commercial motor vehicles.

(F) Making capital improvements to public commercial motor vehicle parking facilities currently closed on a seasonal basis.

(G) Improving the geometric design of interchanges on the National Highway System to improve access to commercial motor vehicle parking facilities.

(4) **PRIORITY.** —In allocating funds made available to carry out this section, the Secretary shall give priority to applicants that—

(A) demonstrate a severe shortage of commercial motor vehicle parking capacity in the corridor to be addressed;

(B) have consulted with affected State and local governments, community groups, private providers of commercial motor vehicle parking, and motorist and trucking organizations; and

(C) demonstrate that their proposed projects are likely to have positive effects on highway safety, traffic congestion, or air quality.

(c) **Report To Congress.**—Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Transportation shall submit to Congress a report on the results of the pilot program.

(d) **Funding.**—

(1) IN GENERAL. —There is authorized to be appropriated from the Highway Trust Fund (other than the Mass Transit Account) to carry out this section \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2010 through 2015.

(2) CONTRACT AUTHORITY.—Funds authorized under this subsection shall be available for obligation in the same manner as if the funds were apportioned under chapter 1 of title 23, United States Code, except that such funds shall not be transferable and shall remain available until expended, and the Federal share of the cost of a project under this section shall be determined in accordance with sections 120(b) and 120(c) of such title.

(e) **Treatment of Projects.** —Notwithstanding any other provision of law, projects funded under this section shall be treated as projects on a Federal-aid system under chapter 1 of title 23, United States Code.

State Regulations

10 V.S.A. § 485

§ 485. Official tourist information centers

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall establish official tourist information centers, near the principal entrance points into the State, as determined by the Agency, and at such other locations as the Agency deems appropriate, in order to provide information about public accommodations, commercial services for the travelling public, other businesses, and points of scenic, historic, cultural, educational, and religious interest. (Added 1967, No. 333 (Adj. Sess.), § 5, eff. March 23, 1968; amended 1969, No. 92, § 3, eff. April 19, 1969; 1983, No. 167 (Adj. Sess.), § 4; 1995, No. 190 (Adj. Sess.), § 1(a).)

10 V.S.A. § 487

§ 487. Other information

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall provide travel information regarding the location of available public accommodations, commercial services for the traveling public and other businesses, and points of scenic, historic, and cultural interest. It may include in guidebooks and other published materials, paid advertising, identified as such. This information shall be made available to the general public at places the Agency may find desirable, such as interstate rest areas, information plazas, information centers and booths, service stations and garages, hotels, motels, and restaurants, historical attractions, and education facilities, using the most appropriate methods and means, such as publications, audio/visual, computer, and telephone. (Added 1967, No. 333 (Adj. Sess.), § 7, eff. March 23, 1968; amended 1969, No. 92, § 5, eff. April 19, 1969;

1983, No. 167 (Adj. Sess.), § 6; 1993, No. 121 (Adj. Sess.), § 6; 1995, No. 190 (Adj. Sess.), § 1(a).)

19 V.S.A. § 5

§ 5. Transportation Board; powers and duties

(b)(1) Except as otherwise authorized by law, the Board is the sole authority responsible for naming transportation facilities owned, controlled, or maintained by the State, including highways and the bridges thereon, airports, rail facilities, rest areas, and welcome centers. The Board shall exercise its naming authority only upon petition of the legislative body of a municipality of the State, of the head of an Executive Branch agency or department of the State, or of 50 Vermont residents.

29 V.S.A. § 152

§ 152. Duties of Commissioner

a) The Commissioner of Buildings and General Services, in addition to the duties expressly set forth elsewhere by law, shall have the authority to:

(30) Provide services to the traveling public, lease space, sell products, and conduct any other activities within limits set forth in the federal Surface Transportation Act and Randolph-Sheppard Act and rules adopted thereunder, to administer the information and welcome centers; and use funds generated in the centers to supplement funds for maintaining and operating the centers.

29 V.S.A. § 160b

§ 160b. Sale of milk and milk products at information centers

(a) The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired is encouraged to sell milk and milk products, with a preference for the sale of Vermont-produced milk whenever feasible, in vending machines at rest areas and information centers in this State according to policies and rules established by the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services.

(b) The Commissioner shall designate areas within rest areas and welcome centers for the sale of milk and milk products with an emphasis on the sale of Vermont-made products. The Commissioner, at his or her sole discretion, shall have the authority to designate the areas where sales may occur. (Added 2003, No. 63, § 72, eff. June 11, 2003.)

Appendix C: Financial Modeling

A set of regression models was estimated from historical data on Information Center operations. The dataset included descriptive information about each Information Center as well as numbers of visitors, staffing, and operating costs between 2006 and 2019. The models were used to estimate expected values of the dependent variables (visitors, staff, and costs) during the scenario analysis process where key operating conditions were altered as part of scenario design. Where these scenario conditions are reasonably within the range of current operating practices the modeling coefficients allow for a reasonable estimate of the dependent variable values.

DRAFT

VISITORS

<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R				0.95
R Square				0.91
Adjusted R Square				0.90
Standard Error				52167
Observations				199

ANOVA				
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	10	5.00533E+12	5.00533E+11	183.9275565
Residual	188	5.11615E+11	2721356998	
Total	198	5.51694E+12		

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	-280793.2341	45377.80453	-6.18789818	3.73052E-09
Operating Hours per Year	14.76724101	8.145472124	1.812938622	0.071436329
Years Since Renovation	4134.604051	621.4830154	6.652802969	3.05016E-10
Current Car Spaces	900.5418455	507.0335952	1.776098969	0.077334082
Current Truck Spaces	-2409.716506	2430.575341	-0.991418149	0.322755739
AADT	16.21254969	1.397847226	11.59822718	8.27344E-24
Permanent Staff	25383.95011	6631.187694	3.827964353	0.000175846
Welcome Center	-23407.45981	11920.4556	-1.963638018	0.051046581
Contract Operations	-591.3826325	22820.88503	-0.025914097	0.979353342
Current Toilets	12998.63218	1971.846672	6.592111024	4.25524E-10
On US Route	27364.1798	17828.69179	1.534839467	0.126504451

PERMANENT STAFF

<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R				0.96
R Square				0.92
Adjusted R Square				0.92
Standard Error				0.56
Observations				199

ANOVA				
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	8	723.1652208	90.3956526	293.4585609
Residual	191	58.83477923	0.308035493	
Total	199	782		

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Visitor Count	3.82498E-06	4.85463E-07	7.879040556	2.43794E-13
Operating Hours per Year	0.000431539	3.19372E-05	13.51208706	1.23151E-29
Years Since Renovation	0.008050075	0.004085994	1.970163337	0.050264906
Current Car Spaces	0.015712504	0.006632212	2.369119809	0.018828068
Current Truck Spaces	-0.050090744	0.026854743	-1.865247557	0.063680364
Contractops	-1.698249311	0.199347149	-8.519054926	4.7602E-15
Current Toilets	-0.060646954	0.020107745	-3.016099225	0.002908937
Square Feet	-0.000177491	5.29636E-05	-3.351186859	0.000969833

TEMPORARY STAFF				
<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R		0.93		
R Square		0.87		
Adjusted R Square		0.86		
Standard Error		1.23		
Observations		199		
ANOVA				
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	8	1904.950132	238.1187665	156.8029825
Residual	191	290.0498681	1.518585697	
Total	199	2195		
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Visitor Count	1.13888E-05	1.07789E-06	10.56577499	7.66425E-21
Operating Hours per Year	0.000458595	7.09115E-05	6.467143486	8.15582E-10
Years Since Renovation	0.071489783	0.009072291	7.880014206	2.42364E-13
Current Car Spaces	0.185082319	0.014725758	12.56861095	8.56461E-27
Current Truck Spaces	-0.735079405	0.059626631	-12.32803853	4.5213E-26
Contract Operations	-0.583721966	0.442618234	-1.318793311	0.188817256
Current Toilets	0.033230278	0.044646009	0.744305691	0.457606296
Size in Square Feet	-0.001206842	0.000117597	-10.26251567	5.84943E-20

SALARY COSTS				
<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R		0.98		
R Square		0.96		
Adjusted R Square		0.95		
Standard Error		39210		
Observations		199		
ANOVA				
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	9	7.31589E+12	8.12876E+11	528.719762
Residual	190	2.92114E+11	1537442379	
Total	199	7.608E+12		
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Visitor Count	0.243266315	0.034946003	6.961205804	5.33271E-11
Operating Hours per Year	18.54479645	2.813905524	6.590411898	4.20585E-10
Years Since Renovation	-79.22594933	295.4023935	-0.268196708	0.788838863
Permanent Staff	15567.48528	5027.349133	3.096559414	0.002254218
Size in Square Feet	-17.1735908	2.489927363	-6.89722562	7.65059E-11
Current Toilets	3347.56103	1250.608712	2.67674533	0.008084114
Temporary Staff	17428.93618	1681.814877	10.36317161	3.11961E-20
Welcome Center	-11490.68939	6841.502278	-1.679556466	0.094687232
Contract Operations	-151275.2881	14742.85449	-10.26092255	6.17138E-20

CONTRACT COSTS

<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R		0.97		
R Square		0.93		
Adjusted R Square		0.93		
Standard Error		26453		
Observations		199		

<i>ANOVA</i>				
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	9	1.87372E+12	2.08191E+11	297.5117098
Residual	190	1.32957E+11	699773806.8	
Total	199	2.00668E+12		

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Visitor Count	-0.06645217	0.023576369	-2.818592202	0.005334278
Operating Hours per Year	2.851712208	1.898405263	1.50216198	0.134715433
Years Since Renovation	-548.1442017	199.2936343	-2.750435073	0.006526945
Permanent Staff	-18512.40117	3391.708063	-5.4581352	1.48991E-07
Size in Square Feet	7.456226162	1.679832948	4.438671222	1.53223E-05
Current Toilets	5996.509435	843.7249017	7.107185556	2.32444E-11
Temporary Staff	-1967.394551	1134.638739	-1.733939168	0.084550931
Welcome Center	19706.82107	4615.628997	4.26958516	3.08997E-05
Contract Operations	69235.14119	9946.287225	6.960903061	5.34185E-11

OTHER COSTS

<i>Regression Statistics</i>				
Multiple R		0.98		
R Square		0.96		
Adjusted R Square		0.95		
Standard Error		16259		
Observations		199		

<i>ANOVA</i>				
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Regression	9	1.13205E+12	1.25784E+11	475.787497
Residual	190	50230158522	264369255.4	
Total	199	1.18228E+12		

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Visitor Count	0.138044915	0.014491173	9.526137827	7.83843E-18
Operating Hours per Year	-0.06418958	1.166851428	-0.055010928	0.95618756
Years Since Renovation	-297.892045	122.4954788	-2.431861549	0.015948787
Permanent Staff	12344.01314	2084.707345	5.921221109	1.47002E-08
Size in Square Feet	15.25744776	1.032506342	14.77709835	2.12913E-33
Current Toilets	-2275.524228	518.5940143	-4.387872142	1.89564E-05
Temporary Staff	-918.8689565	697.4036882	-1.317556778	0.189238603
Welcome Center	-16488.07522	2836.988176	-5.811823736	2.56889E-08
Contract Operations	28140.81538	6113.467801	4.603085563	7.60092E-06

Appendix D: Stakeholder Engagement Materials

DRAFT



Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Kick Off Meeting

September 11, 2020



Agenda

- **Introductions** (5 minutes)
- **Review Overall Project Goals & Objectives** (10 minutes)
- **Review Scope of Work and Schedule** (5 minutes)
- **Review Stakeholder Outreach Strategy** (15 minutes)
- **Initial Review of Existing Conditions** (10 minutes)
- **Discussion** (20 minutes)
- **Next Steps** (5 minutes)



Project Goals and Objectives

Conduct a study of Vermont's system of Visitor Information Centers to develop recommendations for strategic future investments.

➤ Identify:

- Current state of Visitor Information Centers;
- Needed infrastructure investments and operational costs;
- Potential economic development opportunities;
- Alternative service delivery models;
- Policies and requirements; and,
- Deficiencies and priorities for the system.

➤ Develop:

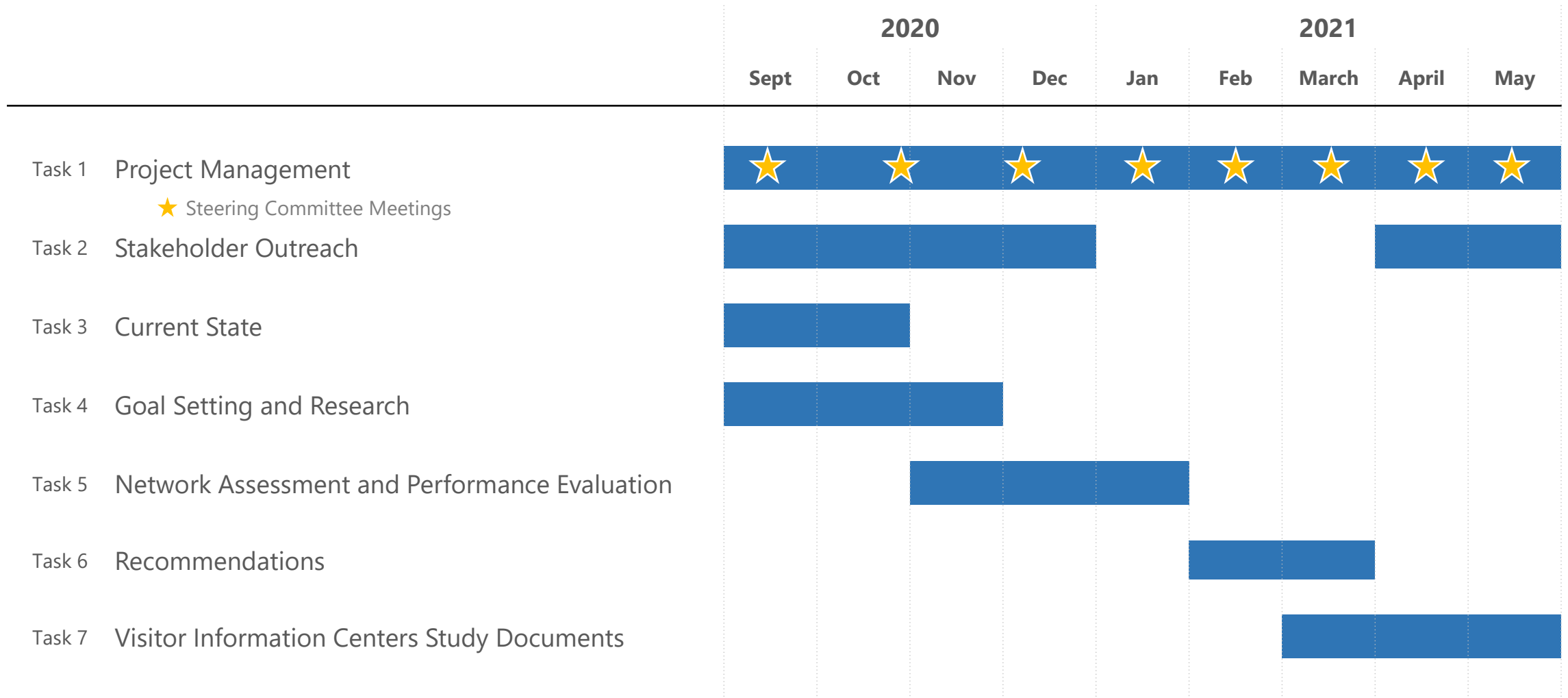
- Forecast of financial sustainability of maintenance and operations for current system;
- Alternatives that consider targeted investments or leverage other service delivery models;
- Evaluation matrix with 20-year maintenance and operation cost comparisons
- Final plan with recommendations that meets programmatic objectives and requirements in a fiscally sustained manner.



Scope of Work

- Task 1 - Project Management & Kick-off
- Task 2 – Develop a Stakeholder Outreach Strategy
- Task 3 – Develop a Profile of Vermont’s Rest Areas
- Task 4 – Outline Goals and Requirements
- Task 5 – Network Assessment & Performance Evaluation
- Task 6 – Development of Implementation Guidelines
- Task 7 – Final Report

Project Schedule



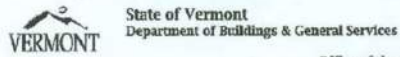
Stakeholder Outreach

- Identify Stakeholders
 - Coordinate with BGS, ACCD, and VTrans
 - Target stakeholders
 - Tourists, truckers, commuters, motor carriers
 - Businesses marketing to customers
- Discuss Outreach Strategy
 - Connecting with target stakeholder groups
 - Tourists
 - Truckers
 - Commuters
 - Motor Carriers
 - Forums for engagement
 - What information gaps can stakeholders help fill?



Existing Conditions

- Previous Reports / Assessments



Office of the Commissioner
2 Governor Aiken Avenue
Montpelier, VT 05633-5801
Telephone: 802-426-3519
Website: <http://bgs.vermont.gov/>

January 15, 2012

The Honorable Members of the 2012
General Assembly
State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Members:

In accordance with Act 60 of the Acts of 2011, Section 32, attached is a report to the 2012 General Assembly. This report, regarding the future program for travel information services and the promotion of Vermont businesses and products to the motoring public, is presented jointly by the Department of Buildings & General Services, the Agency of Transportation, and the Agency of Commerce & Community Development.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Ouzchowski
Michael J. Ouzchowski, Commissioner
Department of Buildings & General Services

Brian R. Seales
Brian R. Seales, Secretary
Agency of Transportation

Lawrence Miller
Lawrence Miller, Secretary
Agency of Commerce & Community Development



January 21, 2010

Mr. E. Joseph Aja, Jr., Director
State of Vermont
Buildings and General Services (BGS)
Design & Construction Division
2 Aiken Avenue
Montpelier, VT 05633-5801
E-Mail: joe.aja@vermont.gov

Ref: Statement of Work Agreement #01181 - 0000019514, between BGS and WSP USA Inc.
Re: Various Rest Area Projects for the State of Vermont - Site Assessment Report

Dear Mr. Aja:

WSP USA Inc. (WSP) visited various rest areas during the weeks of October 21 and 28, 2010. The purpose was to observe and generally verify the proposed physical repairs as shown on Page 6 of the Statement of Work Agreement #01181-0000019514 - the Facilities Assessment Phase. Additionally, while on-site, WSP observed and documented other facility conditions that may be of concern to BGS now, or in the future. The scope of site visit was not exhaustive, nor did it include building code compliance reviews or considerations.

The report is organized to follow the Page 6 Table Locations, starting with Alburgh and ending with Williston. Proposed BGS repairs from Page 6 are referred to as "Basic Scope," and other observations as "Additions." Additional Scope refers to work outside the elements listed on Page 6 - that is, not necessarily work to be programmed or constructed, but identified for consideration as time and funding permits. For context, classified the added observations as immediate, near-term, and long-term.

Numerous photographs were taken during the site visits to document conditions. An entire file of over 200 photographs has been provided separately in a Flash Drive to Peter Hack. Photos of the specific site are discussed herein and included and described in an Appendix.

Alburgh 3.2.7.1

Basic Scope

1. Replace Roof
Assessment - Conventional 3-tab shingles have become dislodged and are lifted from the plane of the roof. Shingles have the propensity to rip and blow off during windy conditions. Site Staff stated that there was recent shingle blow off due to wind. Failure of shingle leading edge attachment at bituminous strip is evident. It is advised that replacement roofing materials with the proper attachment and desired wind load, be specified for this location.



Executive Park Drive
Suite 101
Northbrook, NH 03056
Tel.: 603-950-7900
www.wsp.com

FACILITY CONDITION ASSESSMENT

PREPARED FOR:

State of Vermont
Buildings and General Services
2 Governor Aiken Avenue
Montpelier, Vermont 05633



FACILITY CONDITION ASSESSMENT
OF
WILLISTON SOUTH INFORMATION CENTER
I-89 SOUTHBOUND MILE MARKER 83
WILLISTON, VT 05495

PREPARED BY:
EMG
10461 Mill Run Circle
Owings Mills, Maryland
800.733.0660
www.EMGcorp.com

EMG CONTACT:
John Landry, R.A.
Program Manager
800.733.0660 x6291
landryj@emgcorp.com

EMG PROJECT NUMBER:
106686.18R000-171

DATE OF REPORT:
December 17, 2018

ON SITE DATE:
May 16, 2018



- ALBURG
- HIGHGATE
- DERBY
- GEORGIA NORTH
- GEORGIA SOUTH
- LYNDON
- WILLISTON NORTH
- WILLISTON SOUTH
- WATERFORD
- MONTPELIER - CAPITOL REGIONAL
- BRADFORD
- RANDOLPH NORTH
- RANDOLPH SOUTH
- SHARON NORTH
- SHARON SOUTH
- FAIR HAVEN
- WHITE RIVER
- HARTFORD NORTH
- HARTFORD SOUTH
- GUILFORD

Confidential

Report to the Commissioner

VERMONT'S VISITOR CENTER PROGRAM

September 12, 2008

Department of Buildings & General Services
Government Business Services Division
Vermont Information Centers

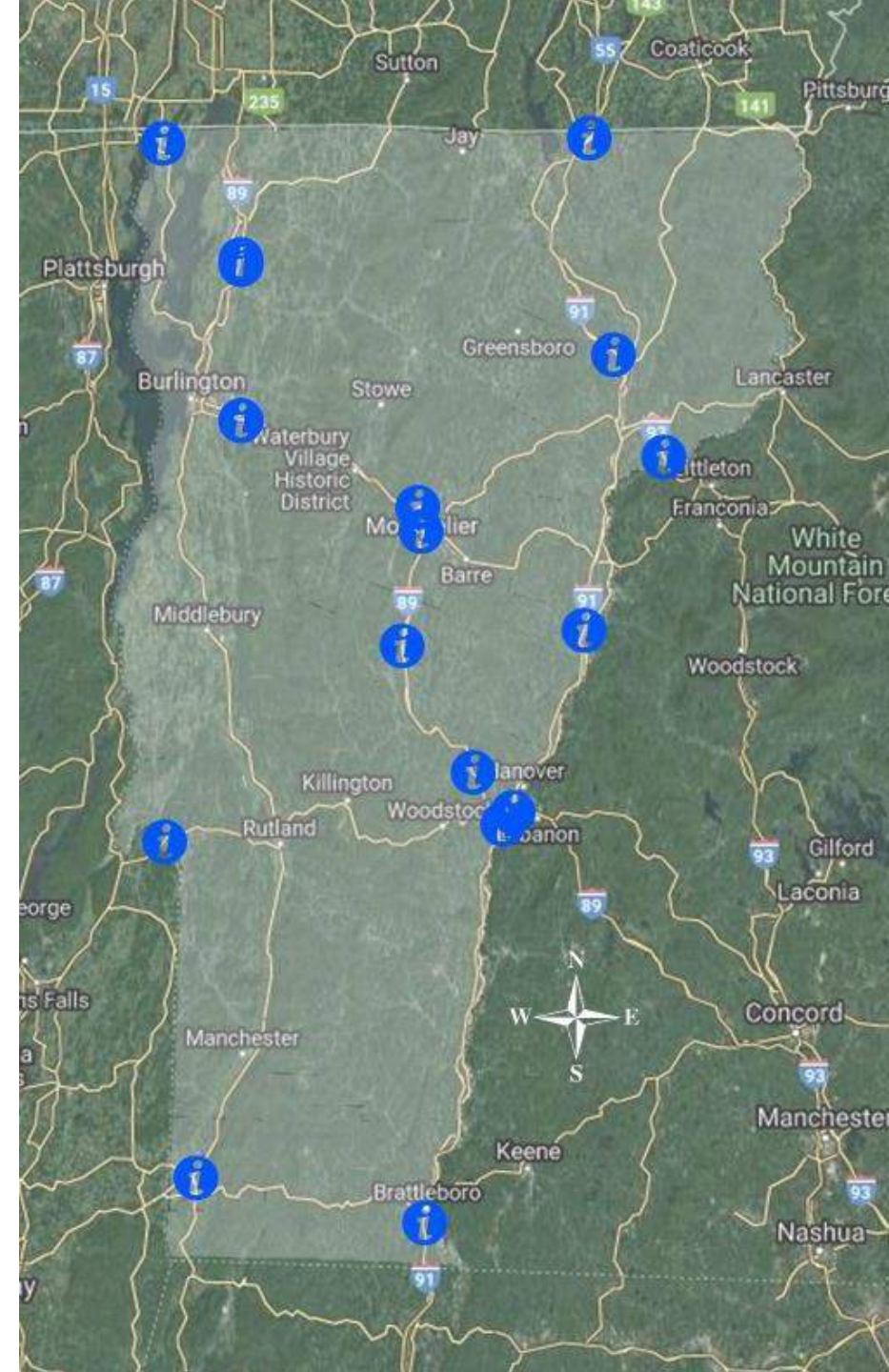
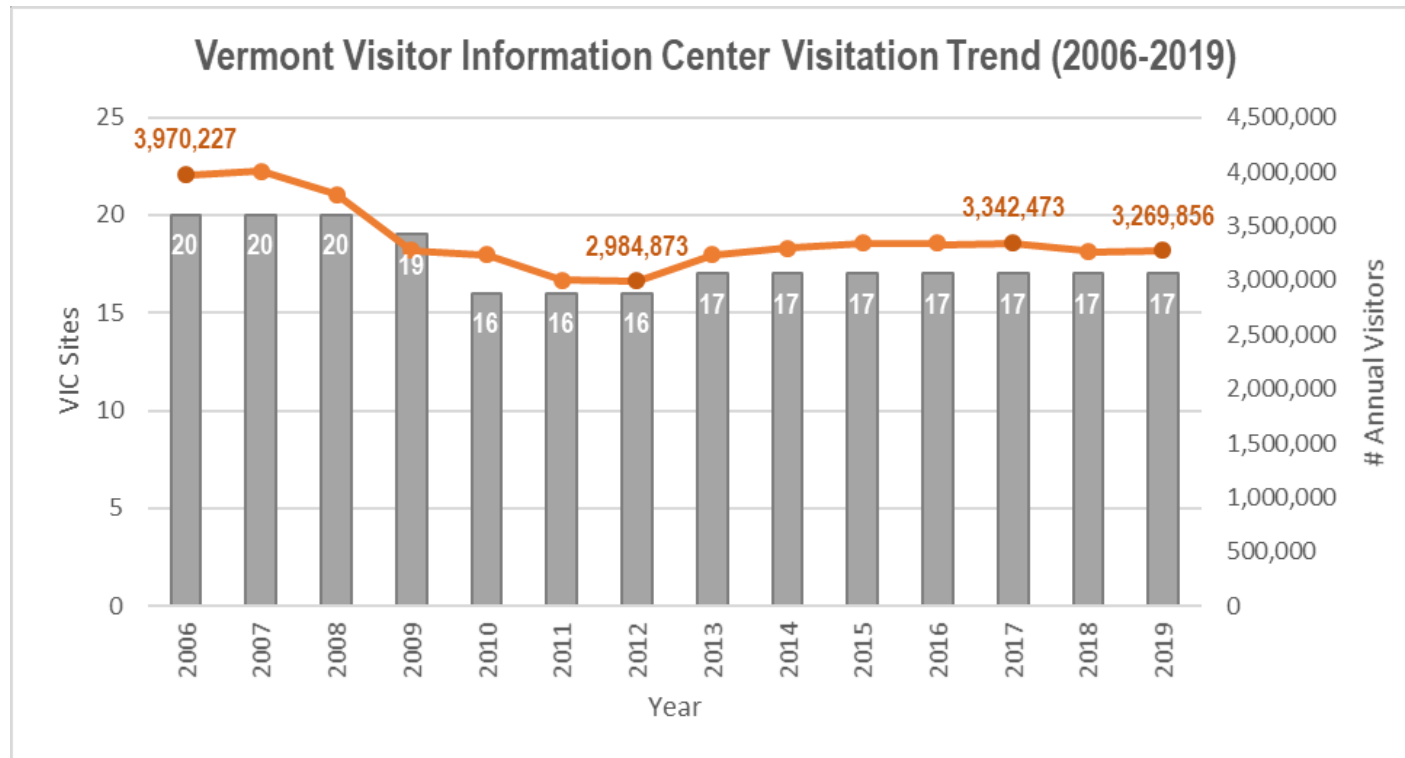
emg engineering | environmental | capital planning | project management

EMG Corporate Headquarters 10461 Mill Run Circle, Suite 1100, Owings Mills, MD 21117 www.EMGcorp.com p 800.733.0660

Existing Conditions

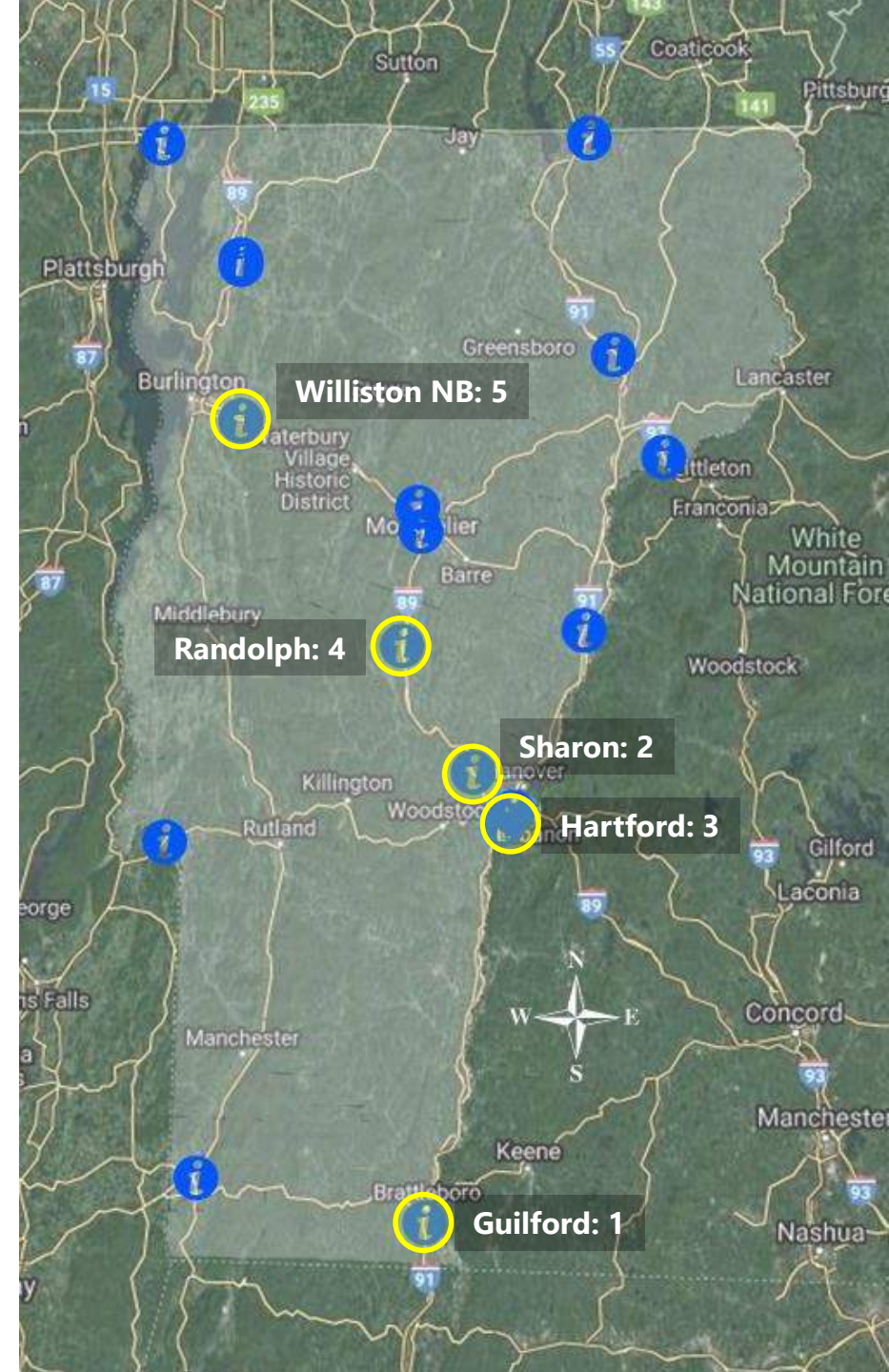
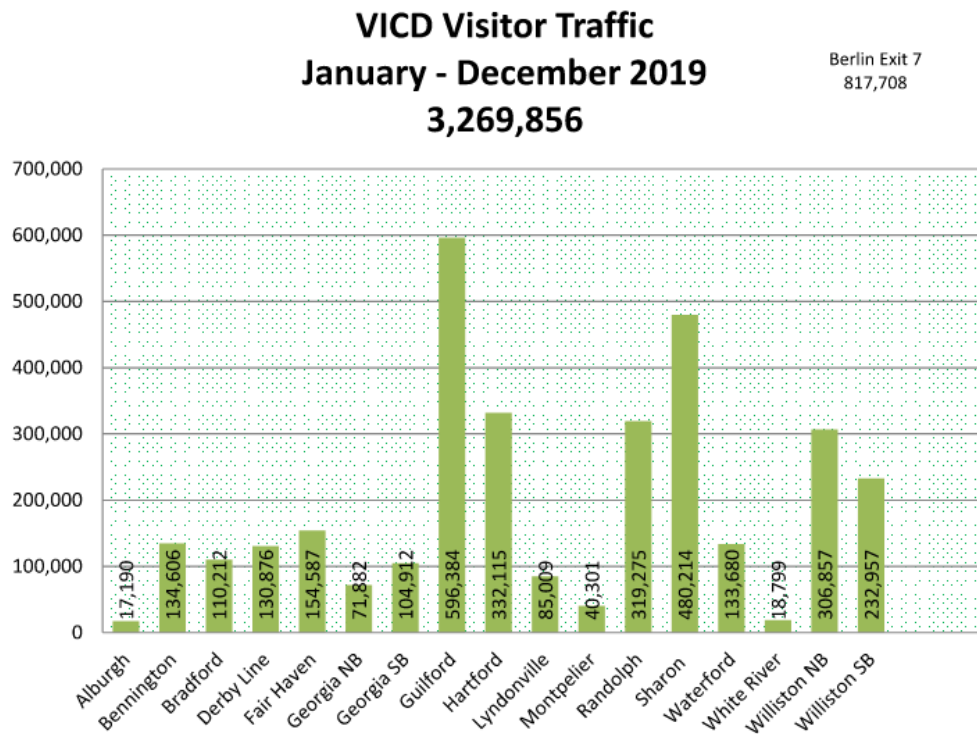
- Current State

- 18 active Visitor Information Centers statewide
- 9 considered Welcome Centers
- 8 Visitor Centers reopened in July (closed due to COVID response)
- 3.27 million visitors last year (*4.09 million including Berlin Exit 7*)



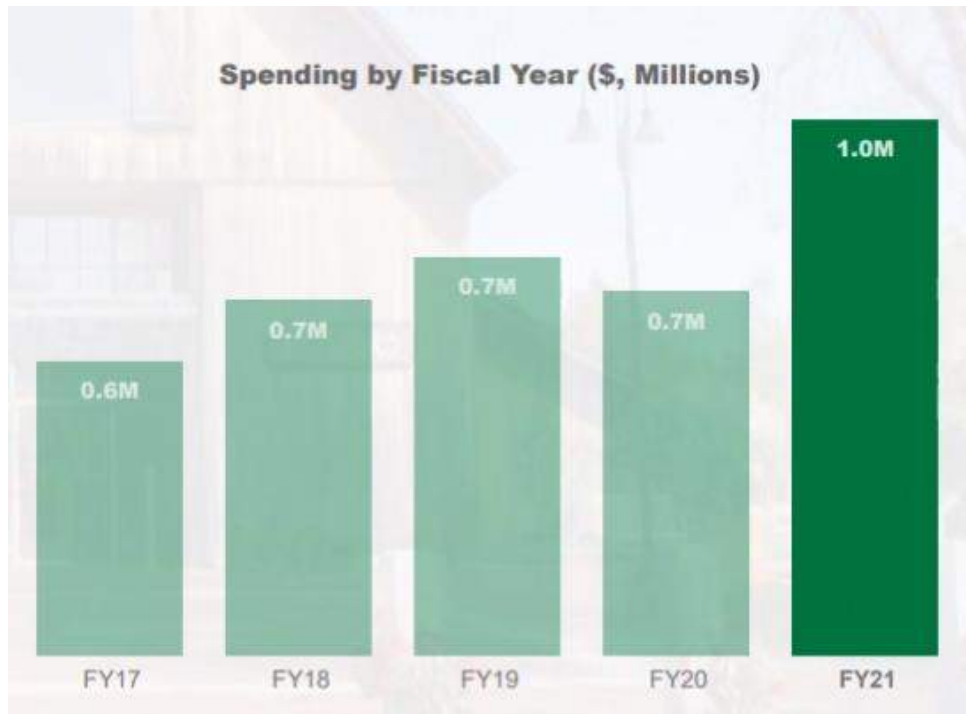
Existing Conditions

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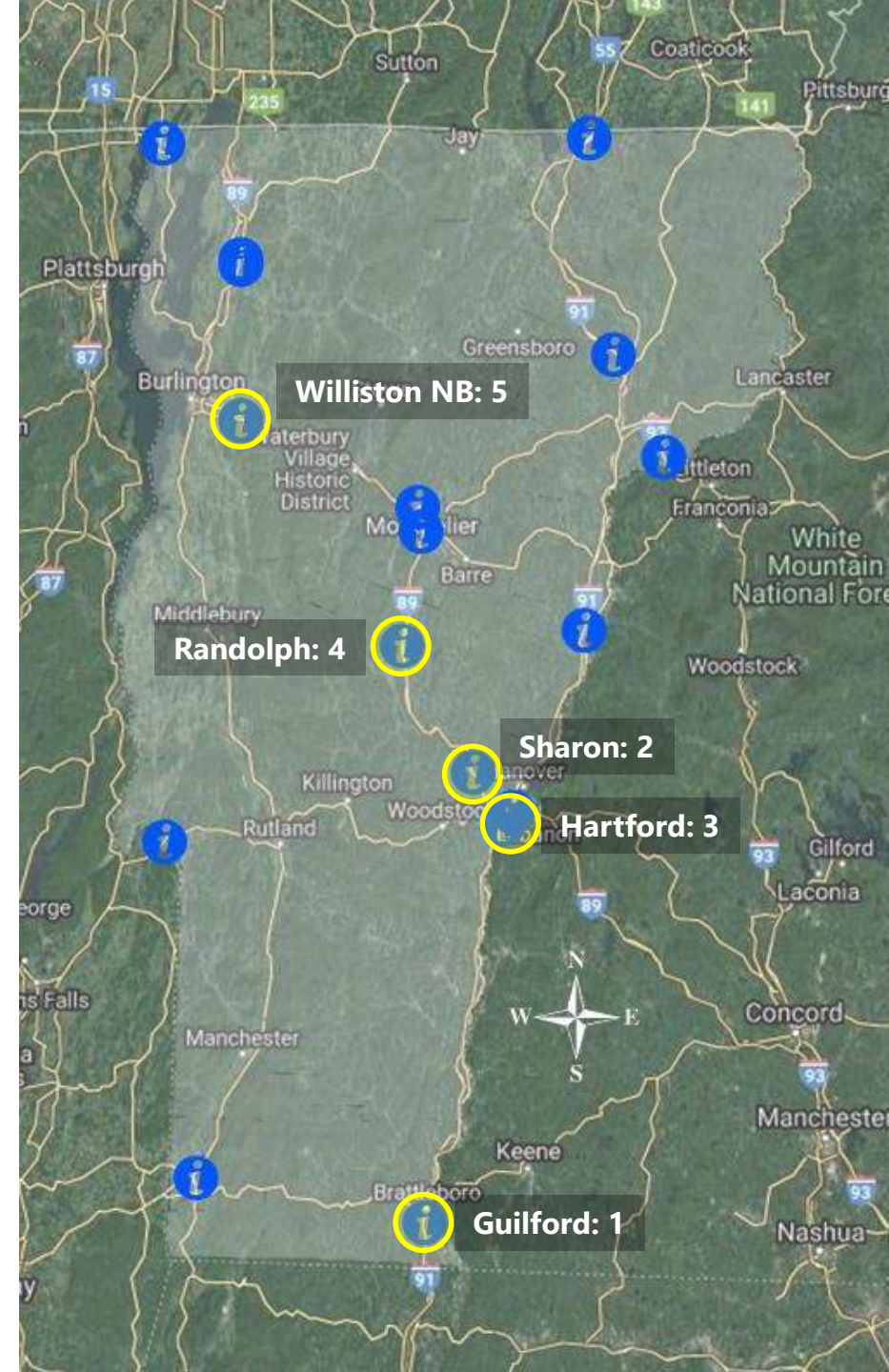


Existing Conditions

- Current State
 - 18 active Visitor Information Centers statewide
 - 9 considered Welcome Centers
 - 8 Visitor Centers reopened in July (closed due to COVID response)
 - 3.27 million visitors last year (*4.09 million including Berlin Exit 7*)



VTrans "Rest Area" Budget (FY 2017-FY 2021)





Discussion

- Agency/Department Roles and Responsibilities for the Visitor Information Centers
- Categorization of Rest Areas / Visitor Information Centers
- Data Request
 - Visitation by VIC over time
 - Operating costs & revenues by VIC over time
 - GIS data interface
- Proposed Visitor Information Center Capital Improvements
 - Derby (rehabilitation), Sharon (repaving)
- Other Potential VIC Locations?

VERMONT INFORMATION CENTERS DIVISION (VICD) NETWORK STATISTICS TABLE - FISCAL YEAR 2017 - 2019

SORT BY LOCATION

Department of Buildings & General Services
Government Business Services Division

Sites	Location	BUILD/REBUILD DATES & SIZE			HOURS OF OPERATION & STAFFING HOURS			AVAILABLE EMPLOYEES			VISITOR COUNT - FY 2016-2018			TOTAL OPERATING COST									Sites	
		Original Construction Date	Build/Rebuild Completed	Square Feet	Hours Open Each Day	Ave. scheduled staff hours/day	Days/Week	STATE EMPLOYEES		Contract	FY 2017 Visitor Count	FY 2018 Visitor Count	FY 2019 Visitor Count	FY 2017			FY 2018			FY 2019				
								Classified	Temporary					Total Operating Cost	Cost Per Operating Hour	Cost Per Visitor	Total Operating Cost	Cost Per Operating Hour	Cost Per Visitor	Total Operating Cost	Cost Per Operating Hour	Cost Per Visitor		
1	Alburg Welcome Center	Rte 2 W	1996		1150	8	8	7	1	3		17,775	17,178	16,021	\$ 107,842	\$ 30.68	\$ 6.07	\$ 83,752	\$ 28.68	\$ 4.88	\$ 93,154	\$ 31.90	\$ 5.81	Alburg
2	Bennington Welcome Center	Route 7	2013		7500	14	28	7	0	0	11	120,026	130,580	136,121	\$ 317,259	\$ 53.03	\$ 2.64	\$ 279,827	\$ 54.76	\$ 2.14	\$ 300,447	\$ 58.80	\$ 2.21	Bennington
3	Bradford Information Center	I-91 N	1995		2290	12	12	7	1	3		137,426	135,178	108,717	\$ 181,234	\$ 41.30	\$ 1.32	\$ 190,347	\$ 43.46	\$ 1.41	\$ 202,769	\$ 46.29	\$ 1.87	Bradford
4	Derby Welcome Center	I-91 S	1968		1300	12	12	7	2	2		154,470	146,787	137,741	\$ 195,377	\$ 41.95	\$ 1.26	\$ 198,321	\$ 45.28	\$ 1.35	\$ 207,623	\$ 47.40	\$ 1.51	Derby
5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	Rte 4	1980	1997	2345	12	12	7	2	3		159,272	157,891	153,989	\$ 238,978	\$ 50.98	\$ 1.50	\$ 208,327	\$ 47.56	\$ 1.32	\$ 188,216	\$ 42.97	\$ 1.23	Fair Haven
6	Georgia Northbound Information Center	I-89 N	1968	1999	1230	12	1	7	2	1		72,502	68,193	70,362	\$ 213,881	\$ 50.71	\$ 2.95	\$ 224,363	\$ 51.22	\$ 3.29	\$ 222,848	\$ 50.88	\$ 3.17	Georgia North
7	Georgia Southbound Information Center	I-89 S	1999		1230	14	14	7	0	0	3	102,216	100,720	100,931	\$ 139,591	\$ 23.68	\$ 1.37	\$ 128,886	\$ 25.22	\$ 1.28	\$ 121,363	\$ 23.75	\$ 1.20	Georgia South
8	Guilford Welcome Center	I-91 N	1999		7130	16	27	7	3	10	1	676,136	680,578	625,098	\$ 617,884	\$ 75.77	\$ 0.91	\$ 544,173	\$ 62.12	\$ 0.80	\$ 543,130	\$ 62.00	\$ 0.87	Guilford
9	Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	I-91 S	1964	2012	7500	14	16	7	3	2		327,499	327,823	332,824	\$ 278,639	\$ 47.38	\$ 0.85	\$ 348,305	\$ 68.16	\$ 1.06	\$ 390,937	\$ 76.50	\$ 1.17	Hartford
10	Lyndonville Information Center	I-91 S	1973	1996	1300	12	12	7	2	2		90,998	79,817	84,468	\$ 200,533	\$ 43.06	\$ 2.20	\$ 206,775	\$ 47.21	\$ 2.59	\$ 216,507	\$ 49.43	\$ 2.56	Lyndonville
11	Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Rte 2 E	Unknown	1998		11	14	7	2	4		40,920	37,218	38,669	\$ 213,357	\$ 55.68	\$ 5.21	\$ 191,208	\$ 50.03	\$ 5.14	\$ 212,159	\$ 55.51	\$ 5.49	Montpelier
12	Randolph Southbound Information Center	I-89 S	1970		1470	12	12	7	2	4		294,944	263,633	298,735	\$ 287,654	\$ 62.63	\$ 0.98	\$ 254,149	\$ 58.02	\$ 0.96	\$ 210,596	\$ 48.08	\$ 0.70	Randolph
13	Sharon Northbound Information Center	I-89 N	1960s	2005	7440	16	21	7	3	3		508,541	497,248	485,635	\$ 477,668	\$ 81.72	\$ 0.94	\$ 516,318	\$ 88.65	\$ 1.04	\$ 570,215	\$ 97.91	\$ 1.17	Sharon
14	Waterford Welcome Center	I-93 N	1982	1997	2340	12	12	7	2	2		135,223	131,949	131,468	\$ 195,586	\$ 42.20	\$ 1.45	\$ 201,433	\$ 45.99	\$ 1.53	\$ 194,708	\$ 44.45	\$ 1.48	Waterford
15	White River Junction Information Center	Downtown	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	7	7	0	0	4	22,192	22,189	19,172	\$ 33,320	\$ 15.60	\$ 1.50	\$ 39,389	\$ 15.78	\$ 1.78	\$ 38,462	\$ 15.41	\$ 2.01	White River Jct.
16	Williston Northbound Information Center	I-89 N	1960s	2002	4600	16	20	7	0	0	4	310,956	317,852	307,906	\$ 305,955	\$ 47.77	\$ 0.98	\$ 298,023	\$ 51.17	\$ 0.94	\$ 391,631	\$ 67.24	\$ 1.27	Williston North
17	Williston Southbound Informaton Center	I-89 S	1960s	2002	4600	16	20	7	0	0	4	211,754	218,590	222,016	\$ 313,967	\$ 48.80	\$ 1.48	\$ 306,244	\$ 52.58	\$ 1.40	\$ 303,748	\$ 52.15	\$ 1.37	Williston South
TOTAL VISITOR COUNT:									25	39	27	3,382,850	3,333,424	3,269,873	\$ 4,318,725			\$ 4,219,840			\$ 4,408,513			Operating Cost Total
															\$ 427,891			\$ 307,413			\$ 245,312			Administrative Cost
															\$ 4,746,616			\$ 4,527,253			\$ 4,653,825			Total Cost

Next Steps

- Existing Conditions Assessment: *September – October*
- Goal Setting & Research: *September – October*
- Stakeholder Outreach: *September – November*
- Next Steering Committee Meeting: *End of October*







Place: Teams Meeting

Meeting Notes

Date: September 11, 2020

Notes Taken by: Karen Sentoff, VHB

Project #: 57895.04

**Re: Vermont Information Centers Study
Kick-Off Meeting**

ATTENDEES

Joe Aja	VT BGS Design and Construction Director
Tina Bohl	VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau (Rest Areas)
Deb Ferrell	Executive Manager of Government Business Services (including VICD)
Jennifer Fitch	VT BGS - Acting Commissioner
Peter Hack	VT BGS Project Manager
Kenneth Jones	Department of Tourism and Marketing
Colleen Montague	VTrans Facilitator
Costa Pappis	VTrans Policy and Planning
Dave Pelletier	VTrans Policy and Planning – Project VTrans PM
Lisa Sanchez	Vermont Information Centers Division Manager
Sue Scribner	VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau (including Rest Areas)
Roger Thompson	FHWA Vermont Division Office
Dave Saladino	VHB – Project Consultant PM
Jenn Conley	VHB
Karen Sentoff	VHB
Matthew Kitchen	ECONorthWest

Introductions were made of the parties present (listed above).

Dave P. discussed some general housekeeping.

Dave S. presented the slides prepared for the kick-off meeting. He reviewed the project goals and objectives. The first part of this effort will be compiling data from the past and updating resources with new information so as to gather and synthesize the information to identify the current state of the system. The study will then look to develop forecasts for sustaining the current system, investigating potential gaps in the current system, developing alternatives with targeted investments or other service models, and comparison and evaluation of the system on a 20-year time horizon.

Jennifer shared that the impetus for this study, to some degree, is that we don't have enough funding on the staffing side or the maintenance side for the existing network of VICD facilities. In addition, we have facilities that need to be replaced. What we are trying to get at is what is the funding level required to maintain what we have and what is the funding needed to support the system we envision going forward. A critical component to this is a gap analysis to identify any locations needed. For example, some individuals have suggested there is a gap in the state's northwest quadrant that should be investigated.



Lisa offered that the primary VICD funding mechanisms are the state's General Fund and VTrans/FHWA. No funding comes through the ACCD. The budget split is 86/14 to support the staffing and maintenance and operations. The facilities run an annual budget of about \$500,000. Due to limited BGS Project Management staffing, expending these funds has fallen behind.

A discussion of the budget ensued where it was suggested that the split for operations is 86% general funds and 14% transportation funds. Note: Later in the meeting it was confirmed that the split is 86/14, but with 86% state transportation funds and 14% general funds.

In the meeting chat box, Sue Scribner added the following:

We transfer some transportation funds to BGS for operations annually. We do not transfer federal funds to the best of my knowledge. We do use federal funds for the major preventative maintenance projects, and we match the federal dollars with transportation funds. VTrans does also have some role in maintenance as spelled out in a MOA. It needs updating but if you don't have a copy, we can provide you with one.

Costa added that the other critical part of this study is the gap analysis. For example, a Windsor representative has been in contact regarding their interest in the study and filling the gap in the Windsor area.

Dave S. provided an overview of the project's Scope of Work and Schedule. He then provided initial discussion points on Stakeholder Engagement.

Costa suggested that this seems like a broader outreach than the focused intent of the study. We should be focused on engaging Regional Planning Commissions and Chambers of Commerce as opposed to individual users. He distinguished between a plan and a study, the latter of which is what we are conducting here.

Lisa added that the primary purpose of the VICD facilities is highway traffic safety, providing rest locations along the highway network. A secondary benefit is that these locations are able to promote the Vermont brand. These locations provide opportunities and benefits to the traveling public and tourism industry.

Jennifer suggested that the customer experience during COVID is very different than their experience typically, and therefore need to use caution in how we are reaching out at this particular moment. The system is currently operating with reduced locations, reduced hours, no free coffee, no brochures, etc. We need to be strategic about how we are engaging the users of these locations.

Jenn offered insights from the truck and freight industry side of the equation through experience with the ongoing freight and rail efforts. Although we provide more locations per mile than other places, Vermont tends to have the perception of being unfriendly to truckers. This perception is likely due to the lack of trucking-related services at the locations in the current system.



Costa added that toll roads/turnpikes in other states have travel plazas that provide more services and facilities for truckers.

Lisa added that in many current VICD facilities, the parking spaces are not necessarily truck friendly. For instance, in Sharon the truck parking is limited and often trucks are parked in overflow configurations. In Guilford the situation is much the same in that the location is busy with truck traffic and experiences over capacity conditions. Although the network is made up of 17 centers, those 17 centers are not all equipped with ample (or adequate) truck parking to provide the refuge demanded of the system. Another example is in Randolph, where it is one of the smallest facilities and in the winter the back portion of the parking area is closed so passenger cars and trucks have to mix in the passenger car area.

A question was raised of whether parking utilization data exist. Lisa responded that there are data on number of parking spots (capacity) at each location, but not utilization at each location.

Discussion of target groups to involve in the stakeholder outreach should include RPCs and Chambers of Commerce. Jennifer asked if ACCD needs to have a role here. Lisa stated that she was concerned with engagement and data collection during a pandemic. Ken added that ACCD would discourage surveying of users at this juncture due to COVID. Costa suggested that we will circle back to the users' portion of the outreach effort post-pandemic, likely to happen after this study is completed.

Sue conveyed that \$4M were allocated annually to the VICD from the transportation funds. This represents 86% of the 86/14 split. Jennifer added that \$630,000 came from the general fund for this year.

Karen presented on initial Existing Conditions data.

Lisa suggested that the number of centers be limited to the 17 that fall under the Visitor Information Centers Division jurisdiction. The study should not include Berlin, even though VICD has historically gathered Berlin statistics. Making this distinction is critical in this effort.

Deb suggested that consideration of the P&H Truck Stop in Wells River and the Maplewood Travelers Service Center in Berlin be included in this study as these locations may relieve some dependency on other visitor centers that are in VICD jurisdiction. These locations may fill geographical gaps in the VICD system.

Jennifer added that as we explore options for new locations, it may prove useful to consider lessons learned from P&H and/or Berlin. New locations may utilize alternative strategies that leverage models like these locations.

Costa sees this study as having two functional components: (1) funding sustainability of the system, and (2) coverage of the system to serve the needs of travelers (i.e. the operation of the system). Without doing outreach, we don't know what the more local preferences will be for a particular model over another until we ask those communities identified in a gap analysis. Therefore, from an operational perspective, all locations inclusive of the PPPs should be considered. From a funding sustainability perspective, only the VICD locations should be considered.



Dave S. asked about P&H. Lisa responded that VTrans provided signage for P&H on the interstate and in return they allot space for the state to advertise there. As a result, the location is functionally a part of the brochure program.

As mentioned earlier in conversations, Dave S. followed up to ask which facility is closing. Lisa responded that based on budget reductions in the coming year, the decision was made to close the White River Junction welcome center that is located in the train station depot.

Dave S, asked a follow up question about the VICD visitor count data. Lisa responded that the counts are conducted via person counters that count the number of visitors that actually enter each building.

Karen asked about counts during COVID, as some locations are still utilized for rest and have port-o-lets, but the buildings are not open. Lisa answered that the use of these locations is unfortunately not counted unless visitors are actually entering the buildings.

Dave P. suggested that Lisa work directly with VHB and ECONorthwest to share data resources.

Lisa added that careful interpretation of the usage data is required. For instance, Randolph South closes at 7PM, whereas Hartford closes at 9PM. These are both heavily utilized locations, but the hours of operation skew the usage. Another example is with Randolph, which is technically a handicap accessible location in terms of facilities provided but proves difficult to access. Derby and Randolph both pose unique challenges that need to be addressed.

Tina can provide the MOU that spells of the AOT and BGS agreement.

Tina provided a brief background on Derby and Randolph. The thought in Randolph was that there was going to be a new VICD facility located at Exit 4 in Randolph that would replace the existing Randolph location, but the project fell through. Similarly in Derby, an exploration of a PPP did not go anywhere. The deferred maintenance at these locations was not addressed as these processes played out, but now needs to be addressed because their private replacement did not occur.

Dave S. asked to confirm the funding equations that he was hearing. There is approximately \$4.6M flowing from BGS and VTrans allocates an additional \$1M in the capital improvements program for a total of \$5.6M to fund the system.

Sue referred to the lack of BGS project management capacity as the reason why there has not been consistent expenditure of the \$4.6M budgeted. This was said in an effort to clarify budgeted monies versus dollar expenditures.

Deb added that there are a number of rest areas that are owned by VTrans that have no facilities. These pull offs are not included in the VICD system, but are in addition to the system to provide rest breaks to travelers. The welcome centers are along the border and the remaining information centers are interior to the state.

Dave S. asked about any known GIS resources and added that unless other resources exist, we will be assembling data in the GIS environment.

Lisa noted that they have not been able to spend all of the funds that have been budgeted.



Peter wanted to add that his list projecting out the priority projects for the network does not include the Derby or Sharon projects that were mentioned and included in the VTrans Capital Improvements Program.

Sue noted that these projects that are prioritized are managed through BGS. This is how Guilford was done. She acknowledged the hard work of Tina and Roger to develop an agreed upon list of projects that federal aid funds can be utilized on, even though federal aid cannot typically be used for these projects.

Joe added a clarification on Derby that the project was programmed based on a study that focused on bringing this location into ADA compliance and updating the location appropriately.

Dave S. asked if there were other geographic locations that have expressed interest in the study and the gap analysis besides Franklin County and Windsor. Costa acknowledged that there was some urgency when the gap analysis portion of this effort was last discussed amongst this group. He asked if that urgency still existed.

In response, Jennifer asked if Deb and Lisa could help craft a blurb to let the Legislature know that the study had been delayed, but that the gap analysis was still a priority. She also asked if VHB could provide a timeframe in which this piece of the effort could be done by. If the study can conduct the gap analysis and make recommendations to that end by March, then the results could possibly be incorporated into the next round of budget discussions.

Ken suggested that we keep in mind the possibility of collocating electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Costa reminded the group that commercial activity along the interstate is prohibited, and this is inclusive of charging stations. Roger added that charging stations are considered a fuel source, which is why they are prohibited infrastructure at these locations.

Jennifer emphasized that her focus is on the financial side of the equation so she can answer to the legislative body. If there is some type of additional service identified in the gap analysis, the mechanism for funding such an addition to the system is crucial. To this end, cost estimates should be as accurate as possible to ensure that the recommendations that are made are adequately funded.

Costa reiterated that financial sustainability and gap analysis are the two primary components to this study. With the gap analysis, we are identifying if we have any gaps that we need to close and if so, what is the appropriate service model.

Dave S. asked about the top concerns with the Berlin location. Lisa responded that the location is open 24 hours per day and provides the additional amenities of fuel, convenience store, beer cave, etc. Berlin has dedicated signage on the interstate, which is a potentially politically charged position. In addition, complaints about the location get directed to VICD even though they are not within their jurisdiction. VICD ends up being a silent partner in the operation. Users expect the treatment and ambassadorship that they receive at the state operated locations at this privately held location, without the private location being accountable to that experience.



Matthew encouraged the sharing of any and all relevant data resources. He added that we are data hungry and will take whatever data is available in the most disaggregate format we can get. Detailed information is welcome, even if it means that we are doing some post processing.

Lisa and Deb were identified as the holders of many relevant data resources. Dave P. will serve as the data gatekeeper, so resources should funnel through him to the consultant team.

Costa encouraged VHB to think about performance standards. The sooner in this process we are thinking about and discussing the standards to target for these locations and the services they provide, the better.

The discussion wrapped up and adjourned at 2:53PM.



Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Steering Committee Meeting #2

November 18, 2020



Agenda

- **Introductions**
- **Existing System Overview**
 - Review key observations from the Draft Current State Memo
- **Visioning Session**
 - Articulate a Vision, Goals, & Objectives for the System
- **System Evaluation – Scenario Planning**
 - Brainstorm potential scenarios to be evaluated
- **Next Steps**

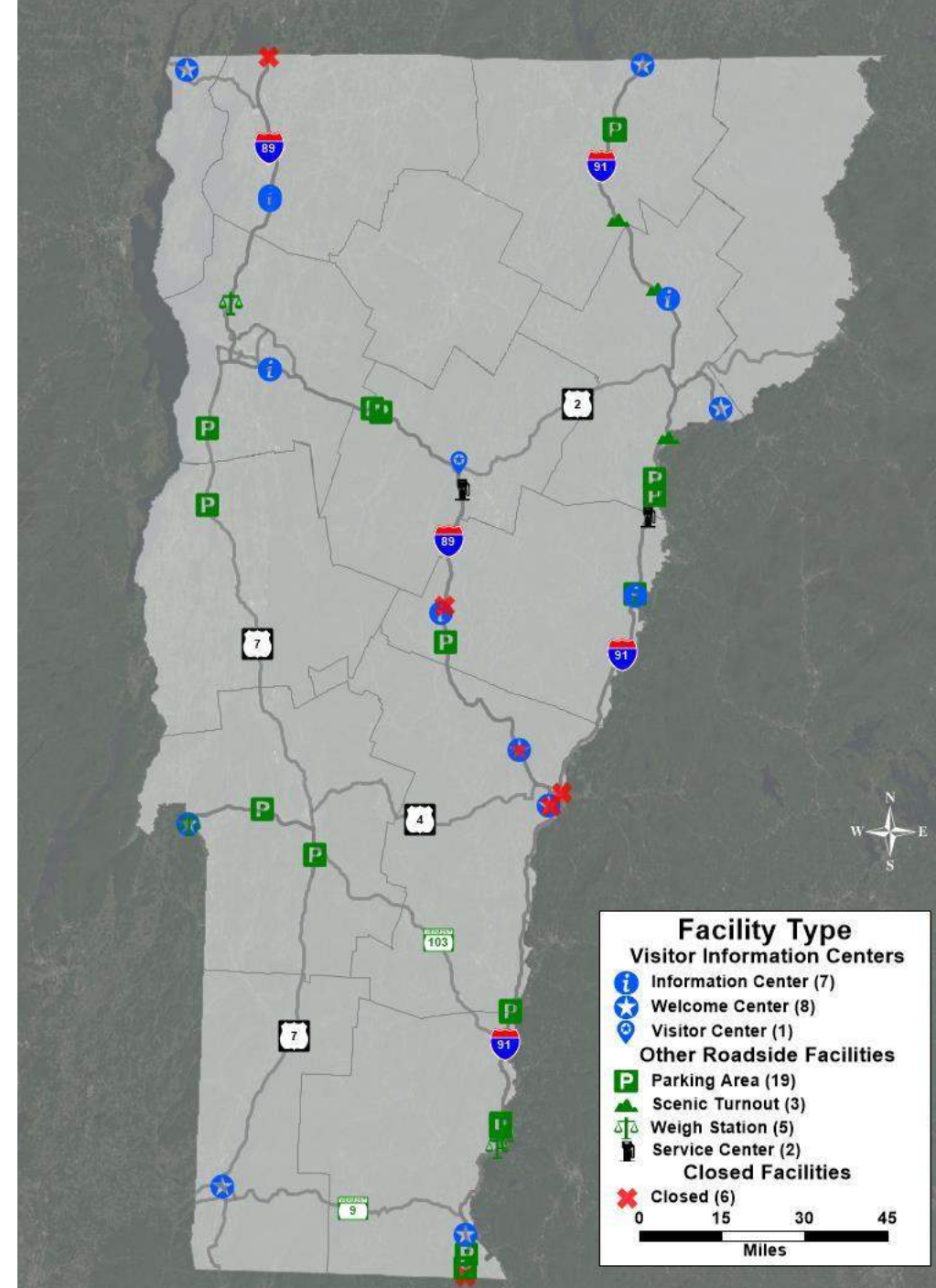
Existing System Overview



Existing Conditions

■ System Inventory

- 16 active Visitor Information Centers statewide
 - 45 total “Roadside Facilities”
 - All interstate facilities within 35 miles of next facility (60-mile guidance)

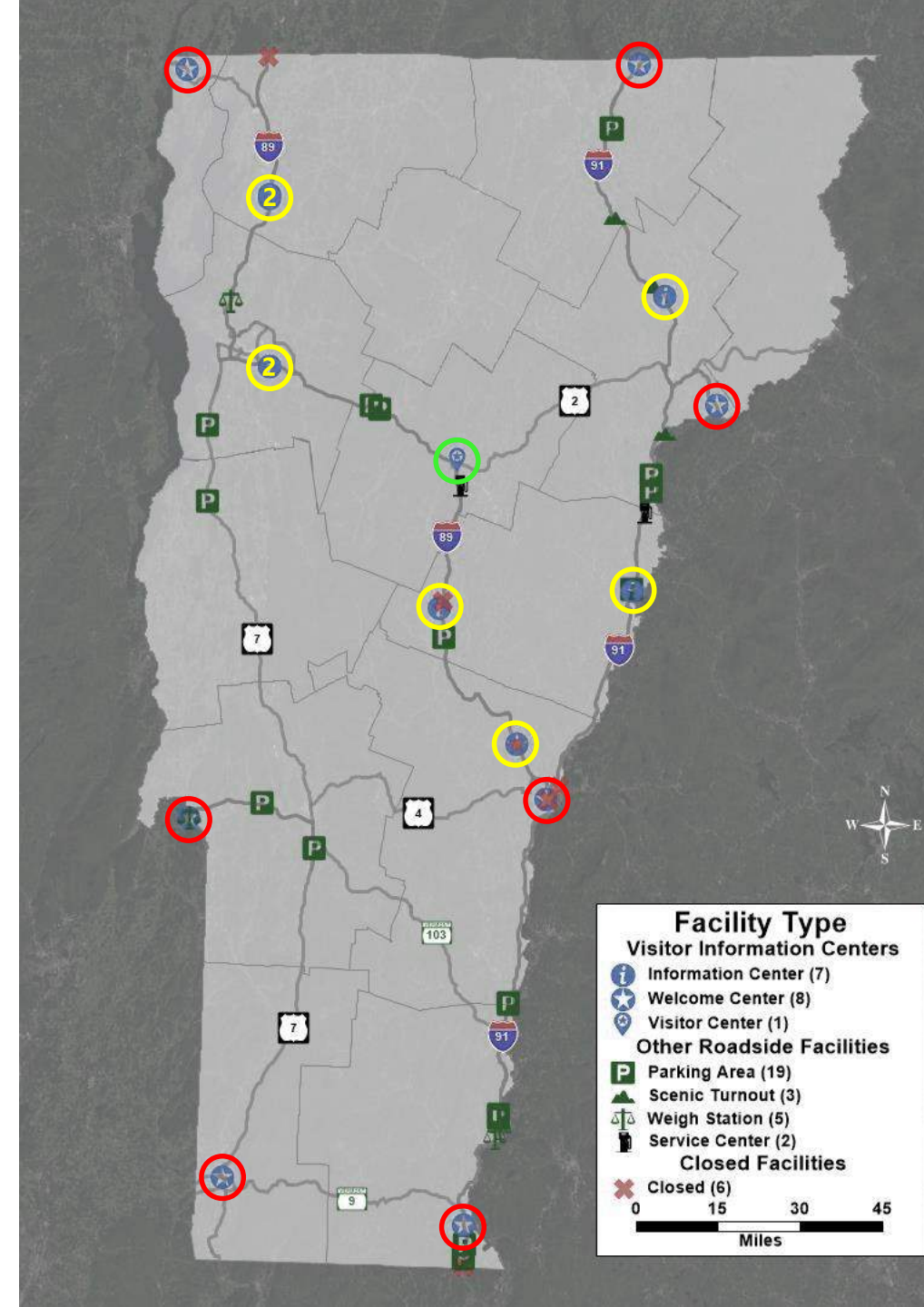


Existing Conditions

■ System Inventory

– 16 active Visitor Information Centers statewide

- **Information Center** (8 facilities): These facilities have direct access to the interstate, provide refuge for brief safety breaks, and provide additional amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information
- **Welcome Center** (7 facilities): These facilities are located near the border of Vermont and are focused on providing gateway services for travelers coming into the state
- **Visitor Center** (1 facility): These facilities are located off the interstate network without direct access to the highway and provide similar amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information.



Existing Conditions

■ System Inventory

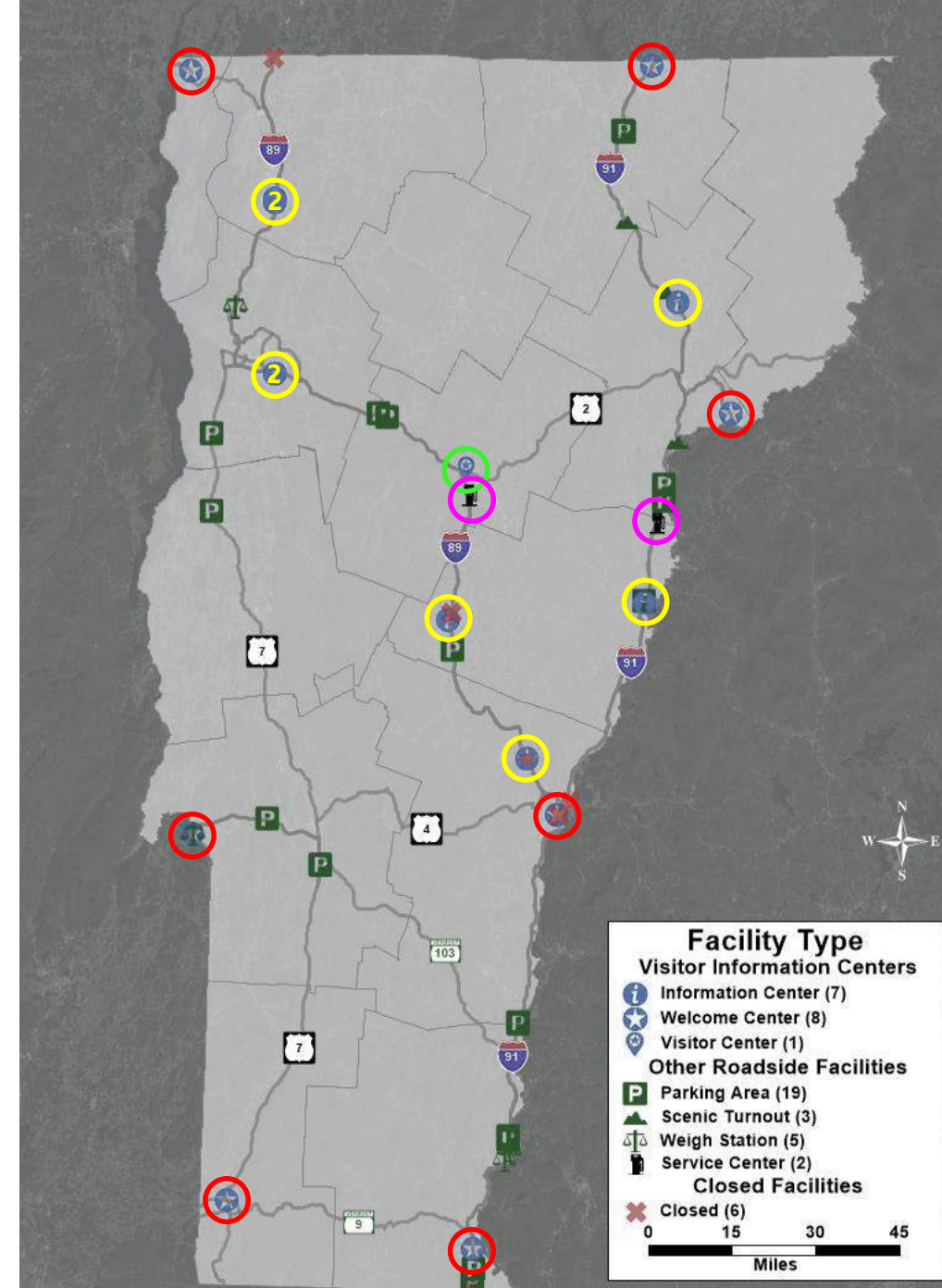
– 16 active Visitor Information Centers statewide

○ **Information Center** (8 facilities): These facilities have direct access to the interstate, provide refuge for brief safety breaks, and provide additional amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information

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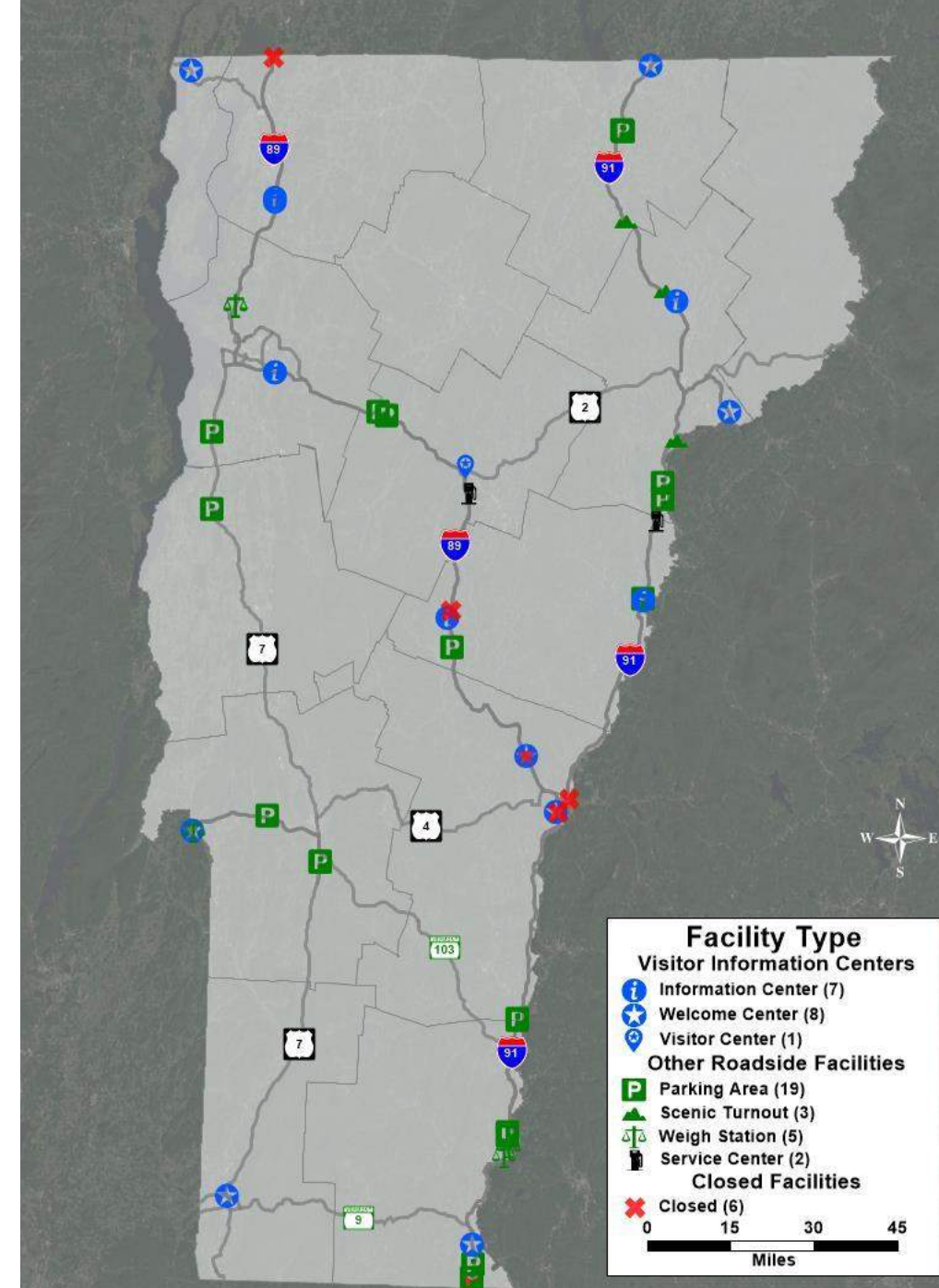
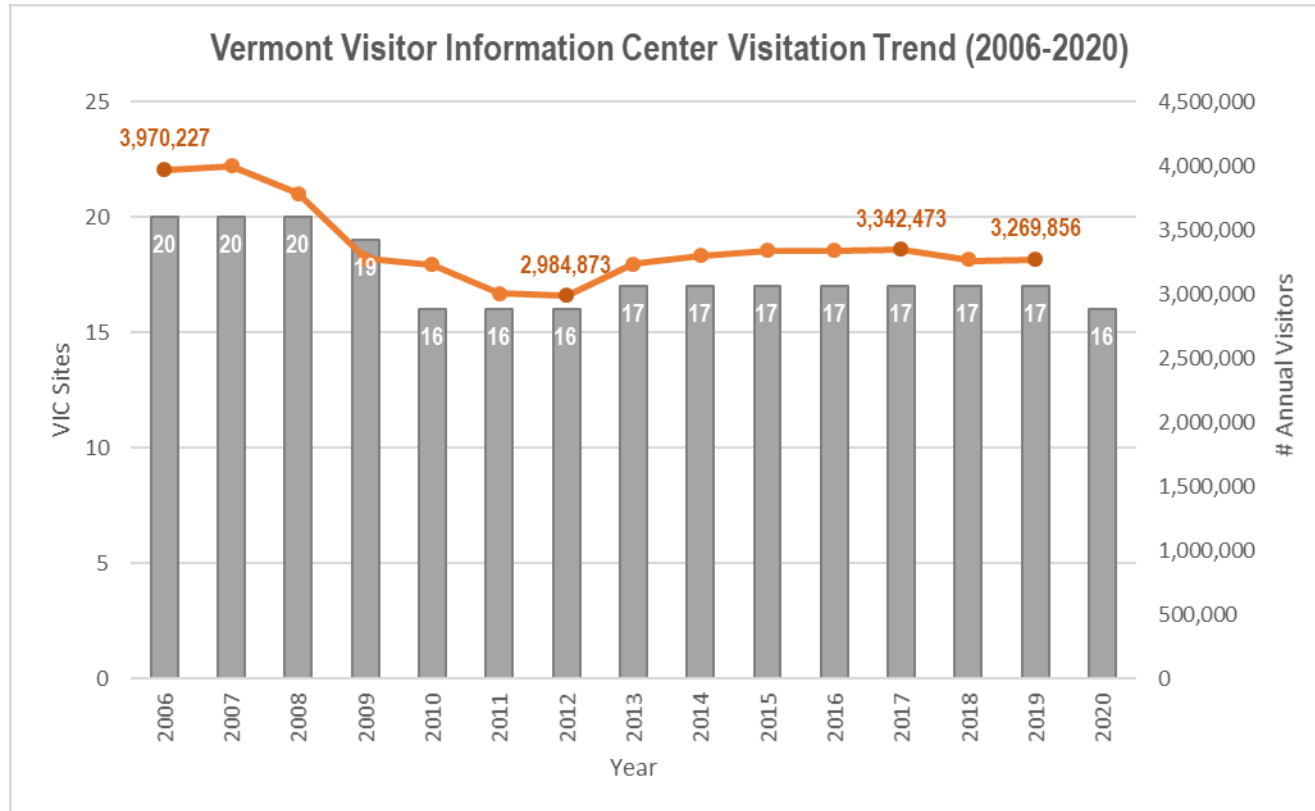
○ **Service Center (2 facilities):** Through public/private partnerships with the state, Service Centers are locations that provide restroom facilities and traveler information as well as additional services including food and fueling.



Existing Conditions

System Inventory

- 16 active Visitor Information Centers statewide
 - Relatively level visitation trends (2013-2019)



Existing Conditions

■ Staffing

— VICD Staffing

- 26 full-time staff, 36 temporary/part-time staff (pre-COVID)

— Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce

- Georgia Southbound Information Center
- Williston Northbound & Southbound Information Center

— Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce

- Bennington Welcome Center

Site	Designation	Hours Of Operation	Staffing+ (Permanent)	Staffing+ (Temporary)
Alburg	Welcome Center	9 AM - 5 PM	1	3
Bennington	Welcome Center	7 AM - 9 PM	0*	0*
Bradford NB	Information Center	7 AM - 7 PM	1	2
Derby SB	Welcome Center	7 AM - 7 PM	2	2
Fair Haven	Welcome Center	7 AM - 7 PM	3	2
Georgia NB	Information Center	7 AM - 7 PM	2	1
Georgia SB	Information Center	7 AM - 9 PM	0*	0*
Guilford NB	Welcome Center	7 AM - 11 PM	3	10
Hartford SB	Welcome Center	7 AM - 7 PM	3	1
Lyndonville SB	Information Center	7 AM - 7 PM	2	2
Montpelier	Visitors Center	6 AM - 5 PM	2	5
Randolph SB	Information Center	7 AM - 7 PM	2	2
Sharon NB	Information Center	7 AM - 11 PM	3	3
Waterford NB	Welcome Center	7 AM - 7 PM	2	2
Williston NB	Information Center	7 AM - 11 PM	0*	0*
Williston SB	Information Center	7 AM - 11 PM	0*	0*

* Facilities staffed through collaborative agreement with regional Chambers of Commerce

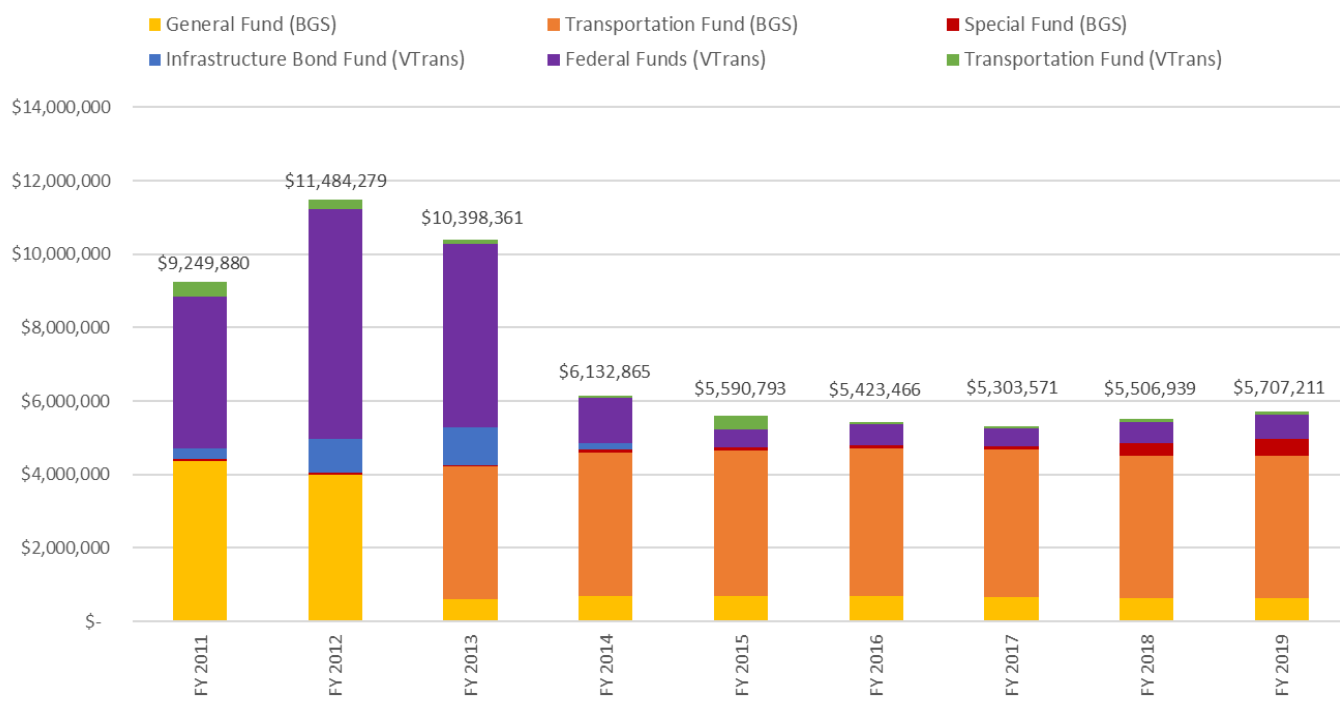
+ Pre-COVID-19 staffing levels

Existing Conditions

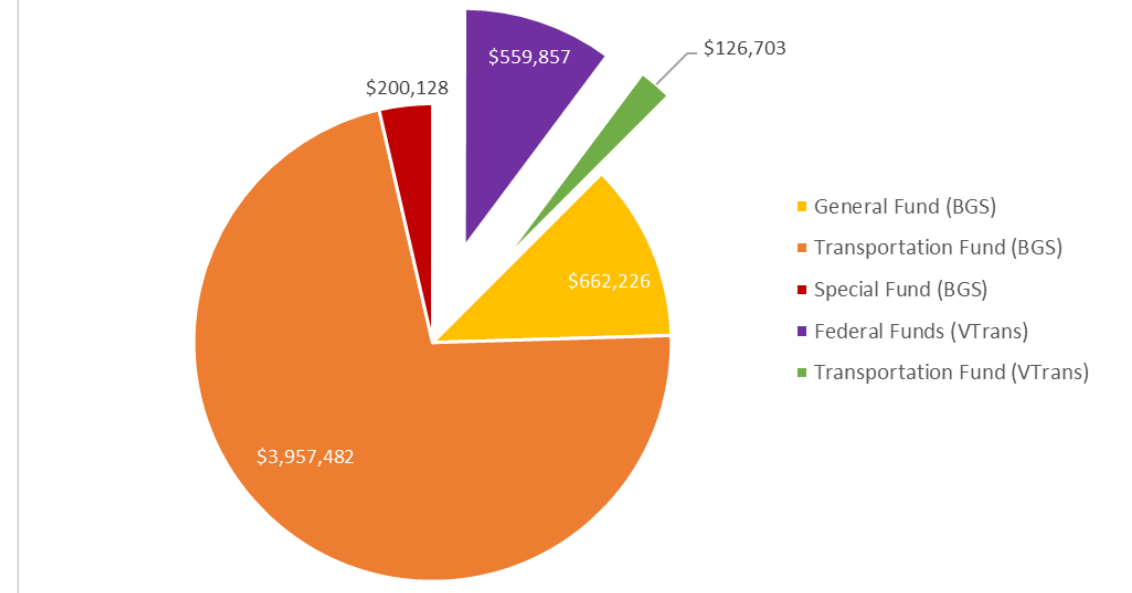
System Funding

- Level funding over the past five years (FY 2015-2019)
- Collaborative SEP14 Agreement allows for VTrans program funds to be allocated to major preventative maintenance projects
 - Over \$680k per year on average allocated through agreement (about 80% federal funds)

Total Visitor Information Center Budget Appropriations



Average Budget Appropriations (FY 2015-2019)

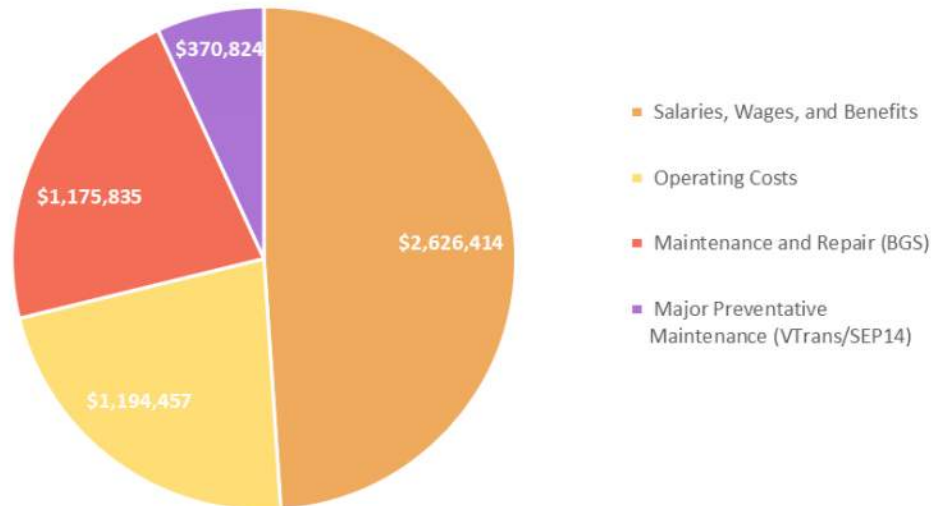


Existing Conditions

System Expenditures

- Approximately 50% of \$5.5M annual appropriations go towards personnel costs
 - 26 full-time staff, 36 temporary/part-time staff (*pre-COVID*)
- Operating costs at each location trend relative to number of visitors
- Major preventative maintenance activities average about \$370k per year (*about 7% of total spending*)
 - Spent ~50% of the \$2.8M total funds programmed for major maintenance projects over the last five years

Average Annual Expenditures
by Expenditure Type (FY 2015-2019)



Visitors and Operating Costs



Existing Conditions

■ Expenditures by location

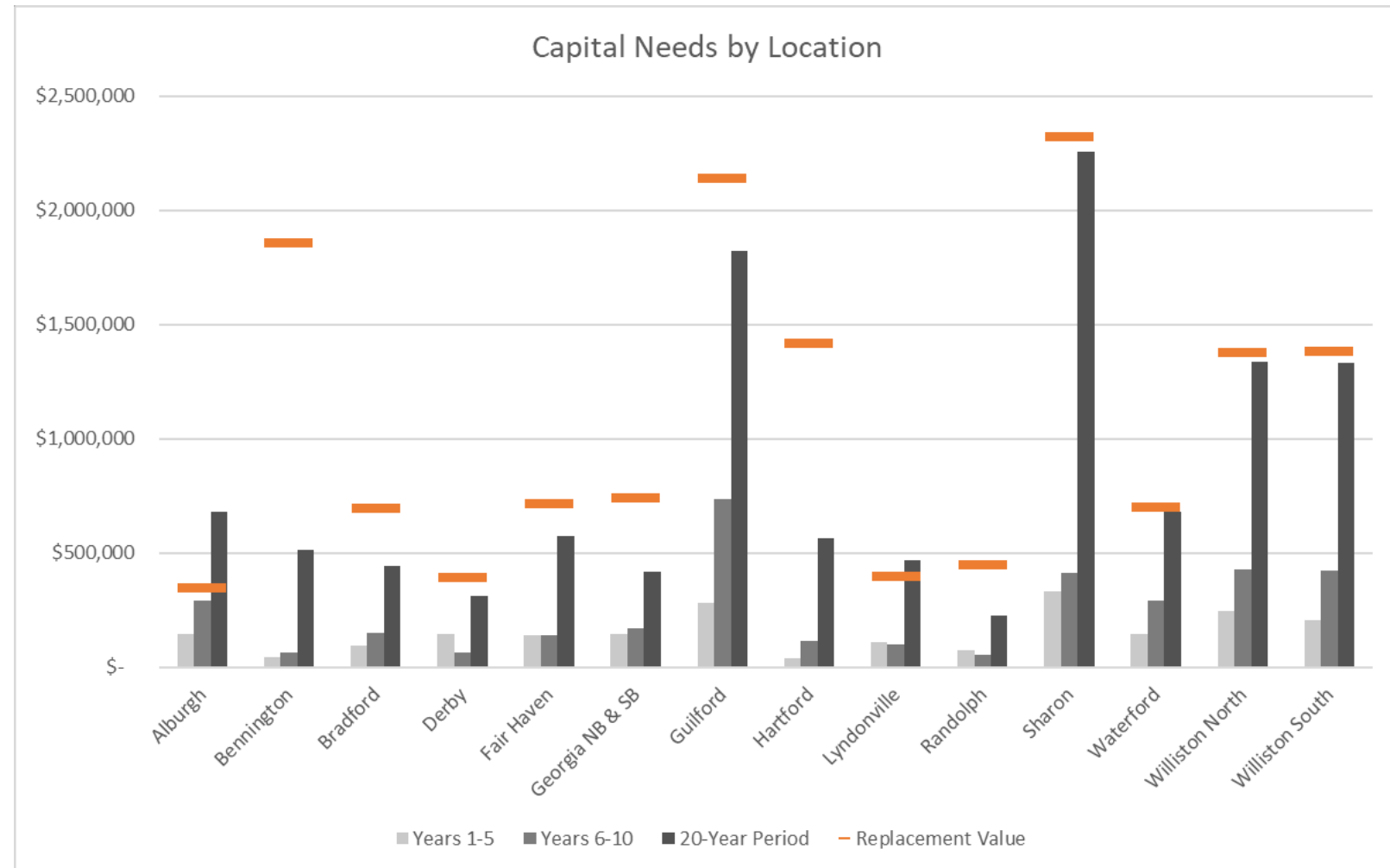
- Target of \$1.25 per visitor systemwide recommended in 2012
- Systemwide \$1.57 per visitor in FY 2019 (BGS Information Centers Budget Spending Total)



Existing Conditions

■ Location Condition

- Facility Condition Assessments identified capital needs by location
- Comparison of 20-year capital needs to current replacement value indicative of location condition

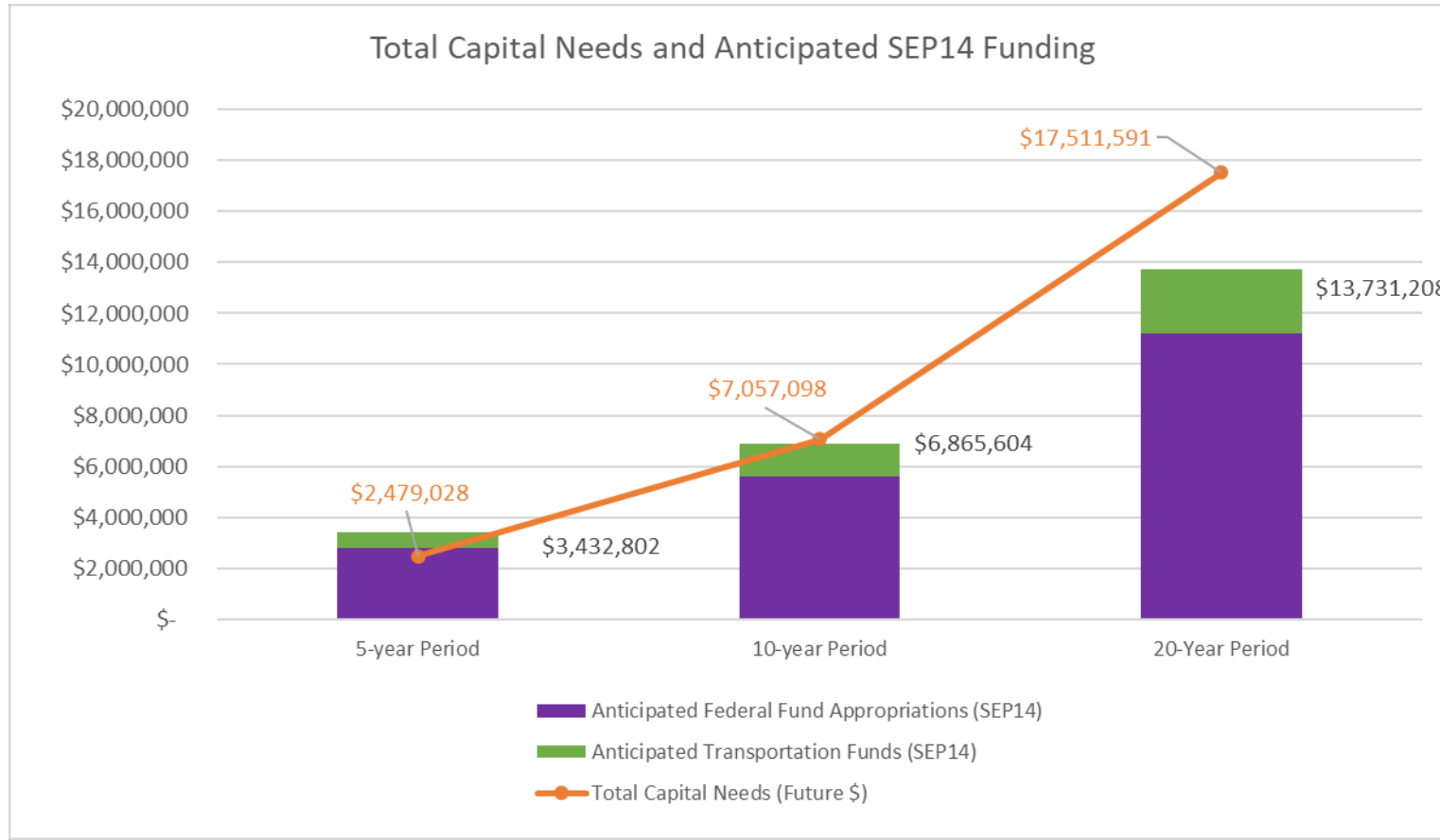


Existing Conditions

■ Major Preventative Maintenance

Given current funding levels, SEP14 programmed funds would not cover the 20-year capital needs adjusted to future dollars even if they are fully leveraged

- Does not cover cost of facility replacement (e.g. functional deficiencies at Randolph and Derby)
- Does not address 6 closed facilities



Vision, Goals, & Objectives





Vision, Goals & Objectives

- Draft Vision for the VIC System:

Vermont's system of Visitor Information Centers will support travel-related safety, comfort, and convenience; offer appropriate services and information for all highway users; meet users' needs for safe, convenient, and clean facilities; provide facilities that are energy-efficient and environmentally sound; are managed in an effective and fiscally responsible manner; and present a positive image of the State of Vermont.

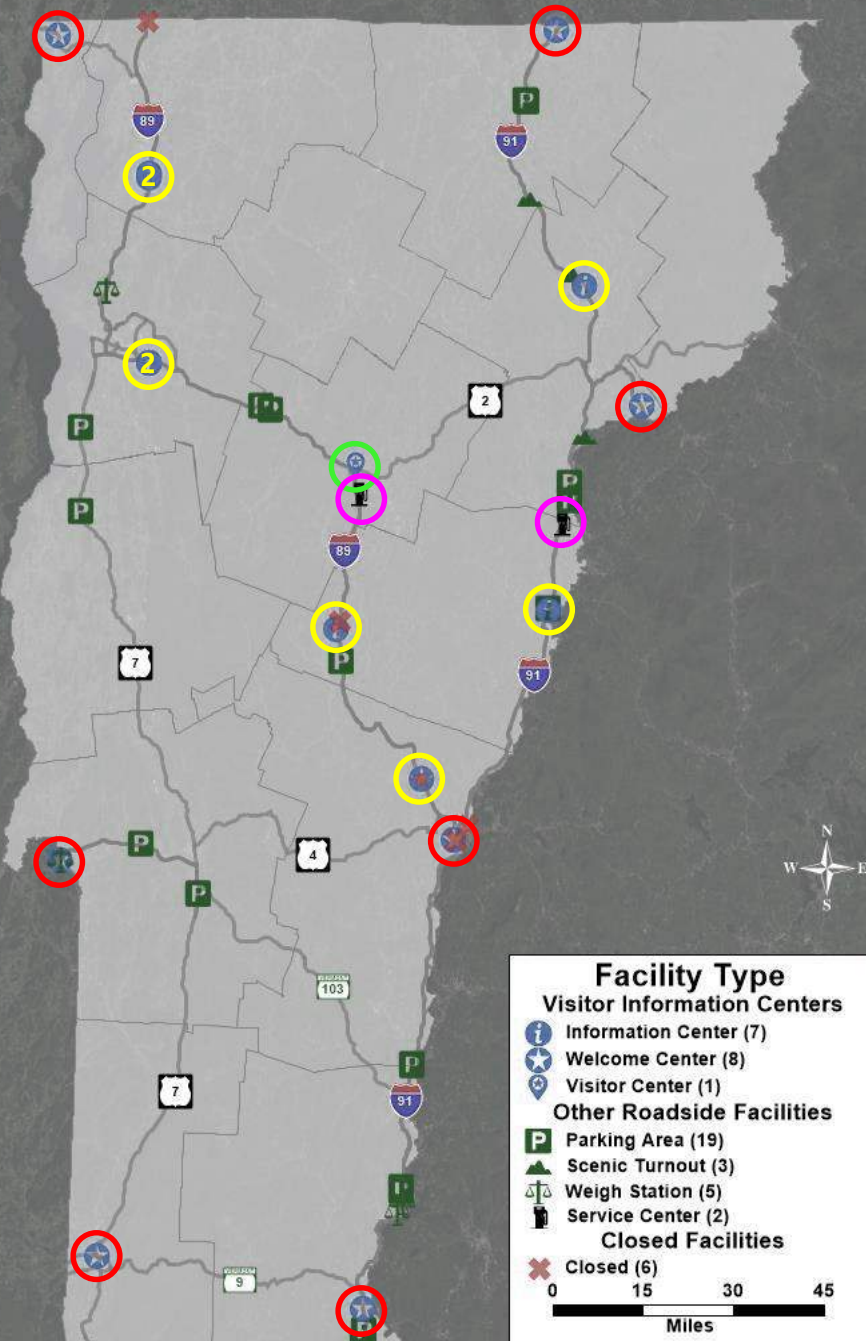
System Goals / Objectives

- **Core Functionality / Rest Areas**

- Funding
- Safety/Spacing
- Parking Capacity
- Facility Condition

- **Information Centers**

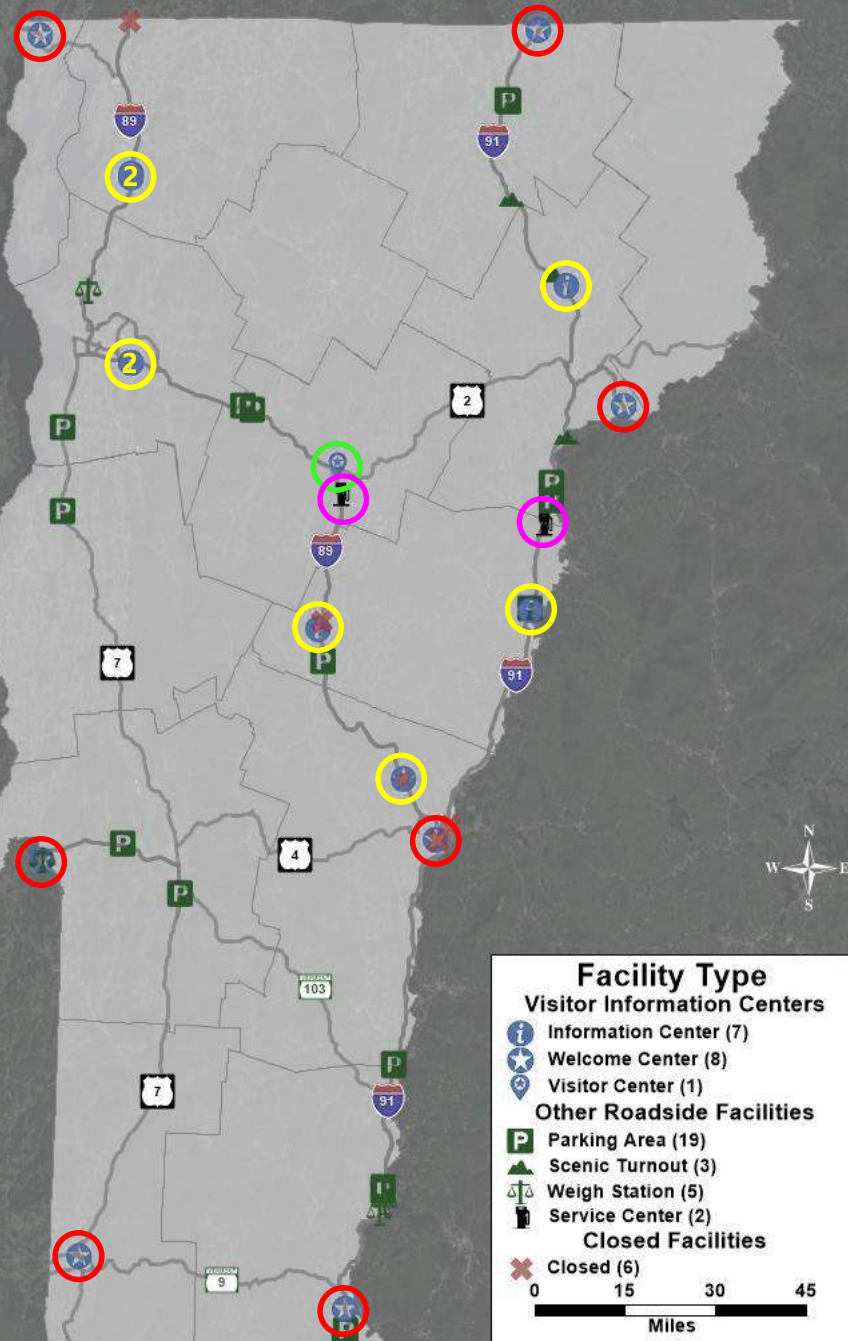
- Number & Location of Information Centers
- Staffing Levels



System Goals / Objectives

■ Core Functionality / Rest Areas

- **Funding:** Identify sustainable funding mix to achieve defined vision for the VIC system
 - *Current funding levels not adequate to maintain, upgrade, and staff existing VIC network*
- **Safety:** Provide opportunities for safety breaks along Vermont's interstate system at a maximum 60-mile spacing
 - *VIC Facilities: Maximum 35 mile spacing*
- **Parking:** Provide adequate car and truck parking
 - *VIC Facilities: 502 car spaces, 133 truck spaces; no identified shortages*
- **Facility Condition:** Manage facilities maintenance program to maintain State of Good Repair at all locations
 - *VIC Facilities: \$17.5M estimated 20-year capital needs*



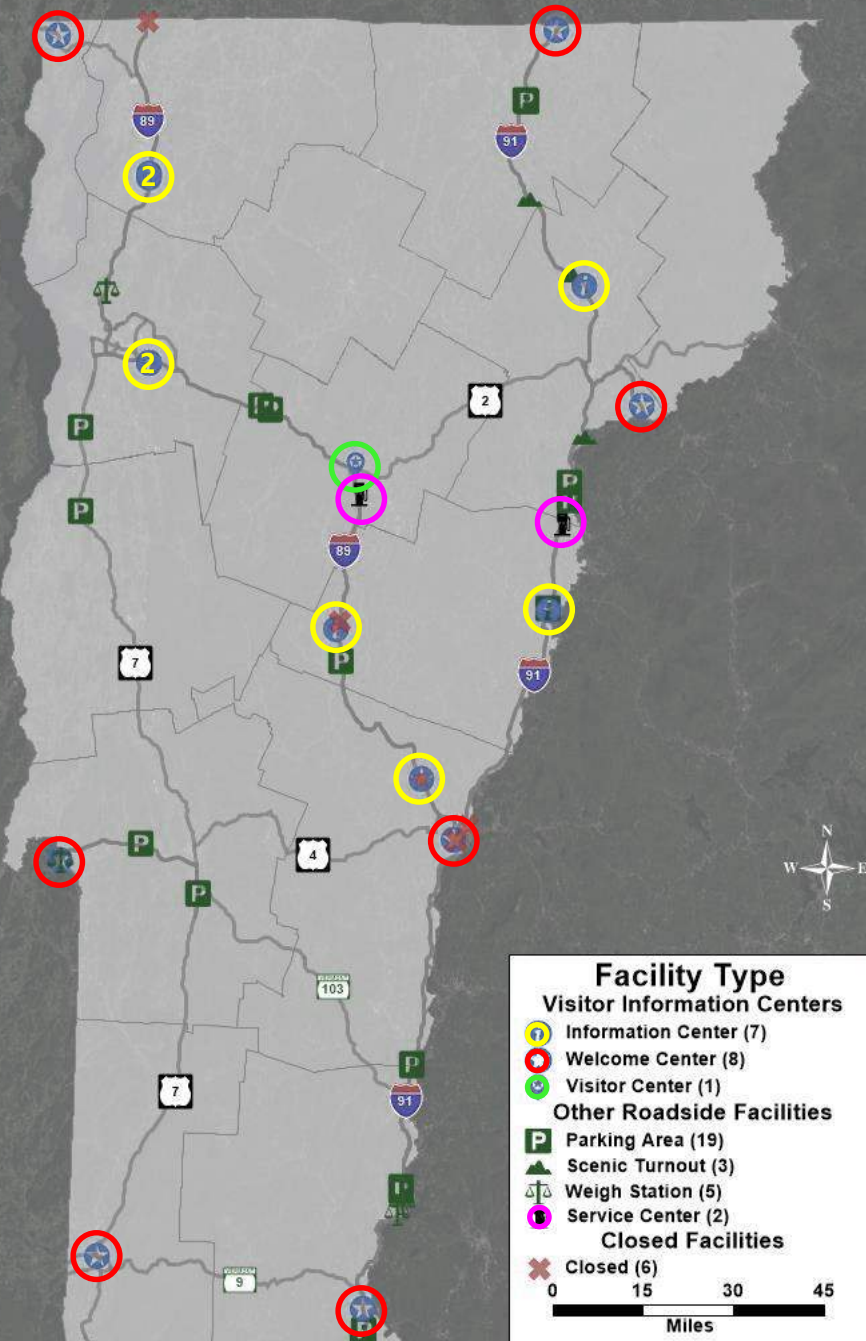
System Goals / Objectives

Information Centers

- Number & Location of Info Centers
- Staffing Levels
 - Are staffing levels adequate to promote goal of informing visitors?

Site	Designation	Hours Of Operation	Staffing+ (Permanent)	Staffing+ (Temporary)
Alburg	Welcome Center	9 AM - 5 PM	1	3
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Williston NB	Information Center	7 AM - 11 PM	0*	0*
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* Facilities staffed through collaborative agreement with regional Chambers of Commerce
+ Pre-COVID-19 staffing levels



Scenario Development



System Evaluation - Scenario Planning

Evaluate scenarios to identify implications to VIC system

- Potential Scenario “Variables”:

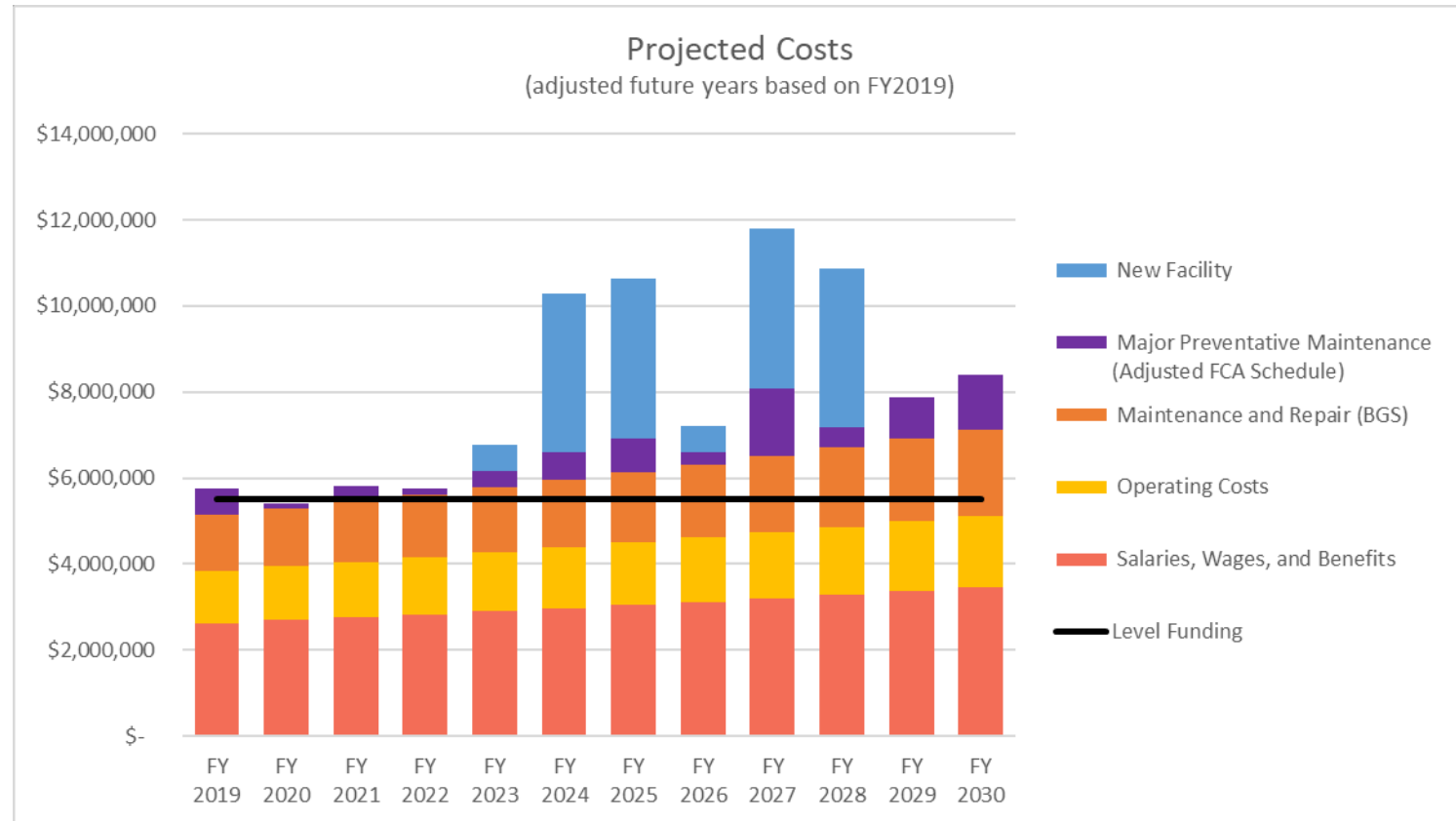
1. **Funding**

- Level Funding, Increased Funding, Decreased Funding
 - What level of increase/decrease to assume?

2. **Alternative Delivery Models**

- Public/Private Partnerships
- Increased Cooperation with Regional Chambers

3. **Other?**



Next Steps





Next Steps

- Refine Vision, Goals & Objectives: November – December
- Scenario Evaluation: November - January
- Next Steering Committee Meeting: January
- Develop Implementation Plan: February – March
- Draft & Final Report: March - May



vhb®



Place: Teams Meeting

Meeting Notes

Date: November 18, 2020

Notes Taken by: K. Sentoff

Project #: 57985.04

**Re: Visitor Information Center Study
Steering Committee Meeting #2**

ATTENDEES

Tina Bohl	VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau
Deb Ferrell	Executive Manager of Government Business Services
Erik Filkorn	VT BGS Principal Assistant
Jennifer Fitch	VT BGS Acting Commissioner
Peter Hack	VT BGS Project Manager
Kenneth Jones	Department of Tourism and Marketing
Costa Pappis	VTrans Policy and Planning
Dave Pelletier	VTrans Policy and Planning – Project VTrans PM
Lisa Sanchez	Vermont Information Centers Division Manager
Sue Scribner	VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau
Roger Thompson	FHWA Vermont Division Office
Scott Johnstone	VHB
Dave Saladino	VHB – Project Consultant PM
Karen Sentoff	VHB
Matthew Kitchen	ECONorthWest

Dave P. provided a quick set of introductions for all of the attendees on the call.

Dave S. provided an introduction to the agenda with a focus on the current state of the system and laying the groundwork for a broader conversation regarding the vision and goal setting for the system.

Karen discussed the information that has been gathered as part of the existing conditions assessment of the system and the evolving understanding of the system.

Feedback on the material being presented and the Current State of the System Draft Memo were part of the discussion and are summarized below:

- The description of the “Welcome Centers” in the memo should be clarified to include everything from Information Centers plus that they are located at the state gateways.
- For the Facility Spacing table in the memo, these locations should include the sites in the Jason’s Law spreadsheet. Some of the sites that are currently included are gated or would otherwise not be able to provide parking and safety breaks for folks, with the exception of the occasional truck driver that might back into the location.



- What are the bare minimum requirements for Jason's Law and highway safety thresholds as interpreted by FHWA? It is critical to have a clear understanding of what the minimum requirements are and work up from there. The other services that the system provides, albeit important, are above and beyond what is required of the system.
- In regard to FY 2011 through FY 2013, it is important to acknowledge that the funds for the new Bennington location and the new facility at Hartford were earmarked federal dollars.
- It is also important to note that the special funds are not a reliable source of funding. They are not sustainable sources and should therefore not be counted on for funding projections.
- Federal funds have been used for larger projects like the Guilford pump station.
- The language in the memo regarding coffee and marketing is a bit misleading. The coffee and marketing programs are self-funded endeavors and should be specified as such.

Dave S. transitioned to a more forward-looking discussion of the system focused on the vision and goals for the VICD system. He presented a draft Vision statement as adapted from various sources and asked for first impressions.

The group noted that tourism should be more explicitly described in the Vision statement.

Some skepticism was voiced with setting a Vision at this point in the study without hearing from others and having a clear picture of the future scenarios.

A big part of the mission at the VICD locations is to get travelers off of the highways and into the communities. This should come through in the Vision statement and goal setting.

Are there gaps in the system that should be addressed? Highgate jumps out as the only major entry point to the state that does not have a Welcome Center.

Recall that there were 4 locations that were closed in 2009 and subsequently razed. This includes the Highgate location, as well as Hartford NB, Sharon, and Randolph NB. It was determined that keeping these locations was unsustainable.

Are there alternative uses at the locations that have been closed?

The Randolph NB location is gated and used as a weigh station. Trucks are able to back into it for parking. In addition, there is a salt shed at the Sharon SB location and Hartford NB has been used as a staging area, equipment storage, and a weigh station.

Questions arose out of a discussion of alternative service models, like the partnering with Chambers of Commerce. Do these agreements seem to provide a net savings to the VICD budget? Are the levels of service appropriate?



In general, the locations that are operated in collaboration with the Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce are considered understaffed compared to the staffing levels that VICD attempts to achieve at the other VICD operated locations. On the flip side, the Bennington Chamber initially overstaffed based on the number of anticipated visitors. That contract was right-sized to provide a more balanced level of staffing based on the visitation.

The primary complaint received for the Williston locations is that folks stop in and there is no one at the front desk to answer questions. It is understood that staff cannot always be at the desk, but at the other locations staffed by VICD staff, there is an effort to staff and stagger schedules with overlap so that there is always someone present. Given the visitation at those locations, there really should be 3 full time employees with staggered schedules to provide sufficient overlap.

When we are looking forward, it is important to remember that the system is more or less level funded. We do not get adjustments to meet the rising costs of maintenance and operations or to meet the necessary increases to salaries and benefits for staffing. Although there are increasing costs to run the program, there are no adjustments to account for those increases, so we are essentially experiencing a net decrease in funding. Posed the question if anyone, in their tenure, had observed an increase in funding for the system. Responded that the only "increase" that VICD has experienced has been carry forward funding from a previous year that went unspent for some reason.

Getting back to the tourism piece of the mission, ACCD is currently not providing any funding for the VICD program. Given that the services focus attention on tourism and marketing, it seems like there might be an opportunity there to have an additional source of funding. Are there other possible funding sources that have not been tapped into?

There was a note that ACCD has historically been tasked with the management of the system prior to BGS operating the system.

It is likely that ACCD does not have the funding to help support the system. Even though tourism tends to be a driver of the economy, ACCD tends to have even tighter budget constraints than BGS experiences.

As far as the policy agenda the BSG Commissioner needs to inform, is the chart that looks to project funding and system needs sufficient? Are there other pieces of information that need to be summarized to inform that policy agenda for the upcoming legislative sessions?

BGS has been asked to develop our FY 2022 budget with the current state of the system, which has 8 centers open.

The questions was posed – given the current circumstances between COVID and budget development, is now the time to be thinking through increased funding for VICD?

It was suggested that we want to continue with the FY 2022 budgeting for the 8 currently open centers. That being said, once the legislative session gets started, no one wants to see their information centers close. It is likely that legislators will advocate for support of the system.



A question regarding how the funding level is determined for the preventative maintenance and SEP14 funds was posed.

There is no set target for the VTrans appropriations. Those are programmed dollars, so although there is not set number for the system, there are tradeoffs if it is determined that more funding needs to be programmed to VICD.

It was added that the major preventative maintenance has been level funded across the years, but that decision was based on the needs as defined by BGS and what they can accomplish in a given year.

Once we get into scenario planning, we will have gone through the budgeting exercise for FY 2022 with 8 centers. This may inform one of the funding level approaches that we take for the scenario planning exercise.



Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Steering Committee Meeting #3

February 25, 2021



Agenda

- Review of January 15 Goals Brainstorm Session
- Review of Scenarios & Alternatives
- Review & Discuss Alternatives Evaluation
- Next Steps

Review of 1/15 Goals Brainstorming Session



January 15th Goals Brainstorming Session

■ Attendees

- Sara Defilippi: *ACCD Sales & Marketing Specialist*
- Jennifer Fitch: *BGS Commissioner*
- Ken Jones: *ACCD Economic Research*
- Marc O'Grady: *BGS Deputy Commissioner*
- Costa Pappis: *VTrans Policy and Planning*
- Heather Pelham: *ACCD Tourism & Marketing Commissioner*
- Dave Pelletier: *VTrans Policy and Planning*
- Roger Thompson: *FHWA Vermont Division*
- Rob White: *VTrans Project Delivery Director*

■ Scenarios

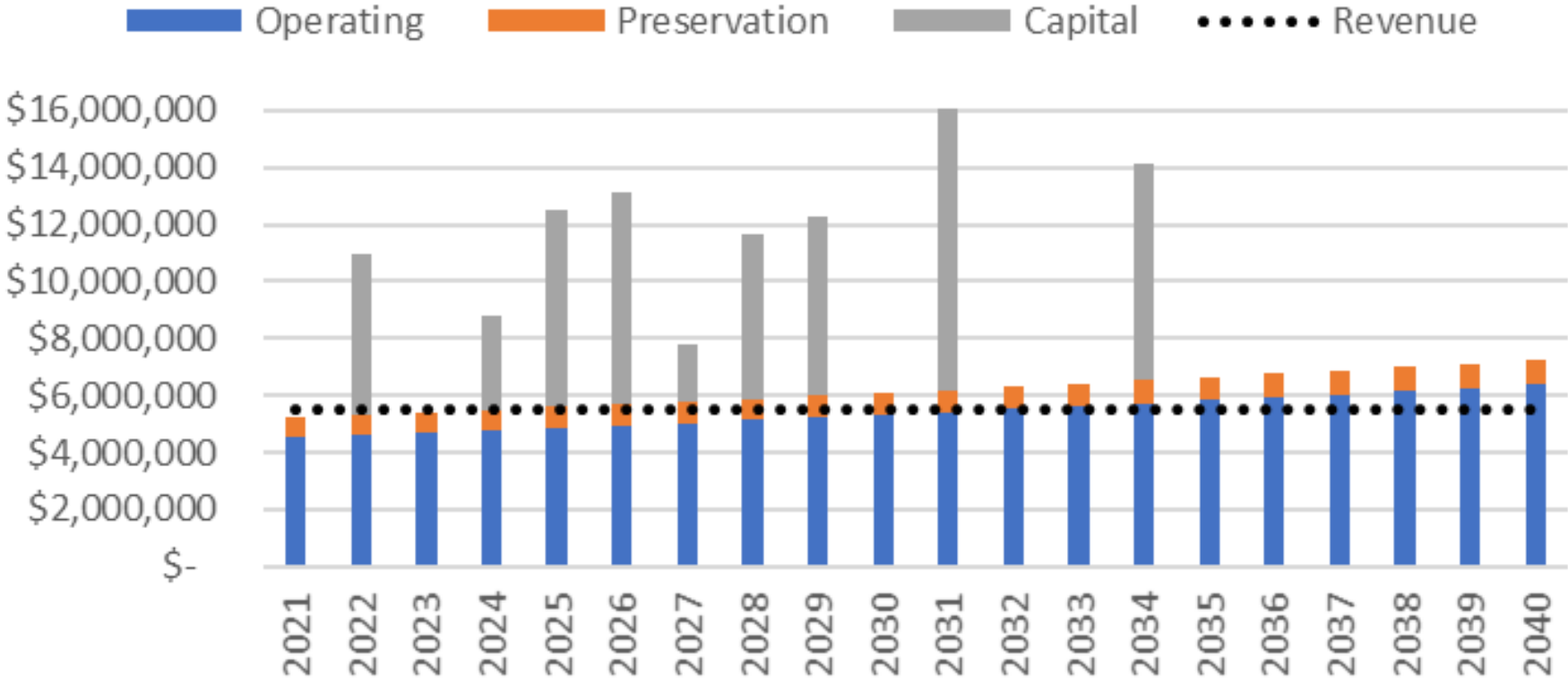
- **Minimum Service Level:** Determine the minimum acceptable level of services that enables Vermont to meet various requirements placed upon the system.
- **Status Quo:** Utilize the existing status of VIC services and funding as a useful and known point between the minimum and future states.
- **System Expansion:** Envision the enhancements and or changes in services and/or funding to meet the needs of tomorrow's traveler.

Review of Scenarios & Alternatives



Case for Change

- **Preliminary Projection of Projected Revenue & Expenditures**
 - Current funding levels not adequate to maintain existing system over next 20 years
 - Over \$13M gap in Operating & Preservation costs over 20 years (compared with current funding levels)
 - Approximately \$70M gap in total costs over 20 years (compared with current funding levels)



Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario A: Reduce Number of Facilities

- A1: Close all VICD Facilities
- A2: Close Selected VICD Facilities
- A3: Maintain Welcome Centers; Close Information Centers & Service Centers
- A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

Scenario B: Maintain Current Facilities

- B1: Existing System + Additional Funding
- B2: Existing System + Reduce Spending
- B3: Existing System + Contract Operations

Scenario C: Add New Facilities

- C1: Add Two New VICD Facilities
- C2: Additional Amenities to Expand VIC Services

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario A: Reduce Number of Facilities

- A1: Close all VICD Facilities
- A2: Close Selected VICD Facilities
- A3: Maintain Welcome Centers; Close Information Centers & Service Centers
- A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

Guidance on Defining the “Minimum” System Size

- Provide Reasonable Opportunities for Safety Breaks; Parking Areas Every 60 miles
 - *AASHTO Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*
- Provide adequate long-term parking for commercial motor vehicles on the National Highway System
 - *“Jason’s Law” implemented through MAP-21 in 2012*
- Official Tourist Information Centers: The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall establish official tourist information centers, *near the principal entrance points into the State*, as determined by the Agency, *and at such other locations as the Agency deems appropriate*, in order to provide information about public accommodations, commercial services for the travelling public, other businesses, and points of scenic, historic, cultural, educational, and religious interest.
 - *Vermont Statute: 10 V.S.A. § 485*

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario A: Close Facilities

A1: Close all VICD Facilities

- Close all facilities at the end of their useful lives (30 years) and revert to surface parking with restroom facilities
- Assumes restroom structures constructed to replace facilities (\$500k each)
- Estimated to reduce visitation by $\pm 25\%$ over 20 years



A1: Close all VICD Facilities

1	Alburg Welcome Center	Restrooms in 2025
2	Bennington Welcome Center	No Change
3	Bradford Information Center	Restrooms in 2024
4	Derby Welcome Center	Restrooms in 2022
5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	Restrooms in 2026
6	Georgia Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
7	Georgia Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
8	Guilford Welcome Center	Restrooms in 2029
9	Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	No Change
10	Lyndonville Information Center	Restrooms in 2025
11	Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Restrooms in 2027
12	Randolph Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2022
13	Sharon Northbound Welcome Center	Restrooms in 2034
14	Waterford Welcome Center	Restrooms in 2026
15	Williston Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2031
16	Williston Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2031

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario A: Close Facilities

A2: Close Selected VICD Facilities

- Close *selected* facilities at the end of their useful lives (30 years) and revert to surface parking with restroom facilities
- Facilities with low relative visitation selected for conversion
- Estimated to reduce visitation by $\pm 6\%$ over 20 years



A2: Close Selected VICD Facilities

1	Alburg Welcome Center	No Change
2	Bennington Welcome Center	No Change
3	Bradford Information Center	Restrooms in 2024
4	Derby Welcome Center	No Change
5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	No Change
6	Georgia Northbound Information Center	No Change
7	Georgia Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
8	Guilford Welcome Center	No Change
9	Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	No Change
10	Lyndonville Information Center	Restrooms in 2025
11	Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Restrooms in 2027
12	Randolph Southbound Information Center	No Change
13	Sharon Northbound Welcome Center	No Change
14	Waterford Welcome Center	No Change
15	Williston Northbound Information Center	No Change
16	Williston Southbound Informaton Center	No Change

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario A: Close Facilities

- **A3: Maintain Welcome Centers, Close Information Centers & Service Centers**
 - Close all Information & Service Centers at the end of their useful lives (30 years) and revert to surface parking with restroom facilities
 - Maintain all Welcome Centers
 - Estimated to reduce visitation by $\pm 13\%$ over 20 years



A3: Maintain Welcome Centers; Close Others

1	Alburg Welcome Center	No Change
2	Bennington Welcome Center	No Change
3	Bradford Information Center	Restrooms in 2024
4	Derby Welcome Center	No Change
5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	No Change
6	Georgia Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
7	Georgia Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
8	Guilford Welcome Center	No Change
9	Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	No Change
10	Lyndonville Information Center	Restrooms in 2025
11	Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Restrooms in 2027
12	Randolph Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2022
13	Sharon Northbound Welcome Center	No Change
14	Waterford Welcome Center	No Change
15	Williston Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2031
16	Williston Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2031

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

- *Alternative A3 plus investigate opportunities to supplement system with public/private partnerships in strategic locations*
 - Option 1: State acquires land and constructs facility; Private entity leases facility from State
 - Option 2: State acquires land and constructs facility with "Vermont room" plus retail space, leases out retail space
 - Option 3: State acquires land, turns over to private entity to construct and operate under specific conditions as determined by State
 - Option 4: State solicits bids for desired facility (e.g. within X miles of interstate, space for brochures, staffing levels, etc.)



A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

1	Alburg Welcome Center	No Change
2	Bennington Welcome Center	No Change
3	Bradford Information Center	Restrooms in 2024
4	Derby Welcome Center	No Change
5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	No Change
6	Georgia Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
7	Georgia Southbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028
8	Guilford Welcome Center	No Change
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13	Sharon Northbound Welcome Center	No Change
14	Waterford Welcome Center	No Change
15	Williston Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2031
16	Williston Southbound Informaton Center	Restrooms in 2031

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario B: Maintain Current Facilities

- B1: Existing System + Additional Funding**
 - *Secure additional funding to maintain 16 existing facilities at current (i.e. pre-pandemic) service levels*
 - *Approximately 1.5%+ increase in funding each year required to cover Operations and Preservation costs (\$13M over 20 years)*

- B2: Existing System + Reduce Spending**
 - *Reduce staffing levels as needed to maintain current \$5.5M/year Operations and Preservation funding levels at 16 existing facilities*
 - *Approximately 45% reduction in staffing levels would result in limited coverage at some facilities*
 - *Reduced spending estimated to result in 8% reduction in visitation*

- B3: Existing System + Contract Operations**
 - *Shift all VICD staff to contract labor; maintain existing 16 facilities*
 - *Assumed that contracted labor costs only increase due to inflation; no other cost escalations assumed*

		Alternatives B1 - B2 - B3
1	Alburg Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2025
2	Bennington Welcome Center	No Change
3	Bradford Information Center	Reconstruct in 2024
4	Derby Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2022
5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2026
6	Georgia Northbound Information Center	Reconstruct in 2028
7	Georgia Southbound Information Center	Reconstruct in 2028
8	Guilford Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2029
9	Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	No Change
10	Lyndonville Information Center	Reconstruct in 2025
11	Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Reconstruct in 2027
12	Randolph Southbound Information Center	Reconstruct in 2022
13	Sharon Northbound Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2034
14	Waterford Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2026
15	Williston Northbound Information Center	Reconstruct in 2031
16	Williston Southbound Informaton Center	Reconstruct in 2031

Future Scenarios & Alternatives

Scenario C: Add New Facilities

■ C1: Add Two New VICD Facilities

- Maintain existing system at current service levels, add two new 3,500 sf VICD facilities, location TBD
- 20% increase in funding needed for Operations and Preservation activities
- Estimated to increase visitation by ± 9% over 20 years

■ C2: Additional Amenities to Expand VIC Services

- Discussion of additional amenities/services to add to VICD facilities
- For example: EV charging stations, autonomous vehicle accommodations, new technologies (e.g. online truck parking reservation system, etc.)

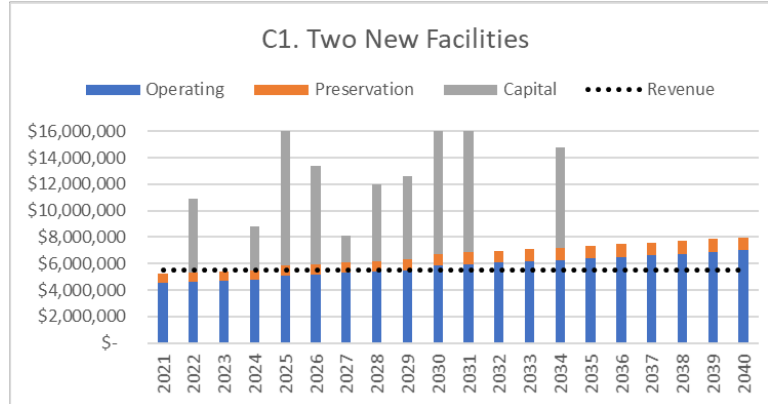
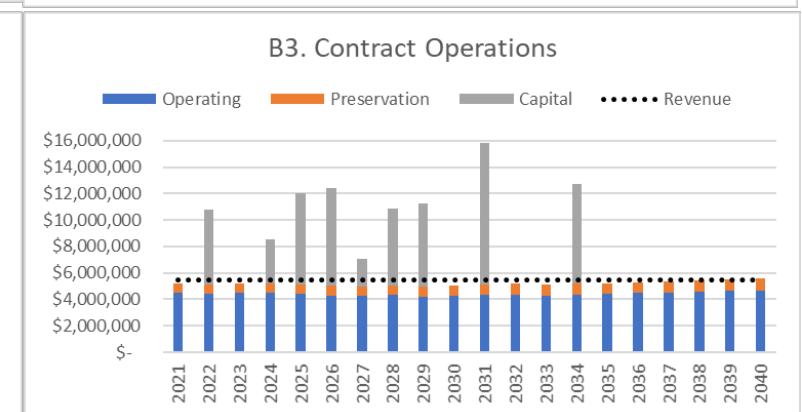
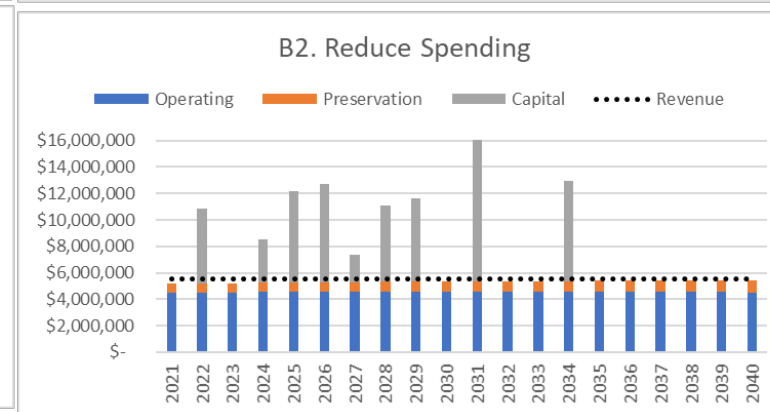
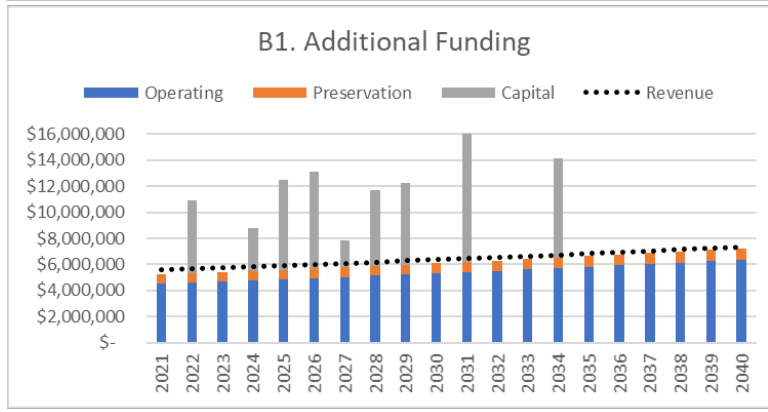
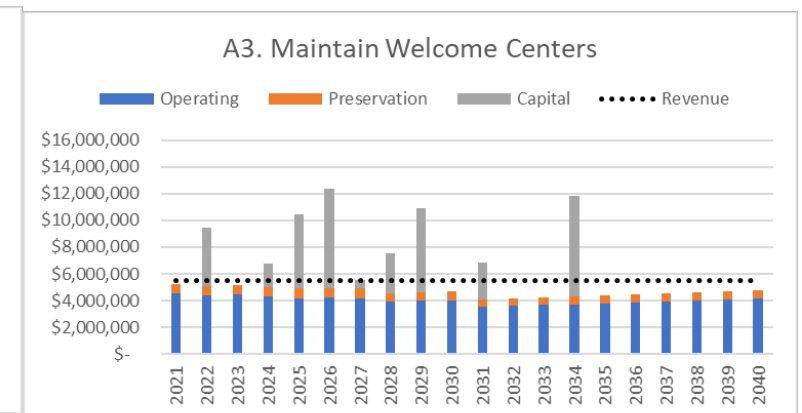
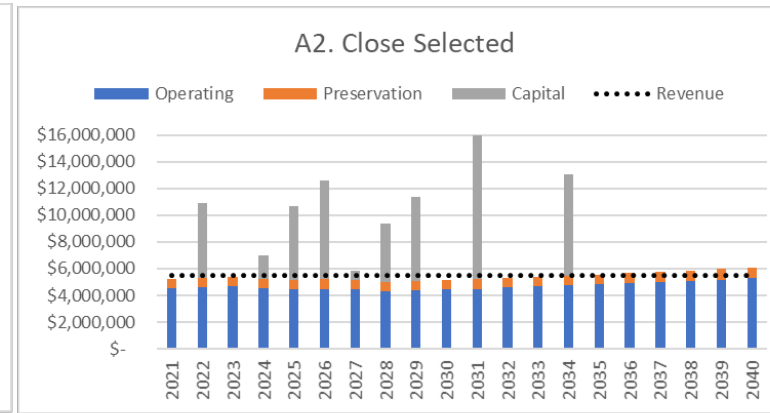
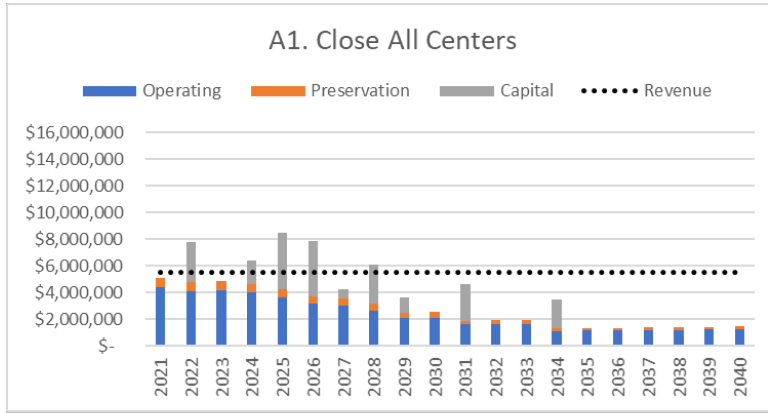
C1: Add Two New VICD Facilities

1	Alburg Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2025
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3	Bradford Information Center	Reconstruct in 2024
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5	Fair Haven Welcome Center	Reconstruct in 2026
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15	Williston Northbound Information Center	Reconstruct in 2031
16	Williston Southbound Informaton Center	Reconstruct in 2031
17	New Site (TBD)	Construct in 2025
18	New Site (TBD)	Construct in 2030

Review & Discuss Alternatives Evaluation



Future Scenarios – Fiscal Analysis



Key Assumptions

- Real or Nominal Nominal
- Inflation 1.25%
- Discount Rate 4.25%
- Construction Cost Growth Rate 1.25%
- Visitor Growth 0.00%
- Salary Cost Growth Rate 2.25%
- Other Cost Growth Rate 1.25%
- Construction Cost Per Sq Ft \$937.50 / sf
- Min/Max Facility Size 2,000 sf / 6,000 sf
- Restroom Replacement Cost \$500,000
- Average Facility Lifespan 30 years

Future Scenarios – Evaluation Matrix

		Minimum Level			Status Quo			System Expansion
		A1 Surface Lots with Restrooms Only	A2 Maintain Selected Locations	A3 Maintain Welcome Centers	B1 Additional Funding	B2 Reduce Spending	B3 Contract Operations	C1 Two New Facilities
Description	Units							
Cost								
Operating & Preservation	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$54,394,450	\$108,134,732	\$93,069,439	\$123,402,041	\$106,836,714	\$103,845,426	\$132,573,930
Capital	Total Cost (2021-2040)	\$22,862,582	\$50,051,237	\$39,387,439	\$55,755,593	\$55,755,593	\$55,755,593	\$75,972,310
Change in O & P Costs	Change from Average 2015-2019 Funding Levels	-51%	-2%	-15%	12%	-3%	-6%	21%
Cost per Visitor	Non-Discounted Average Operating Cost / Visitor (2021-2040)	\$0.95	\$1.50	\$1.39	\$1.61	\$1.51	\$1.35	\$1.58
Change in Cost/Visitor	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-41%	-7%	-13%	0%	-6%	-16%	-1%

Future Scenarios – Evaluation Matrix

Description	Units	Minimum Level			Status Quo			System Expansion
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Change in Cost/Visitor	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-41%	-7%	-13%	0%	-6%	-16%	-1%
Visitation								
Total Visits	Total # of Visitors (2021-2040)	57,329,981	72,249,059	66,829,896	76,845,925	70,931,701	76,756,626	83,768,622
Change in Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-25%	-6%	-13%	0%	-8%	0%	9%
Total Tourism Visits*	Total # of Tourist Visitors (2021-2040)	13,453,182	28,372,261	22,953,098	32,969,127	27,054,902	24,828,935	37,122,745
Change in Tourism Visits	Change from Status Quo Alternative	-59%	-14%	-30%	0%	-18%	-25%	13%

Future Scenarios – Evaluation Matrix

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Operations								
Facilities	Change in # of Facilities from Current Level	-14	-4	-8	0	0	0	2
Total Size**	Change in Total Square Footage from Current Level	-63%	-8%	-29%	4%	4%	4%	18%
Operating Hours	Change in Total Operating Hours from Current Level	-87%	-23%	-50%	0%	-50%	0%	15%
Staffing	Change in State Staffing from Current Level	-93%	-27%	-40%	0%	-48%	-41%	8%

* Tourism Visits were estimated as the total number of visitors stopping for purposes beyond using the restroom (i.e. seeking traveler information)

** Facilities scheduled for replacement were assumed to be replaced with a facility with the same footprint, except those facilities currently over 6,000 sf or under 2,000 sf, which were assumed to be reconstructed with a 6,000 sf footprint maximum or 2,000 sf minimum.

Future Scenarios – Evaluation Matrix

Description	Units	Minimum Level			Status Quo			System Expansion
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** Facilities scheduled for replacement were assumed to be replaced with a facility with the same footprint, except those facilities currently over 6,000 sf or under 2,000 sf, which were assumed to be reconstructed with a 6,000 sf footprint maximum or 2,000 sf minimum.

Discussion:

- Are there any new or modified alternatives that you would like to see evaluated?
- Are there any alternatives here that can be removed from further consideration?

Next Steps





Next Steps

- Steering Committee Meeting #4: **Early March**
 - *Identify Preferred Alternatives*
- Develop Implementation Plan: **March**
- Prepare Draft Report: **March**
 - *Circulate to Steering Committee for review*
- Steering Committee Meeting #5: **Early April**
 - *Review Draft Report*
- Prepare Final Report: **April**





Meeting Notes

Place: Teams Meeting

Date: February 25, 2021

Notes Taken by: K. Sentoff

Project #: 57985.04

**Re: Visitor Information Center Study
Steering Committee Meeting #3**

ATTENDEES

Jennifer Fitch	VT BGS Commissioner
Tina Bohl	VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau
Sara DeFilippi	VT Department of Tourism and Marketing
Erik Filkorn	VT BGS Principal Assistant
Peter Hack	VT BGS Project Manager
Kenneth Jones	VT Department of Tourism and Marketing
Marc O’Grady	VT BGS Deputy Commissioner
Costa Pappis	VTrans Policy and Planning
Heather Pelham	VT Department of Tourism and Marketing Commissioner
Dave Pelletier	VTrans Policy and Planning – Project VTrans PM
Lisa Sanchez	Vermont Information Centers Division Manager
Roger Thompson	FHWA Vermont Division Office
Rob White	VTrans Project Delivery Bureau Director
Scott Johnstone	VHB
Dave Saladino	VHB
Karen Sentoff	VHB
Matthew Kitchen	ECONorthWest

Dave S. provided a brief introduction to today’s meeting with the purpose of reviewing the scenario alternatives and discussing the preliminary evaluation of the alternatives.

Scott provided an overview of the January 15th Brainstorming Session. This conversation was focused on three scenarios to frame the future of the system. At a high level, these scenarios include minimum level of service, status quo, and system expansion.

Dave S. continued by reviewing the case for changes to the system and introducing the alternatives that fall under each of the three scenarios.

Costa asked what the capital costs in the case for change slide were based on. He offered that this is a provocative illustration of the status quo and may require more explanation. Dave offered that the team arrived at these projected capital costs through a few different means, including more detailed conversations with Joe Aja and Tina Bohl to better understand the capital program projections and consideration of site conditions and how they relate to overall capital costs.

When reviewing Alternative A1, Tina offered that when they capitalize Rest Area projects for planning purposes, they use a 50-year useful life. Dave posed the question of whether 50 years is more appropriate than the 30 years that we



had assumed for this exercise. Peter offered that from a practical use standpoint, 50 years is a very long time. Jennifer added that BGS is working with the administration now to come up with an appropriate lifespan to assume. From these conversations, it is likely that 50 years is too long. Jennifer also suggested that codes and standards change over time, so even if a substantial rehabilitation to a building happens updates to bring the facility up to code have to happen concurrently. This adds substantially to the cost of these projects.

Scott shared the details of the Alternative A4, which includes a public-private partnership model. He suggested that to be successful these agreements need to have a high value proposition for both the public and private side of the partnership. In characterizing this alternative, we are looking carefully at the value proposition.

Dave S. posed the question of whether P3 approaches like those shared in the four options are feasible. Tina offered that back in 2012, VTrans looked into a P3 as an alternative at the Derby location. It is worth noting that they did some siting and feasibility work to look at this and it did not come to fruition. Dave S. asked what ultimately doomed that opportunity to fail? Tina thought that it was ultimately political and that they were not able to identify a good option for a site. Tina clarified that she just wanted to note that this has been attempted in the past.

Jennifer suggested that if we are going to use the P3 model, we need to be on the ground floor by paying attention to development activity around interchanges. That is the time when we want to talk about partnership, when the development is likely to occur but has not yet been designed or constructed. A model like this might offer some flexibility, which could be attractive to legislators.

Jennifer suggested another way to reduce the cost of the system is to limit how many hours we have facilities open. Scott offered that we do look at an alternative with reduced hours in Alternative B2.

Dave P. asked for clarification on the 8% reduction in visitation. Dave S. offered that this reduction is represented by the models developed on historical data of visitation as a function of many other factors, which Matthew will shed more light on.

Matthew provided an overview of the model development and the assumptions that were used in the modeling effort. These models were developed based on historical location-based data. Some of the scenarios are defined by the financing, where we tried to target the budget line you see in the charts (see presentation slides for more detail). If we make adjustments to the assumptions to make them more appropriate for the context, we may not meet those targeted budget constraints. For instance, the assumption that inflation will grow at a rate that is lower than the salary cost adjustments. If we adjust this assumption, the bars will change, but also the forecast would be above the targeted financing for that scenario, so the target would likely need to be adjusted as well. It is important to note that these are generally based on operating and preservation costs. Capital costs have a different set of decision points and are treated to some degree separately here.



Dave P. asked the project team to clarify the assumptions around the capital costs, the discoveries from the historical data for this, and the conversation that we had with Joe Aja and Tina Bohl regarding the target of a reasonable cost for capital improvements to be represented in the projections.

Matthew spoke to the assumptions that were baked into the capital costs. Sewer/water costs were considered if the facility is not currently on municipal systems. These figures do not include costs for transportation-based improvements, like updating the highway ramps access to meet standards. Therefore, these figures are assuming that the facility building replacement does not necessarily trigger updates to the site's access from the highway, even though you may logically decide to do these things concurrently.

Rob asked on Alternative B1, where does that additional funding come from? Matthew provided that we are not making assumptions regarding budgeting decisions or revenues, but rather that we are targeting the amount needed to increase the financing for the system. Rob followed up asking if we are therefore not accounting for any revenue like rentals? Matthew offered that we have not projected what those financial outcomes might be. This may be feasible to some degree if we knew what mechanism the P3 partnership would take. It is hard to do this without looking at individual proposals.

Karen provided a brief overview of the evaluation matrix, highlighting some of the metrics that we wanted to pull forward to help characterize each of the scenarios side by side.

Dave S. posed the question of whether the Alternative A1 is palatable. Erik offered that it may not be a sane option, but it does provide an interesting data point that is worth keeping in the conversation. He equated this option to the No Build option for a failing bridge. Heather cautioned that we may not want to propose something that we would not want to end up with. She referenced the state college system experience. Erik equated this to the base closure commission.

Dave S. provided an overview of the next steps, including efforts to identify preferred alternative(s) in March.

Rob offered that the scenarios provide great information that brings reality to the situation. Erik followed with a thanks from BGS on the work thus far.



Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Steering Committee Meeting #4

April 6, 2021



Agenda

- Review Alternatives Refinement Since Last Steering Committee Meeting
- Review Preliminary Recommendations
- Next Steps

Review of Alternatives Refinement



Alternatives Presented at Last Meeting

Scenario A: Repurpose Existing Facilities

- A1: Repurpose all VICD Facilities to Restrooms Only
- A2: Repurpose Selected VICD Facilities to Restrooms Only
- A3: Maintain Welcome Centers; Repurpose Information Centers
- A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

Scenario B: Maintain Current Facilities

- B1: Existing System + Additional Funding
- B2: Existing System + Reduce Spending
- B3: Existing System + Contract Operations

Scenario C: Add New Facilities

- C1: Add Two New VICD Facilities

Refined Alternatives

Scenario A: Repurpose Existing Facilities

- A1: Repurpose all VICD Facilities
- A2: Repurpose Selected VICD Facilities
- A3: Maintain Welcome Centers
- A4: Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s

Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities

- Target: Operations & Preservation Expenditures at or Below Current Levels through 2040
- Investigate Targeted P3 Opportunities

Scenario B: Maintain Current Facilities

- B1: Existing System + Additional Funding
- B2: Existing System + Reduce Spending
- B3: Existing System + Contract Operations

Maintain Current VICD Facilities

- Secure Additional Funding (1.5% per year), and/or
- Reduced Operations & Preservation Spending (*i.e.* reduced staffing levels or deferred maintenance)

Scenario C: Add New Facilities

- C1: Add Two New VICD Facilities

No New Facilities to Be Added

- Existing and projected funding constraints
- Precedent to not grow VICD system
- Lack of specific sites identified

Review of Preliminary Recommendations



Preliminary Recommendations

■ **Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities**

- Maintain operations & preservation expenditures at or below current levels through 2040
- Identify opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships (P3) to replace traveler services near repurposed/closed facilities
- Repurposed facilities to be replaced with simple restroom structure; parking remains

■ **Alternative 2: Maintain Existing VICD System**

- Requires Additional Funding (1.5% per year), and/or
- Reduced Operations & Preservation Spending (i.e. reduced staffing levels or deferred maintenance)

Preliminary Recommendations

- **Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities**

- Maintain operations & preservation expenditures at or below current levels through 2040
- Identify opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships (P3) to replace traveler services near repurposed/closed facilities
- Repurposed facilities to be replaced with simple restroom structure; parking remains



Preliminary Recommendations

- **Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities**

- Used visitation, AADT, cost/visitor, and facility age to identify facilities to be repurposed or closed
- Evaluated whether closure would create >60-mile gap between facilities on the interstate system
- Identified Lyndonville, Bradford, Georgia NB, and Randolph for repurposing
- Identified Alburgh & Montpelier for closure as they are not on the interstate (*Montpelier owned by BGS*)

Facility	Year		Average Annual Visitation (2015-19)		Adjacent AADT (veh/day)		Average Cost/Visitor		Years Since Construction/Rehab		Total Rank		COVID Status	
	Constructed	Rehab	Visitation	Rank	AADT	Rank	Cost/Visitor	Rank	Rehab	Rank	Rank	Rank	Open?	Hours of Operation
Alburg Welcome Center	1996		17,918	1	4,900	3	\$5.56	1	25	4	9	1		
Lyndonville Information Center	1973	1996	90,636	4	4,800	2	\$2.29	5	25	4	15	2		
Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Unknown	1998	42,458	2	7,500	6	\$4.89	2	23	8	18	3		
Bradford Information Center	1995		132,871	7	5,600	4	\$1.43	7	26	3	21	4		
Derby Welcome Center	1968		158,480	10	3,200	1	\$1.20	11	53	1	23	5		
Waterford Welcome Center	1982	1997	133,751	8	6,200	5	\$1.42	8	24	6	27	6	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Georgia Northbound Information Center	1968	1999	72,314	3	22,000	13	\$3.05	3	22	9	28	7		
Fair Haven Welcome Center	1980	1997	154,504	9	8,400	7	\$1.39	9	24	6	31	8	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Bennington Welcome Center	2013		119,360	6	10,900	8	\$2.30	4	8	16	34	9	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Georgia Southbound Information Center	1999		99,253	5	22,000	13	\$1.33	10	22	9	37	10		
Randolph Southbound Information Center	1970		292,028	12	16,700	9	\$0.88	16	51	2	39	11		
Williston Southbound Informaton Center	1960s	2002	216,759	11	36,300	15	\$1.43	6	19	12	44	12	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Guilford Welcome Center	1999		651,483	16	18,300	10	\$0.93	14	22	9	49	13	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Williston Northbound Information Center	1960s	2002	322,757	13	36,300	15	\$1.19	12	19	12	52	14	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Sharon Northbound Information Center	1960s	2005	478,783	15	18,800	11	\$1.04	13	16	14	53	15	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM
Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	1964	2012	329,081	14	19,800	12	\$0.90	15	9	15	56	16	OPEN	10 AM-6 PM

Preliminary Recommendations

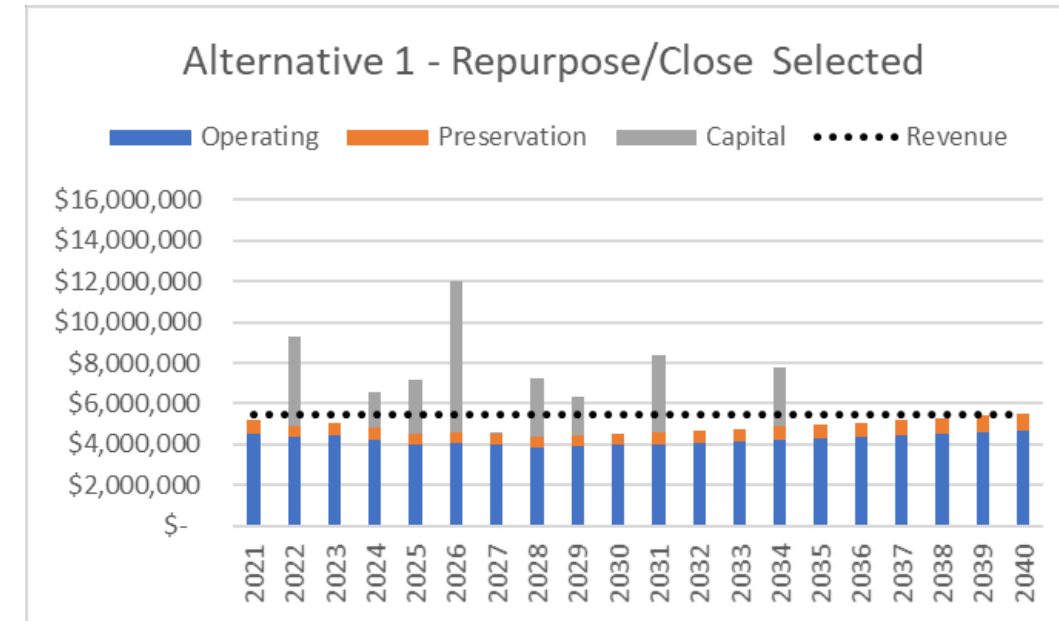
- Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities

Facility	Alternative 1: Close Selected VICD Facilities	
	Selected VICD Facilities	Public-Private Partnership Opportunities
Alburg Welcome Center	Close in 2025	
Bennington Welcome Center	No Action Through 2040	
Bradford Information Center	Restrooms in 2024	Investigate P3 or Oasis Program Partner at Exit 16 in Bradford
Derby Welcome Center	Rehabilitation in 2022	
Fair Haven Welcome Center	Rehabilitation in 2026	
Georgia Northbound Information Center	Restrooms in 2028	Investigate P3 or Oasis Program Partner at Exit 18 in Georgia or Exit 19 in St. Albans
Georgia Southbound Information Center	Rehabilitation in 2028	
Guilford Welcome Center	Rehabilitation in 2029	
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Preliminary Recommendations

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- Annual Operating & Preservation expenditures below current levels (\$5.5M) through 2040
 - 20% lower than Status Quo
- Capital expenditures through 2040 = \$27.7M
 - 18% lower than Status Quo

Summary of Selected Public-Private Partnership Models

Model	ID Infrastructure Need	Propose Solution	Project Design	Project Financing	Construction	Operation	Maintenance	Ownership
Bid-Build	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector
Design - Bid - Build	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector
Design - Build	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector
Design - Build - Finance	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector
Design - Build - Finance - Maintain	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector
Design - Build - Finance - Operate	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector
Design - Build - Finance - Operate - Maintain	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector
Build - Finance	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector
Operation & Maintenance Contract	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector
Build - Operate - Transfer	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector
Build - Lease - Transfer	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector
Build - Own - Operate - Transfer	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Public Sector
Build - Own - Operate	Public Sector	Public Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector	Private Sector

 Public Sector

 Private Sector

Interstate Oasis Program

- An **Interstate Oasis** is a facility near an Interstate highway that provides products and services to the public, 24-hour access to public restrooms, and parking for automobiles and heavy trucks.
- Enabling Legislation: SAFETEA-LU
- Minimum Requirements:
 - Offer products and services to the public
 - Provide 24-hour access to restrooms
 - Have parking for heavy trucks and automobiles.
- In establishing the standards, facility appearance and proximity to the Interstate System are to be considered.



11/8/2018

Contact:
Jessica Williams
ITD Office of Communication
208 886-7806
jessica.williams@itd.idaho.gov

Eastbound Jerome Rest Area to close permanently Nov. 14

SHOSHONE -- The Jerome Rest Area off eastbound Interstate 84 will permanently close on **Wednesday, Nov. 14**. To provide services to travelers, the Idaho Transportation Department has entered into Interstate Oasis agreements with business facilities at Exit 165, 173 and 182.

With Interstate Oasis partnerships, nearby businesses afford travelers the same conveniences rest areas do - ample parking and use of rest room amenities free of charge. ITD has installed signage along the interstate directing travelers to Interstate Oasis locations. The Jerome Rest Area will be demolished within the coming months.

"These agreements have been successfully implemented elsewhere in Idaho and we look forward to the new partnerships formed here in District Four with the Garden of Eden, Valley Country Store, and Mr. Gas," said ITD foreman Carl Horn.

The Interstate Oasis program offers a solution for areas within the state where an ITD-maintained rest area is not feasible. The Jerome Rest Area was built in the 1970s when few businesses existed nearby to provide alternatives, but major repairs would be necessary to bring the facility up to current standards because of its age.

Interstate Oasis Program

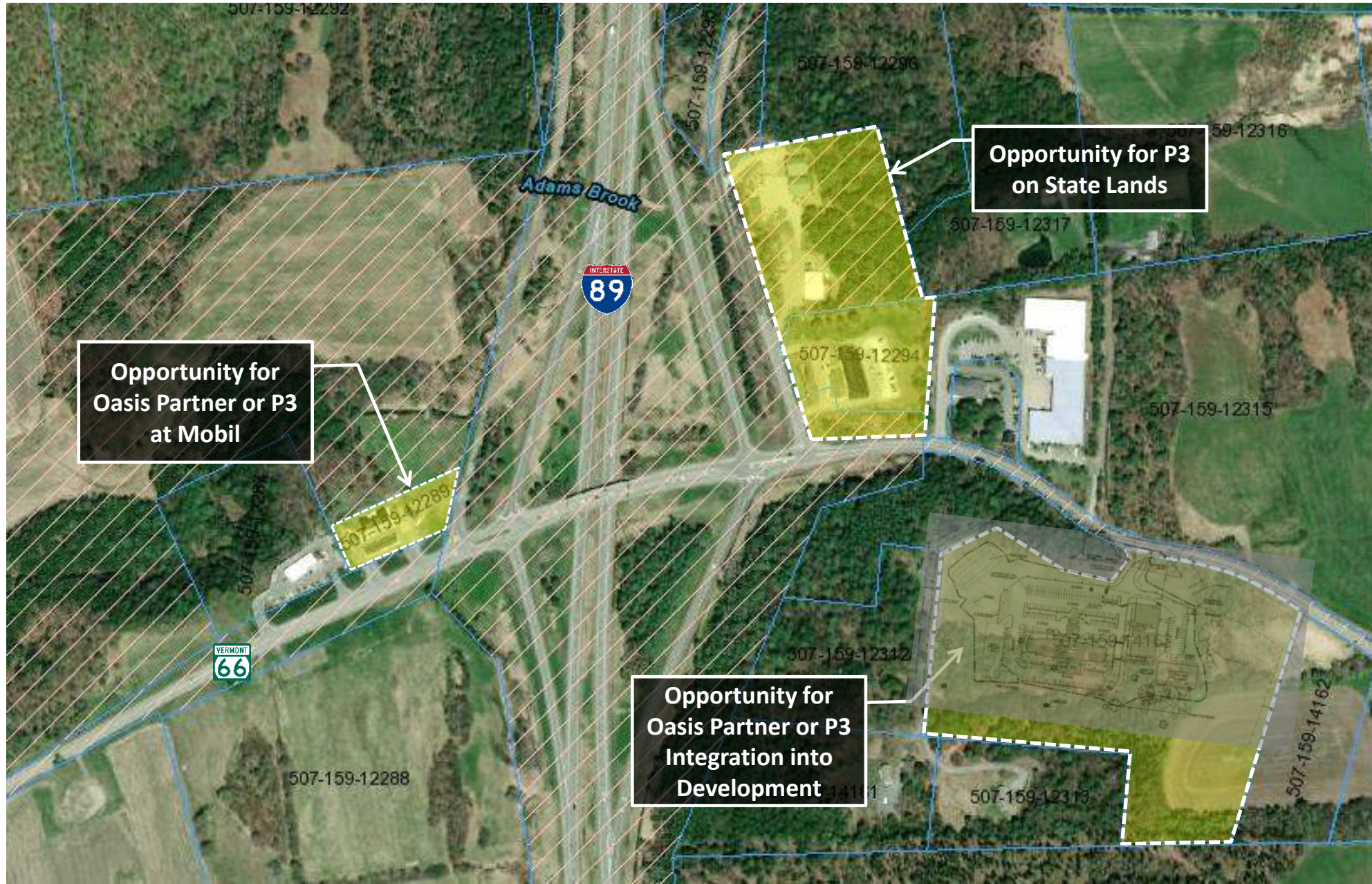
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- In establishing the standards, facility appearance and proximity to the Interstate System are to be considered.



IDAHO DOT Requirements

- A facility shall be **no more than three miles** from an interstate highway interchange...
- Access routes can **safely and conveniently accommodate** all vehicles...
- Provide a physical layout that includes **safe entry and exit, on-site traffic circulation** for all vehicles...
- Maintain modern, sanitary **restrooms** with free drinking water...
- Provide a sufficient number of **well lighted parking spaces**...at no charge...for parking durations of up to 10 hours...
- Offer **public telephone** and **food**, as well as motor vehicle **fuel, oil** and **water**;
- **Staffed** by at least one person at all times.

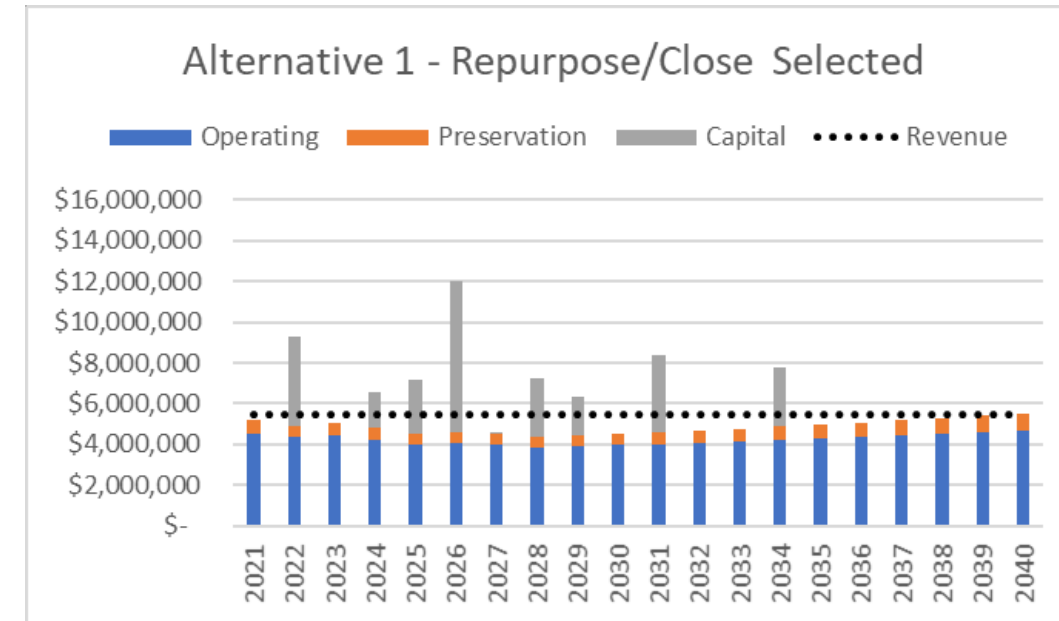
Case Study: P3 Opportunities at I-89 Exit 4 in Randolph



Preliminary Recommendations

Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities

Facility	Alternative 1: Close Selected VICD Facilities	Public-Private Partnership Opportunities
Alburg Welcome Center	Close in 2025	
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Preliminary Recommendations

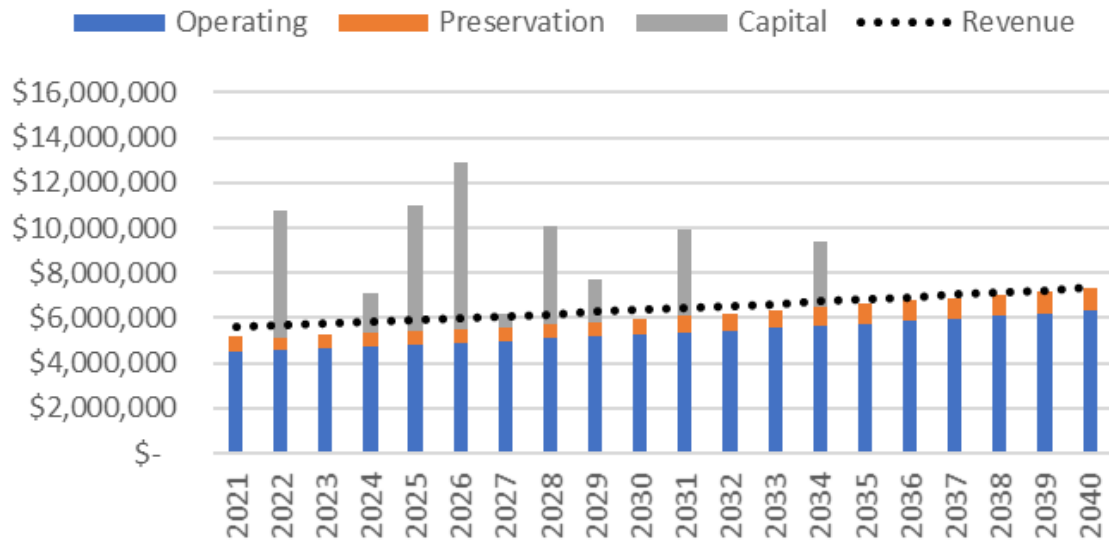
- **Alternative 2: Maintain Existing VICD System**
 - Requires Additional Funding (1.5% per year; \$16.5M over 20 years), and/or
 - Reduced Operations & Preservation Spending (i.e. reduced staffing levels or deferred maintenance)
 - Not much additional room to cut staffing levels / operational spending
 - Maintenance on several facilities already being deferred; resulting in higher preservation & capital costs

Preliminary Recommendations

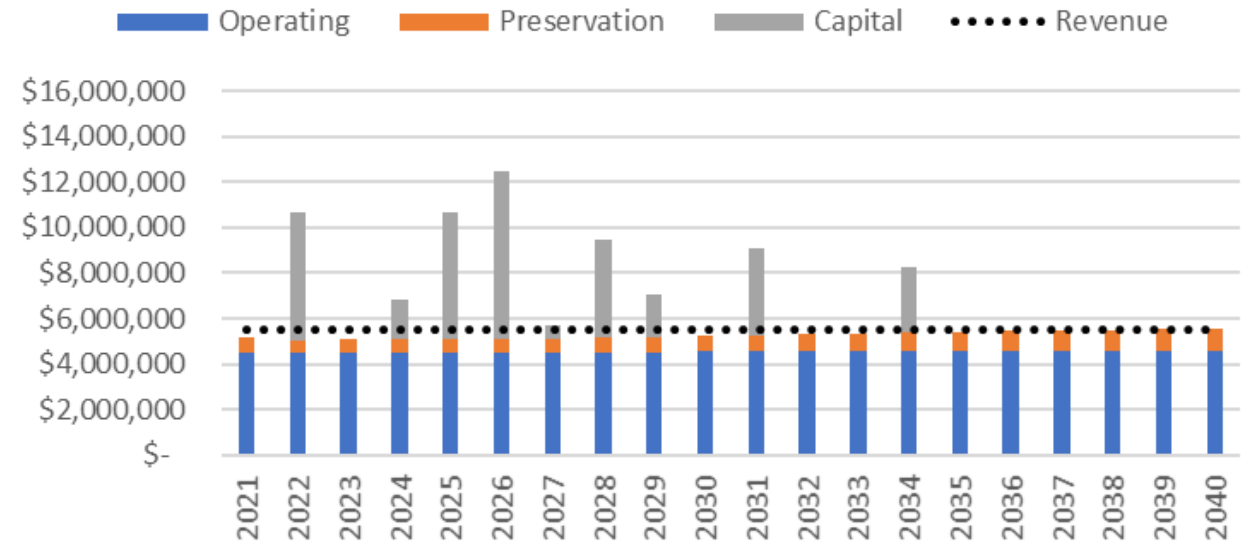
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B1. Additional Funding



B2. Reduce Spending



Preliminary Recommendations – Thoughts?

Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities

- Maintain operations & preservation expenditures at or below current levels through 2040
- Identify opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships
- Repurposed facilities to be replaced with simple restroom structure; parking remains
- 20 Year-Estimated Expenditures:
 - Operating & Preservation : **\$97M**
 - Capital: **\$28M**

Alternative 2: Maintain Existing VICD System

- Requires Additional Funding (1.5% per year), and/or Reduced Operations & Preservation Spending
- 20-Year Estimated Expenditures:
 - Operating & Preservation: **\$122M**
 - Capital: **\$34M**

Facility	Alternative 1: Repurpose / Close Selected VICD Facilities	Alternative 2: Maintain System through Additional Funding
Alburg Welcome Center	Close in 2025	Rehabilitation in 2025
Bennington Welcome Center	No Action Through 2040	No Action Through 2040
Bradford Information Center	Restrooms in 2024	Rehabilitation in 2024
Derby Welcome Center	Rehabilitation in 2022	Rehabilitation in 2022
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Georgia Southbound Information Center	Rehabilitation in 2028	Rehabilitation in 2028
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Preliminary Recommendations – Thoughts?

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Next Steps / Implementation

- Presentation to Senior Leadership?
- Identify Working Group to Pursue P3/Oasis Program Opportunities
 - *VTrans, BGS, ACCD, FHWA*
- Revisit/Revise Alternatives during Future Rest Area Committee Meetings

Next Steps





Next Steps

- Prepare Draft Report: **End of April**
 - *Circulate to Steering Committee for review*
- Steering Committee Meeting #5 (if needed): **Early May**
 - *Review Draft Report*
- Issue Final Report: **May**

Question

- Present findings to Senior Leadership?





Place: Teams Meeting

Meeting Notes

Date: April 6, 2021

Notes Taken by: K. Sentoff

Project #: 57985.04

**Re: Visitor Information Center Study
Steering Committee Meeting #4**

ATTENDEES

Jennifer Fitch	VT BGS Commissioner
Tina Bohl	VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau
Sara DeFilippi	VT Department of Tourism and Marketing
Deb Ferrell	Executive Manager of Government Business Services
Erik Filkorn	VT BGS Principal Assistant
Peter Hack	VT BGS Project Manager
Marc O’Grady	VT BGS Deputy Commissioner
Costa Pappis	VTrans Policy and Planning
Heather Pelham	VT Department of Tourism and Marketing Commissioner
Dave Pelletier	VTrans Policy and Planning – Project VTrans PM
Lisa Sanchez	Vermont Information Centers Division Manager
Roger Thompson	FHWA Vermont Division Office
Rob White	VTrans Project Delivery Bureau Director
Scott Johnstone	VHB
Dave Saladino	VHB
Karen Sentoff	VHB
Matthew Kitchen	ECONorthWest

Dave reviewed the agenda for the meeting, including refinements of the alternative scenarios, review of the preliminary recommendations, and next steps. He reviewed the eight alternative scenarios from the last meeting, which includes four scenarios with variations of repurposed facilities, three scenarios with variations of maintaining the existing system, and one scenario where new facilities are added. He discussed the progress made since that meeting and the narrowing of the eight scenarios to two refined options, including a version of Scenario A (repurpose facilities) and a version of Scenario B (maintain existing facilities).

Costa asked how we analyzed the gateway scenario, where Welcome Centers are maintained. He recalls hearing from legislators previously that there is no gateway location on the I-89 corridor to the north near the border with Canada.

It was suggested that Georgia Southbound could serve as the welcome for folks from points north. Although it might not capture everyone destined for locations north of it (i.e. St. Albans, Swanton, and points east like Jay), it would still serve as a catchment for those destined for other locations throughout the state.



Costa would like to hear from ACCD and BGS on their interpretation of the gateway locations as part of the Welcome component to the system.

Lisa offered that there was a study from the commissioners to look at this issue. It was unfortunate that the Highgate facility was torn down in 2009, as it served just this purpose.

Deb offered that there have been ongoing conversations regarding this issue. This conversation has included siting a public-private partnership location to fill this gap. Exit 19 has been targeted as an opportunity for a possible site.

Heather offered that she has heard some of those same discussions.

Dave asked if the Exit 19 exploration went as far as identifying potential P3 partners?

Deb offered that there was exploration of available locations, but mainly at the high level of what was feasible.

Costa suggested that there was exploration into this concept to the degree that they were looking at properties.

Heather said her recollection was that there was a white paper developed on this. She recalls reading through the thoughts that were gathered as part of the exploration.

Deb believes there was a white paper. She offered to see if she could find it and forward it along.

Lisa acknowledged her role as needing to be an advocate for the VICD system. She suggested that the P3 model that has been employed in the state does not promote Vermont in the same way that her staff does (i.e. Vermont state employees). She offered as evidence that the highest visitation numbers in the state are to the PPP at Maplewood, but there is no designated staff person at the center and the brochure numbers are very low at that location despite the high number of folks through the door.

Dave offered that we would discuss the agreements, which to Lisa's point, need to be more advantageous to the state to really have the value proposition that makes sense.

Lisa offered that her hesitation in including the P3's is that she wants to make sure we are comparing apples to apples.

Jennifer suggested that we have hopefully learned from the P3's that exist so as to create more advantageous agreement terms in the future. She framed this as if we were to enter a different type of agreement in the future, what can we learn from the locations that are not operating in the way we would like and what demands would we make of a new model.



Dave offered that Scenario C, where growth of the system was proposed, was tabled. This was based on the past precedent not to grow the system in combination with no calls from stakeholders to fill particular gaps. Provided that outreach to regional entities, including check ins with VAPDA, did not produce any requests for expansion or identifying desired additional locations.

Jennifer expressed her reaction to the refinement of the scenarios. She asked if we have taken any of the eight original scenarios off of the table? She suggested that maintaining these scenarios provides the path which has led us to the refined scenarios. Having those decisions illustrated by these many scenarios is helpful context. She posed the questions of whether we need to have the travel and tourism component at each of these locations, or if we can accomplish that interaction in some other way? Is there some technology that could be leveraged? She made the suggestion of having QR codes that you can scan to access information.

The other piece of the previous analysis that we don't want to lose is articulating the goals for the system from each agency's perspective and illustrating how each of the scenarios provides tradeoffs to meet those various goals. We want to ensure that when we get to the executive leadership, we are helping to illustrate how we got to a certain recommendation. We still want to show them what was on the evaluation matrix, even if we ultimately bring them down a particular path. Maybe this looks like a table for the options (even the ones from the first round) connected to the various goals for the system.

Heather suggested that one way to present the repurposing of a specific location for some reason is by leveraging the goals for the system. For instance, if an area needs to close for a specific reason and we have clearly articulated those goals for the system, how can we still fulfill the goal without that location?

Dave presented the updated Alternative 1. This approach ranked the locations to consider for closure/repurposing on various factors. He asked for thoughts on those locations that ranked high on the list. What are the thoughts on seeing Alburgh on the list?

Heather connected this idea back to the conversation about what the goals are. If we lose Lyndon for example, what are we compromising by that loss? We need to overlay this chart with those goals so that the implications of those decisions are clear to the reader.

Jennifer asked in knowing that we can't have the system as it is today, what are the priorities for the tourism piece that are provided by the system? Are there technological advances that might help us to expand the things we are doing with the brochure program or other programs to be even more effective?

Rob offered that there may be other places we are getting some of the services out there that we could look to.



Heather also highlighted that if the reduction of facilities is unpalatable, it needs to be clear what would be required to ensure that a reduction was not necessary. We should emphasize that this can be accomplished, but here is what it takes.

Dave acknowledged that it has been a challenge to encapsulate the goals for the system. It is clear that truck parking, safety rest stops, and cost efficiency are fundamental to the system from the VTrans and BGS perspectives. From the ACCD perspective, he gathers that the goal is to create that touchpoint with as many visitors as possible. If that is the case, how are we capturing that in illustrating these alternatives?

Jennifer suggested there is some return on investment to be highlighted in this. From the BGS standpoint, the agency is charged with supporting the policy goals of VTrans and ACCD through management of the system. For us in supporting ACCD's goals, how does the prioritization of different locations, even relative to one another, effect ACCD in meeting their goals.

Heather emphasized the importance from ACCD's perspective are those touchpoints with visitors. She suggested that if we close Alburgh, let's think through where those individuals are going to get that information? What is the next Village center or other resource that can be a touch point for those folks? What is the alternative to that location? How will we mitigate the effects of closing or repurposing? This study should show that we have thought that through to make sure that we still have opportunities to interact with those folks that we might be losing in that closure from a traveler information perspective.

Scott presented the different types of public private partnership models and identified that some of these models may work well for this application. The key to successful PPP models is that it really needs to be a partnership, not just a contractual agreement. There are lots of best practices out there to leverage to ensure favorable partnering. It is also important to note that once a traveler drives off of the interstate system, you are going to serve fewer visitors. This has to be an assumption in the model. It is worth noting that the Oasis Program is a federally sanctioned P3 model which was introduced in the SAFETEA-LU legislation. An example of Idaho was shared as they have implemented this with some success. Key to Vermont adopting successful P3s is spelling out those needs that the state wants to ensure they are provided at these locations.

Dave provided the reminder that the value proposition is the signage on the interstate. Scott offered that we have crossed that bridge with Berlin where we are pointing users on the interstate to a privately owned business.

Deb offered in the chat that P&H Truck Stop was designated as an Oasis Program location in 1997.



Scott walked through the illustrative example of the P3 at Exit 4 as a replacement to Randolph. P3s have codified standards in state statute.

Heather suggested that the signage on the interstate to a private enterprise feels a bit like a red herring. In terms of the potential for P3 success, she feels that Commissioner Goldstein should be brought in on the development perspective if we are going to fully vet this approach.

The question was raised of whether there are successful P3 new builds in Vermont that we can point to?

Jennifer suggested that we need to expand beyond just success stories for P3s in Vermont and need to look elsewhere for best practices. Berlin is a great case study in terms of what we want to do differently and does not think it was set up for success. We were not ahead of that development and did not craft the agreement that would be fully advantageous to the state. It is clear from this analysis that we don't have enough money to sustain the system as is. If faced with the loss of a couple of information centers, what do we want to do to mitigate that loss. Anytime we can entice folks that are already off the interstate to other locations where they might spend their dollars, that is advantageous. Further, if we are going to close a center, we need something to augment the system in return.

Costa suggested that the use of the word "closing" is problematic. We are really transitioning to a different delivery system. We would only be closing an Information Center if we can replace it with something else.

Jennifer asked that we be clear in the distinction between closed and closed with transition to services in some other form.

Costa reiterated that we should be mindful of the wording and consider presenting this in the context of a transition. If we are going to close without a transition, we need to be able to fully flesh out what that means. He suggested something like "realignment" (i.e. not an outright closure).

Dave P. asked if we should be evolving the right-hand column more for each of the facilities to make sure that it is clear what the transition plan might be.

Costa offered that folks are likely to be more comfortable if those yellow and red cells (closure or repurpose) would not happen until a feasible alternative is identified and that recommended action actually taken. Although it might not mitigate the immediate budgeting issues.

Dave P. suggested that maybe this is an alternative scenario where the feasible option is inserted.



Jennifer offered that BGS supports the programmatic goals of the other agencies. BGS as the operator is aiming to support those goals, but is not supposed to set the policy. But to meet the system needs, they are going to come back to ask for more money when there is not enough money to support, maintain, operate the system as needed.

Jennifer articulated the Vermont Room vision she has for the P3, which incorporates a log cabin feel and a state employee centered in the room to direct folks. These would be an add on to a service center or gas station. This would likely relinquish, to some degree, the construction and maintenance costs of having that facility.

Matthew offered that we want to keep in mind in that the model where we are identifying the closure or repurposing does not consider the costs associated with the transition, especially since we don't know with certainty what that transition would be to. There needs to be a revenue stream. Would this revenue stream be more than what it costs to maintain the system facilities as is?

Heather asked what it takes for the community to plan for that transition. P3s would be an option but are not a guarantee. It means going to the legislature for the money. There is a 3rd option in acknowledgement of the transition, because there are costs, options, timing considerations. We will need commitment to get from A (existing facility) to B (different format) and will need the legislature to come together and commit to that cost allocated appropriately.

Dave offered the illustrative examples that might help to compel the transition options.

Heather expressed that Dave's summary was helpful and that it is the type of information that we need to elevate to the decision makers. Ultimately, they will need to decide what changes they are willing to stomach and how to afford whatever that is.

Heather asked if the statutory obligations of ACCD and others were reviewed again. It is her understanding that the role was rescinded.

Karen identified the statutes and additional MOU language. Scott clarified that MOU does not ameliorate the statute if it was never revisited. May be worth having a state attorney review to ensure there is proper interpretation of statute and this is clearly expressed in the recommendations.

Jennifer asked what was meant by reducing staff hours?

Matthew provided an explanation of the model, particularly for the reduced operations approach and how this was represented. It was noted that reducing staff would have a particularly profound effect on the tourist visitation.



Heather suggested shading the table to visually represent the years out into the future where some action would be taken on each location.

Tina noted that the Derby and Randolph dates to take action are 2022. Is this realistic?

Jennifer asked if was possible with the reduced hours model to still provide restrooms but with an exterior access while the building is closed.

Jennifer and Heather both suggested it would be good to get the Agency Secretaries up to speed on the study. Agency of Administration and VTrans have been updated with regular check ins with Jennifer and Costa. Heather suggested that the ACCD Secretary and new Deputy Secretary should be brought up to speed.

Dave asked what the right timing was to present findings to senior leadership given the schedule shown.

Jennifer suggested that we should go into the leadership conversation with the draft report and Heather seconded.

Costa suggested we brief the leadership on high points and recommendations so that input can be incorporated into the draft report.

Jennifer expressed interest in providing senior leadership the opportunity to weigh in.

Heather suggested that sufficient context be provided so that they are informed of how we arrived at this stage in the process.

Dave P. suggested that the presentation to senior leadership should provide a brief overview of the process and not just highlight the details of the step that we are on currently, like with today's presentation.

Dave asked about Jennifer's perspective from earlier in the conversation about the Alternative Scenarios.

Jennifer clarified that she would prefer we not limit the thought process by the leadership by providing all of the different alternative scenarios that were initially developed.

Dave asked if the intention is to lead decisionmakers to a final recommended alternative or to a menu of options that are viable that will be decided upon.

Jennifer noted that a recommendation from the consultants would be valuable to decisionmakers.

Heather suggested that having that third-party expertise is valuable to the executive leadership.

Place: Teams Meeting
Ref: 57985.04
February 25, 2021
Page 8



Meeting Notes

Dave P. offered that he defers to others but can see benefits with either approach.

Heather suggested that this question be brought to the senior leadership.

Tina offered that checking back in on the original scope of work, the deliverable was proposed recommendations.,

Dave P. suggested that the recommendations language provided some latitude in how this information is delivered.

Jennifer offered that Secretary Young and Secretary Flynn have been working together closely, and that although Secretary Kurrle has been less so involved, she is confident that they can all come to some alignment on the subject.



Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Study Group Meeting #5

May 17, 2021



Agenda

- Review & Discuss Draft VICD System Recommendations
- Brief Overview of Draft Report
- Next Steps

Review & Discuss Draft Recommendations



Alternatives Refinement

JANUARY

Maintain Current System (Status Quo)

- Existing System + Additional Funding
- Existing System + Reduce Spending
- Existing System + Contract Operations



Repurpose or Close Select Facilities

- Repurpose all VICD Facilities
- Repurpose Select VICD Facilities
- Maintain Welcome Centers
- Maintain Welcome Centers + P3s



Add New Facilities

- Add Two New VICD Facilities



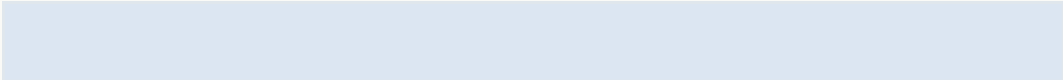
APRIL

Revised Alternatives

- Existing System + Additional Funding
- Existing System + Reduce Spending



- Repurpose or Close Select VICD Facilities



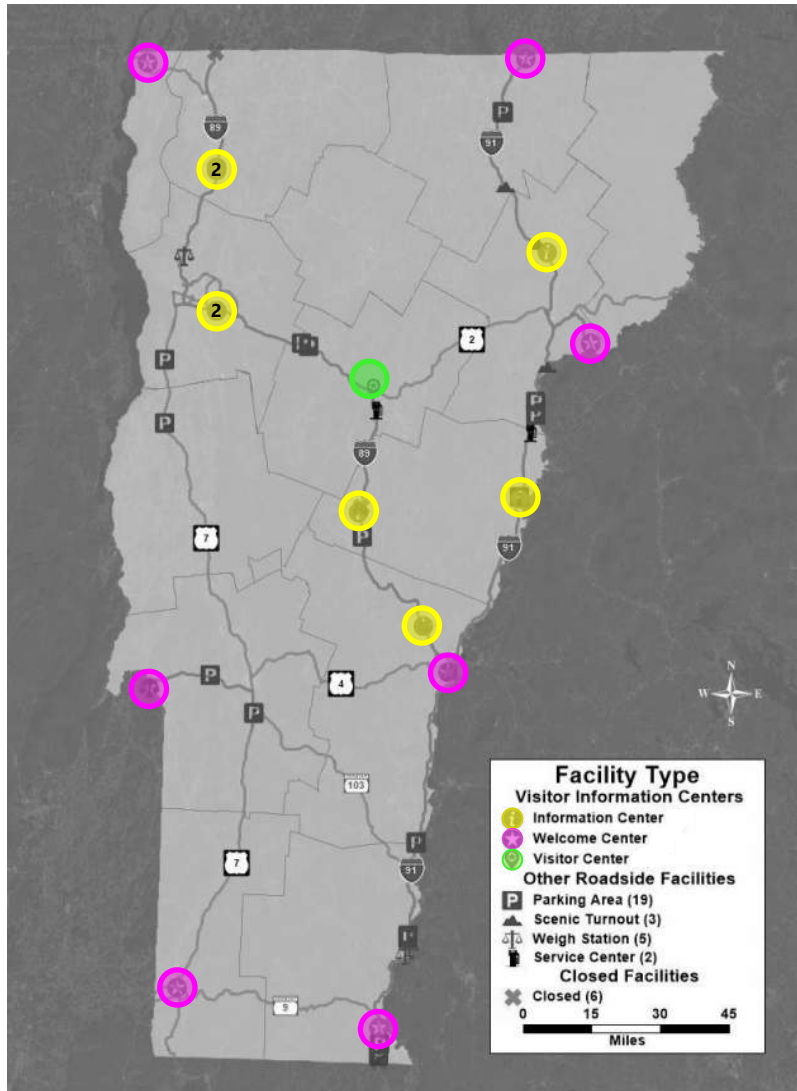
- Consolidate to Add One New Facility

Development of Draft Recommendations

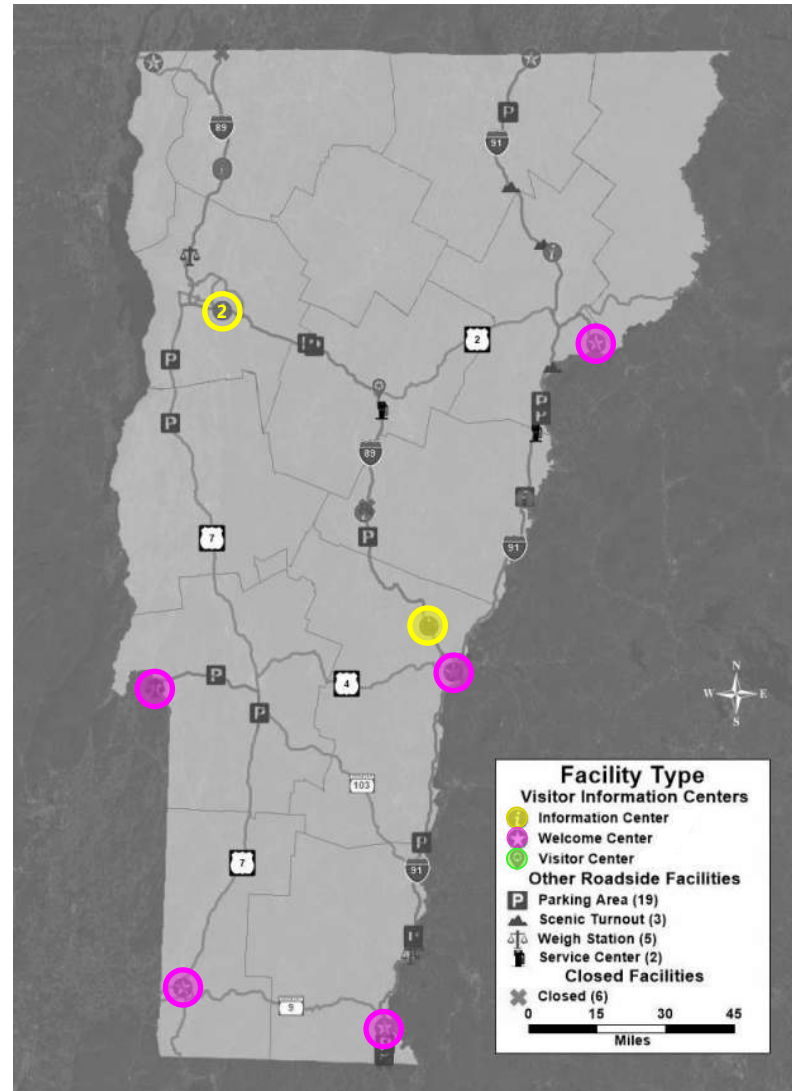
- **Four preliminary alternatives presented to VTrans, ACCD, and AoA Secretaries on 4/20**
 - Maintain Existing VICD System with Additional Funding
 - Maintain Existing VICD System with Reduced Service Levels
 - Repurpose / Close Selected Facilities
 - New Northern Gateway Welcome Center
- **Key Takeaways**
 - Investigate keeping facilities currently closed for COVID closed indefinitely, unless compelling reason to re-open (e.g. Derby which should re-open)
 - Interest in pursuing Northwest Gateway Welcome Center
 - Investigate potential reductions in hours of service (*target servicing 80% of visitors*)

VICD System: Pre- and During COVID

- Pre-COVID (16 facilities)



- Current Network (8 facilities)



← These 8 facilities represented 76% of Visitor Traffic in 2019

Draft VICD System Recommendations

- **Alternative 1: Maintain Existing VICD System with Increased Funding**

- Additional Operations & Preservation funding needed: 1.5% per year; \$16.5M over 20 years

- **Alternative 2: Reduce Size of VICD System**

- **8 facilities to remain open**

- Follow regular maintenance & preservation schedule
 - Reduce operating hours to capture 80% of visitation

- **1 facility to re-open**

- Derby to re-open; facility rehabilitation scheduled for 2022/23

- **7 facilities to remain closed**

- Local options to be investigated in Bradford, Lyndon, Montpelier, and Randolph

- **1 new facility**

- Northwest Gateway Welcome Center; P3 at Exit 21 in Swanton

Alternative 2
Summary of Recommended Action By Facility

Facility	Recommended Action
Alburg Welcome Center	Remain Closed
Bradford Information Center	Remain Closed
Georgia Northbound Information Center	Remain Closed
Georgia Southbound Information Center	Remain Closed
Lyndonville Information Center	Remain Closed
Montpelier - Capital Region Visitors Center	Remain Closed
Randolph Southbound Information Center	Remain Closed
Derby Welcome Center	Re-open
Bennington Welcome Center	Keep Open
Fair Haven Welcome Center	Keep Open
Guilford Welcome Center	Keep Open
Hartford Southbound Welcome Center	Keep Open
Sharon Northbound Information Center	Keep Open
Waterford Welcome Center	Keep Open
Williston Northbound Information Center	Keep Open
Williston Southbound Information Center	Keep Open
New: Northwest Gateway Welcome Center	New

Alternative 2: Reduced Operating Hours

- Evaluation of hourly visitation at sites remaining open to identify operating hours that serve **80%** of 2019 visitation.

	Bennington	Fair Haven	Guilford	Hartford	Sharon	Waterford	Williston NB	Williston SB
07:00 - 08:00	8	11	54	40	39	9	31	30
08:00 - 09:00	29	25	72	53	75	16	98	44
09:00 - 10:00	25	30	91	58	73	21	66	32
10:00 - 11:00	25	34	150	66	79	25	60	30
11:00 - 12:00	27	38	177	55	93	31	53	37
12:00 - 13:00	30	35	200	66	97	31	58	38
13:00 - 14:00	28	40	139	71	100	35	57	42
14:00 - 15:00	37	42	190	81	114	42	62	45
15:00 - 16:00	41	44	161	108	160	41	75	60
16:00 - 17:00	42	41	161	130	152	45	84	71
17:00 - 18:00	35	42	111	118	131	36	84	75
18:00 - 19:00	23	35	96	63	95	27	51	43
19:00 - 20:00	9		43		49		23	20
20:00 - 21:00	12		27		33		17	17
21:00 - 22:00			21		23		12	14
22:00 - 23:00			16		14		9	11
2019 Average Daily Visitation	372	418	1708	909	1327	359	841	607
2019 Hours of Operation	7 AM - 9 PM	7 AM - 7 PM	7 AM - 11 PM	7 AM - 7 PM	7 AM - 11 PM	7 AM - 7 PM	7 AM - 11 PM	7 AM - 11 PM
Time Period Selected	8 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	9 AM - 7 PM	9 AM - 6 PM	8 AM - 6 PM	8 AM - 7 PM
Percent Served	85.88%	83.08%	80.70%	82.88%	82.46%	85.58%	82.97%	85.08%

Total Operating Hours

- Current (COVID): 114 hours / day
- Proposed: 77 hours/day
- 32% reduction in service hours

Alternative 2: Northwest Gateway Welcome Center

Public-Private Partnership at Exit 21 in Swanton

- Close Alburgh, Georgia NB, Georgia SB
- Locate facility within 1/2 mile of Exit 21
- Private Partner: Design, build, finance, maintain & operate the facility
- State Role: Develop requirements, construction cost for "VT room", lease payments for "VT room", staff VT room, provide directional signage.
 - Pros: Opportunity to provide fuel & food, may generate additional tourism visits into Swanton, reduced public operating and capital costs
 - Cons: Not a traditional "Welcome Center", limited control over daily operations of facility, unclear developer interest

1/2 Mile Radius Around Exit 21



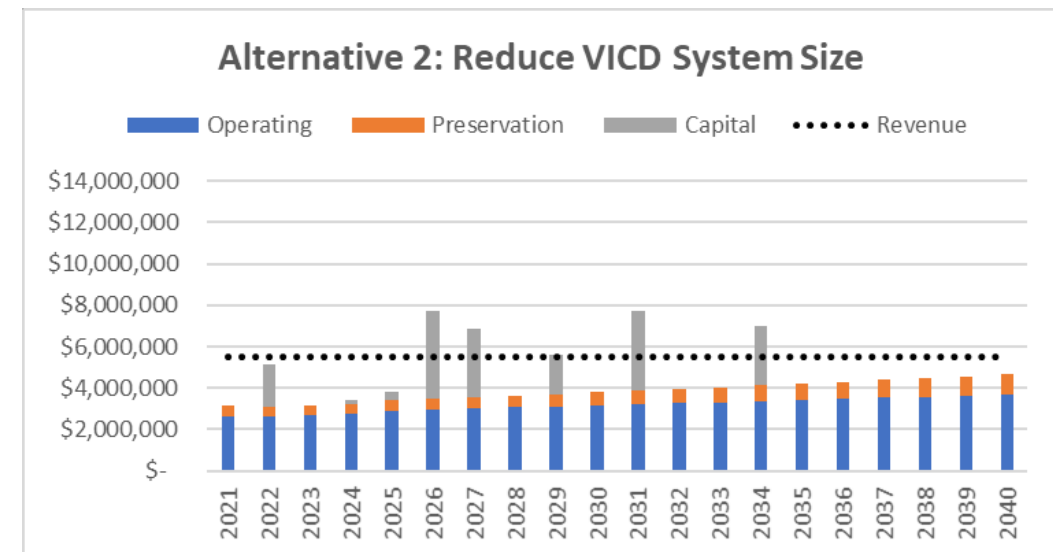
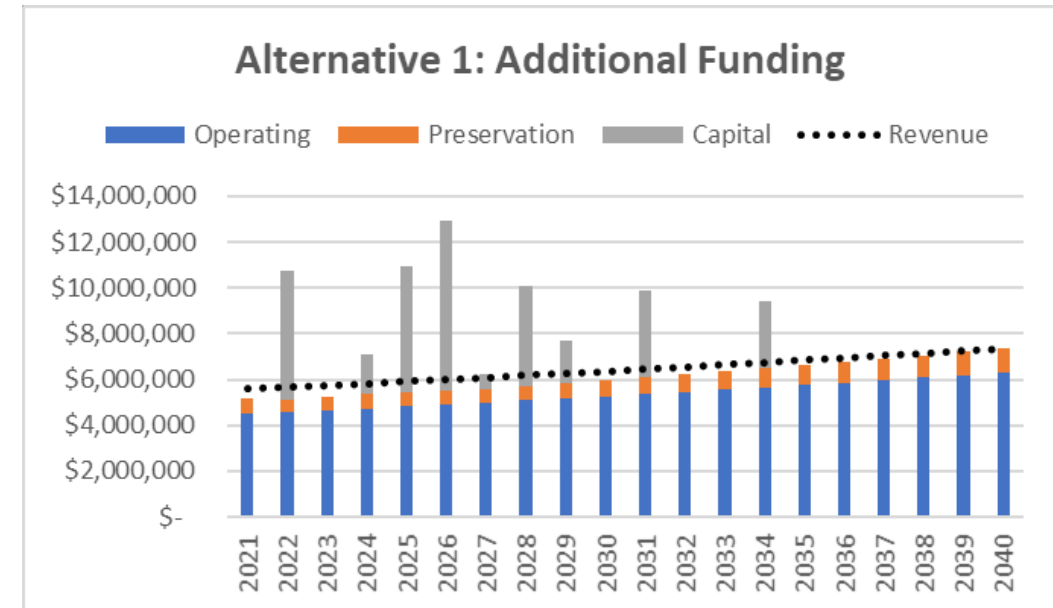
Operating & Capital Cost Estimates for Alternatives

Alternative 1: Maintain Existing VICD System with Increased Funding

- Additional Operations & Preservation Funding: 1.5% per year; \$16.5M over 20 years
- Total 20 Year Estimated Costs:
 - Operating & Preservation: **\$122M**
 - Capital: **\$34M**

Alternative 2: Reduce Size of VICD System

- System Changes
 - 7 facilities to remain closed
 - 1 facility to re-open
 - 8 facilities to remain open
 - 1 new facility (P3)
- Total 20 Year Estimated Costs:
 - Operating & Preservation: **\$77M**
 - Capital: **\$19M**



Brief Overview of Draft Report



Brief Overview of Draft Report

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1

Current State

INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Visitor Information Center Division (VICD) facilities provide a network of locations primarily along the National Highway System (NHS) throughout Vermont that serve the traveling public. The primary function of the VICD system is to provide safety breaks to prevent drowsy or fatigued driving by providing safe areas to rest or change drivers'. The facilities additionally provide travelers with access to restroom facilities, shelter from adverse weather, travel information, free coffee, free wireless internet, vending machines, Vermont promotions, and travel ambassadors. The aim of the system is to deliver these essential safety purposes and additional traveler amenities through well-maintained facilities with exceptional customer service.

HISTORY

During the construction of the federal interstate in Vermont, rest areas were constructed alongside the interstate system to provide basic services and safety breaks to the traveling public. These facilities were a stop gap during a time when few services were available off the federal interstate system's exits. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) was responsible for building and operating these rest area facilities. VTrans also managed a reconstruction of the rest areas during the 1980s. It was during this time that the system saw a steady increase in the number of visitors, in particular the number of tourists, utilizing the rest area facilities. Recognizing the opportunity to capitalize on the state's visitors and bolster the tourism economy, the state turned over the responsibility of the system to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) in 1992. The ACCD was tasked with establishing official tourist information centers at principal entrance points into the state. Information about public accommodations, commercial services, and other business for the travelling public, as well as points of scenic, historic, cultural, educational, and religious interest was expected to be available at these locations. Publications, audio/visual aids, and computers were established as methods of

¹ AASHTO, *Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways*, 2001.

Next Steps





Next Steps

- Finalize Draft Report: **End of May**
 - *Circulate to Steering Committee for review*
- Issue Final Report: **June**





Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Vermont Association of Planning &
Development Agencies Meeting

November 5, 2020



Agenda

- Project Introduction
- Brief Overview of the VIC System
- Discussion



Project Goals and Objectives

Conduct a study of Vermont's system of Visitor Information Centers to develop recommendations for strategic future investments.

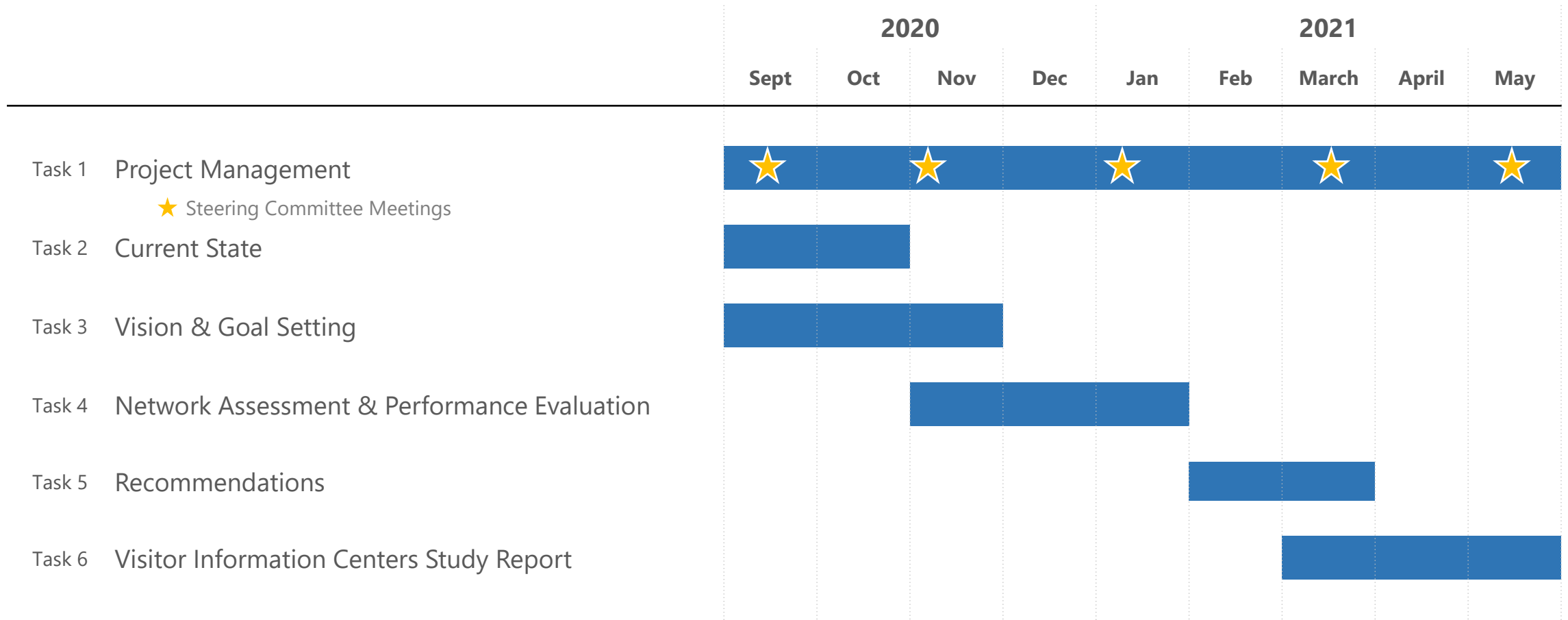
➤ Evaluate:

- Current state of Visitor Information Centers;
- Needed infrastructure investments and operational costs;
- Potential economic development opportunities;
- Alternative service delivery models; and,
- Deficiencies and priorities for the system.

➤ Develop:

- Forecast of financial sustainability of maintenance and operations for current system;
- Alternatives that consider targeted investments or leverage other service delivery models;
- Evaluation matrix with 20-year maintenance and operation cost comparisons
- Final recommendations to meet programmatic objectives and requirements in a fiscally sustained manner.

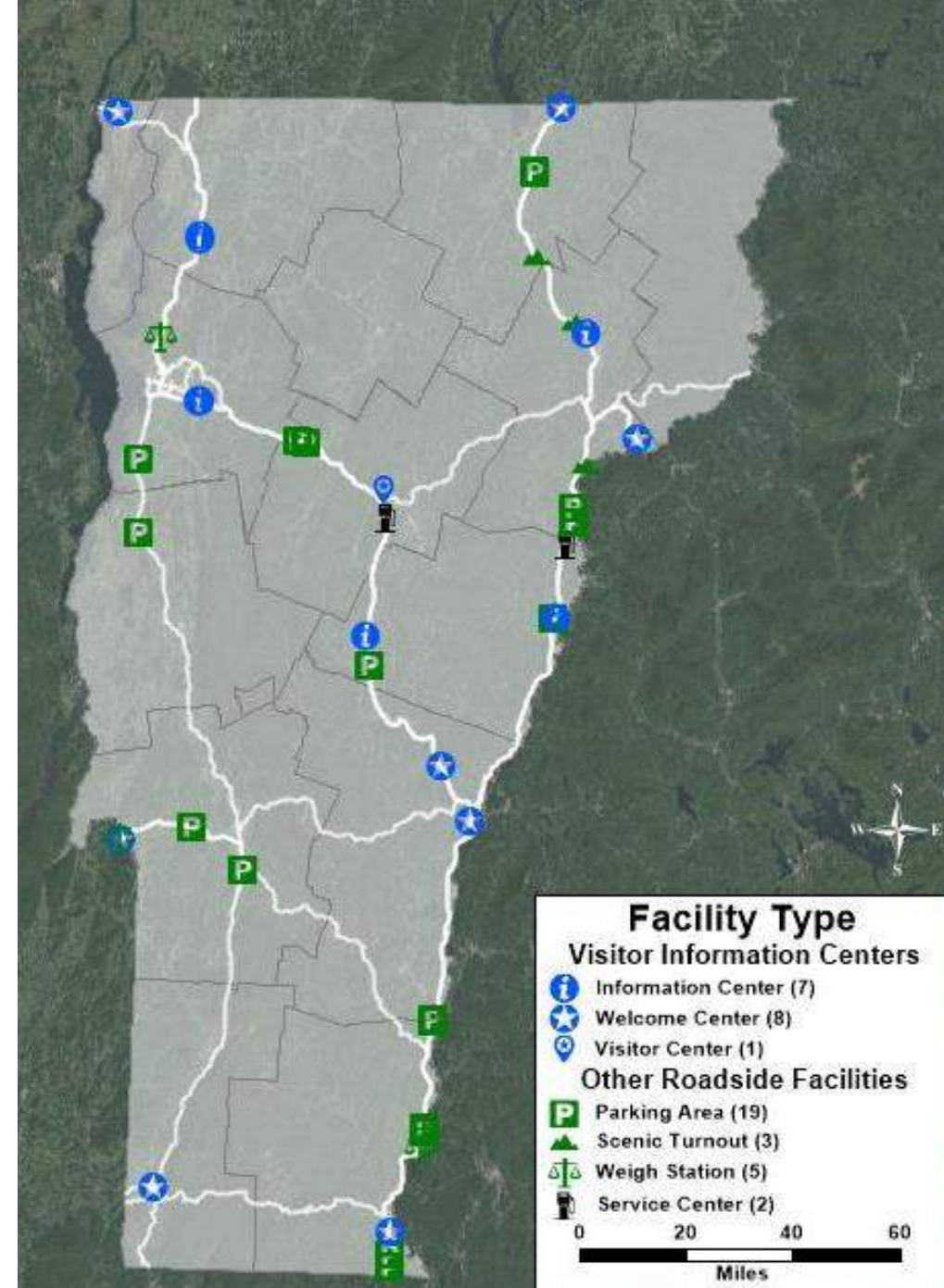
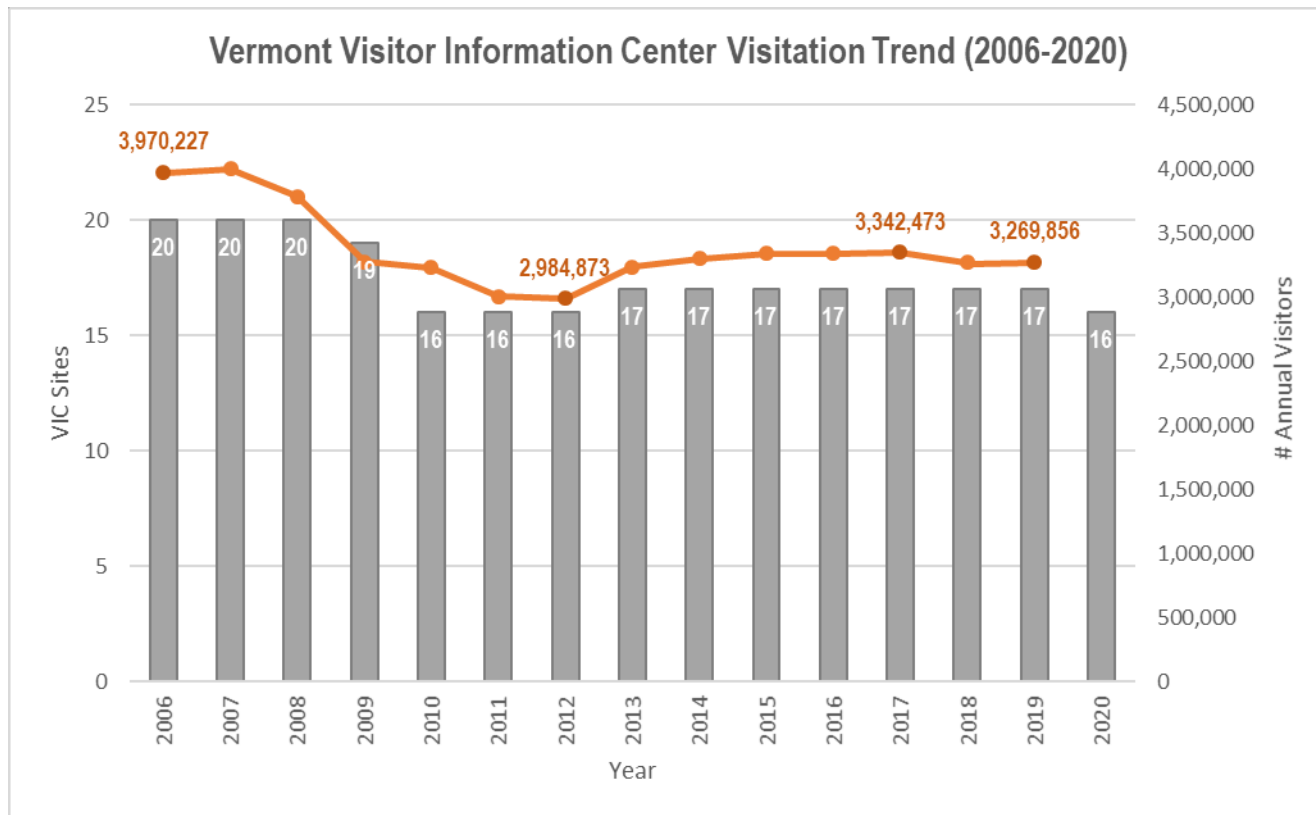
Project Schedule



Existing Conditions

■ Current State of the System

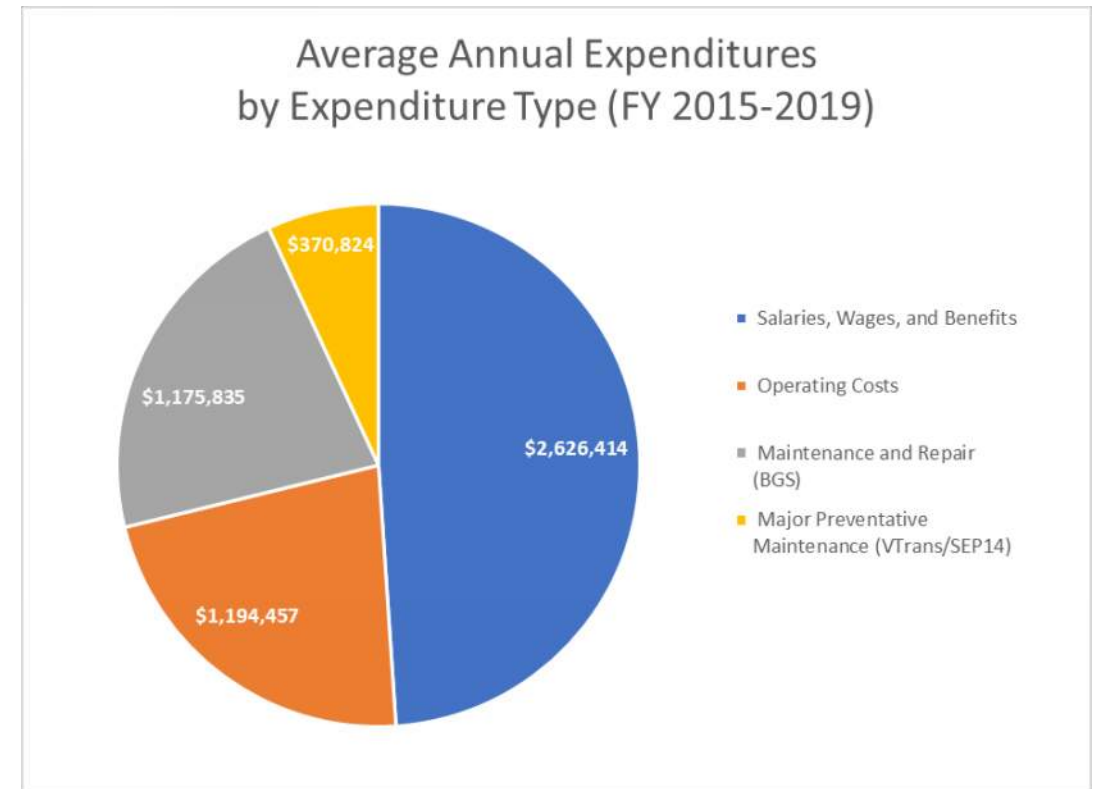
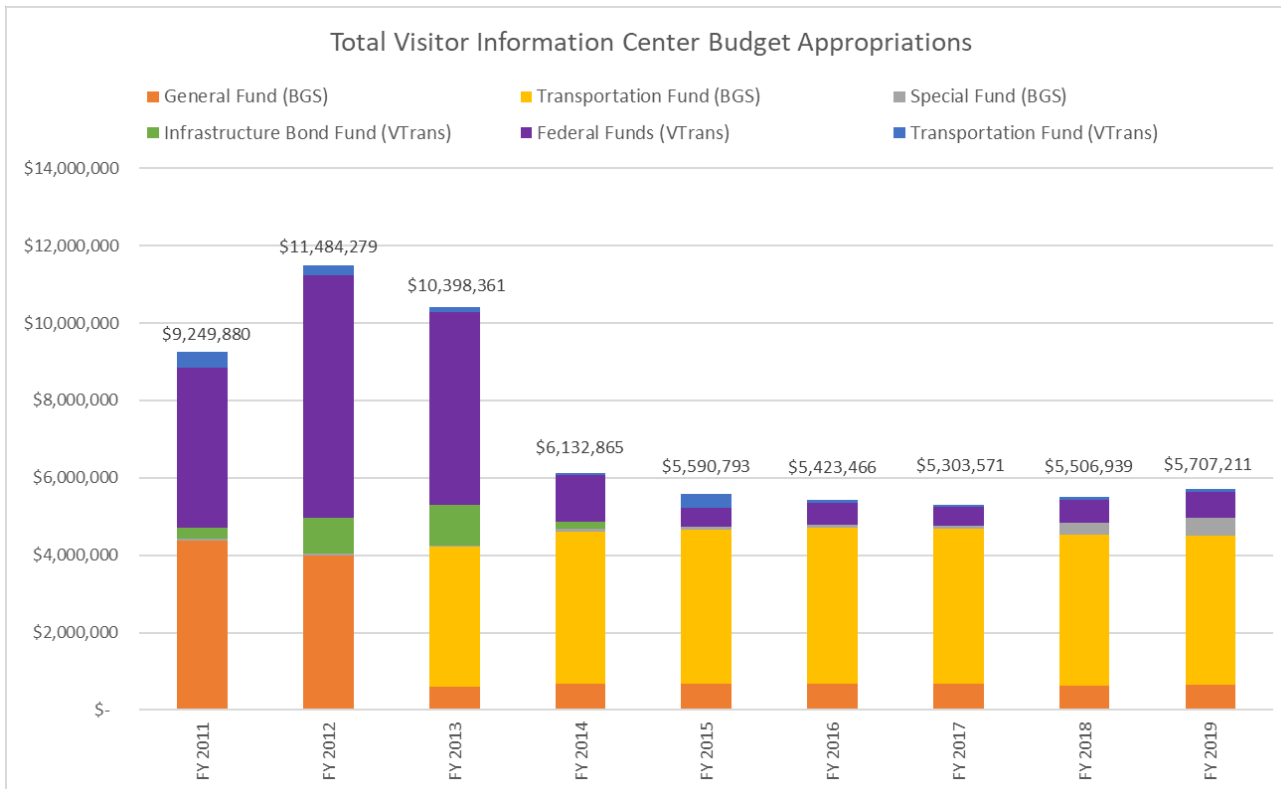
- 45 total “Roadside Facilities”
 - 16 active Visitor Information Centers statewide
 - All interstate facilities within 35 miles of next facility (60-mile guidance)
- Relatively level visitation trends (2013-2019)



Existing Conditions

System Funding & Expenditures

- Approximately 50% of \$5.5M annual appropriations go towards personnel costs
- Major maintenance activities average about \$370k per year (*about 7% of total appropriations*)
 - Spending approximately 50% of the \$2.8M funds made available for major maintenance projects over last five years



Discussion

- Goals / Objectives for Visitor Information Center System
 - Thoughts on number and location of sites?
 - Any gaps or locations missing? Regions with too many facilities?
 - Spending Priorities
 - Facility staffing vs. number of locations
- Thoughts on Alternative Delivery Models
 - Public/private partnerships (e.g. Maplewood facility in Berlin)
 - Expanded agreements with local Chambers to staff facilities







Vermont Visitor Information Centers Study

Vermont Association of Planning &
Development Agencies Meeting

February 4, 2021



Agenda

- Brief Project Overview
- Review of Scenario Evaluation Process
- Discussion

Project Overview





Project Goals and Objectives

Conduct a study of Vermont's system of Visitor Information Centers to develop recommendations for strategic future investments.

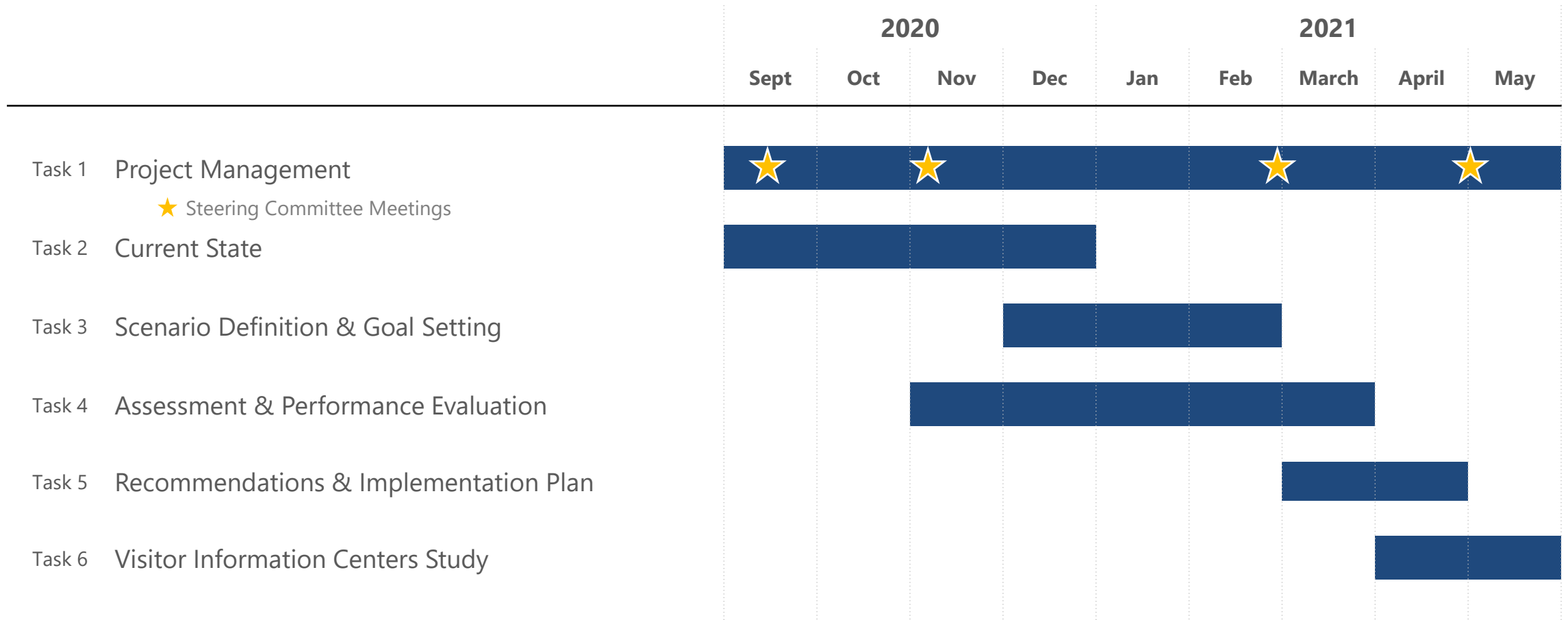
➤ Evaluate:

- Current state of Visitor Information Centers;
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- Alternative service delivery models; and,
- Deficiencies and priorities for the system.

➤ Develop:

- Forecast of financial sustainability of maintenance and operations for current system;
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- Evaluation matrix with 20-year maintenance and operation cost comparisons
- Final recommendations to meet programmatic objectives and requirements in a fiscally sustained manner.

Project Schedule



Existing System

■ System Inventory

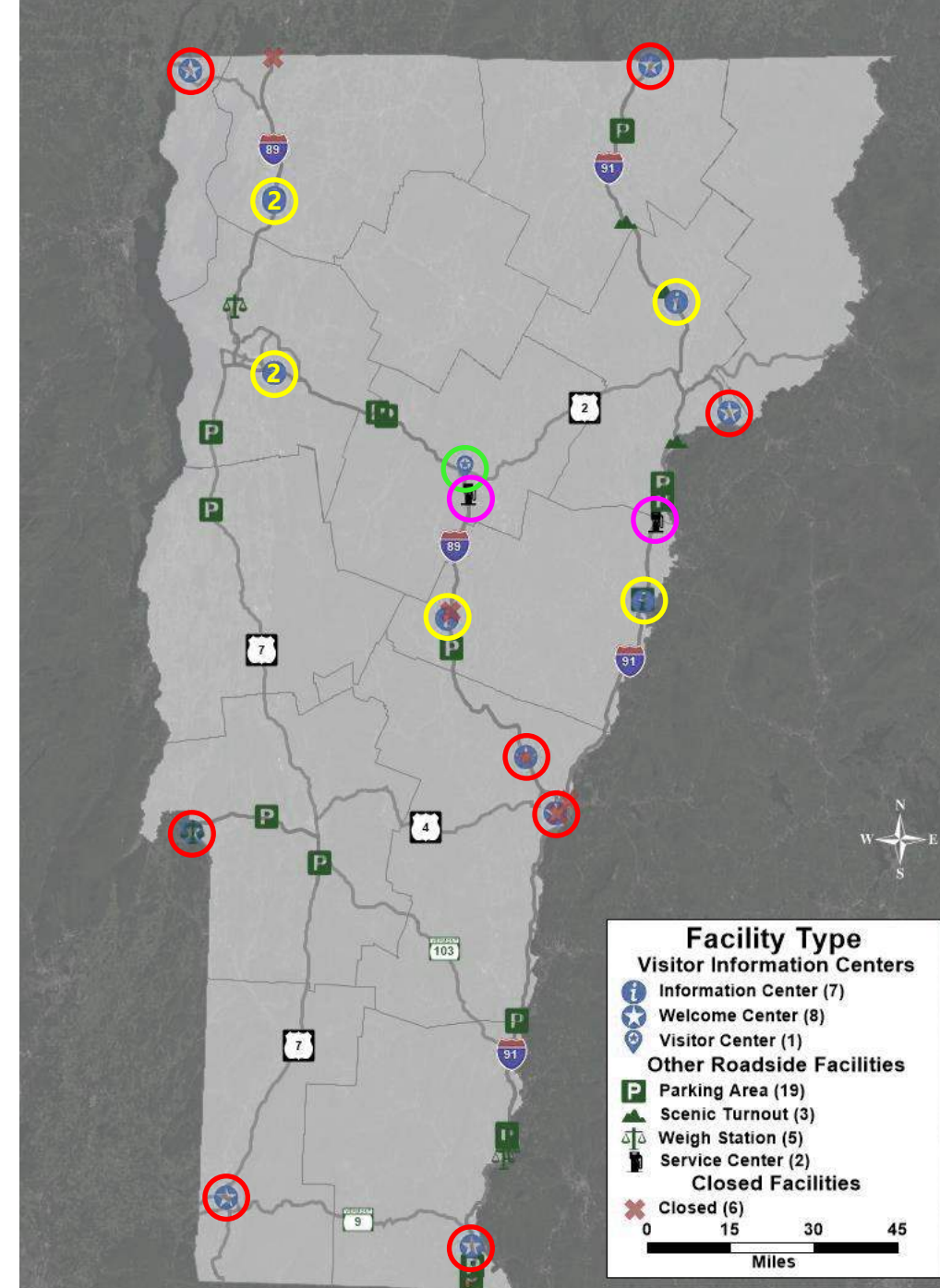
– 16 active Visitor Information Centers statewide

○ **Information Center** (7 facilities): These facilities have direct access to the interstate, provide refuge for brief safety breaks, and provide additional amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information

○ **Welcome Center** (8 facilities): These facilities are located near the border of Vermont and are focused on providing gateway services for travelers coming into the state

○ **Visitor Center** (1 facility): These facilities are located off the interstate network without direct access to the highway and provide similar amenities like restroom facilities and traveler information.

○ **Service Center (2 facilities):** Through public/private partnerships with the state, Service Centers are locations that provide restroom facilities and traveler information as well as additional services including food and fueling.

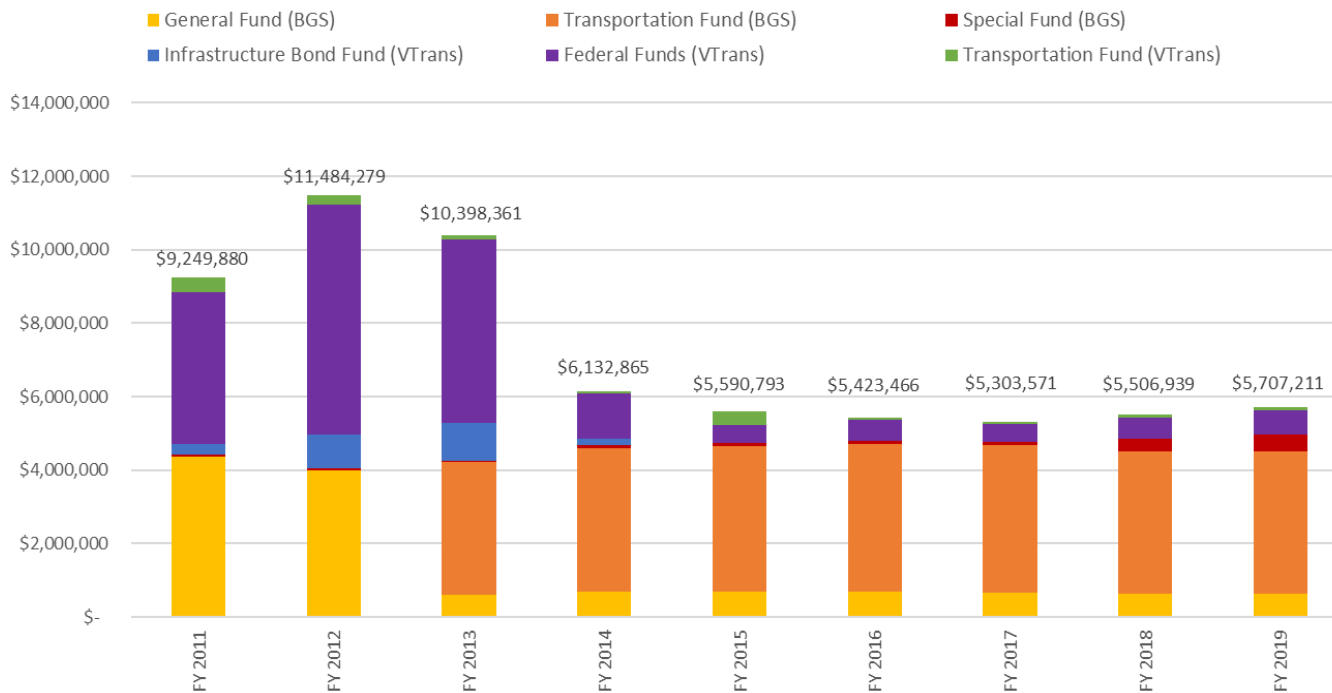


Funding Sources

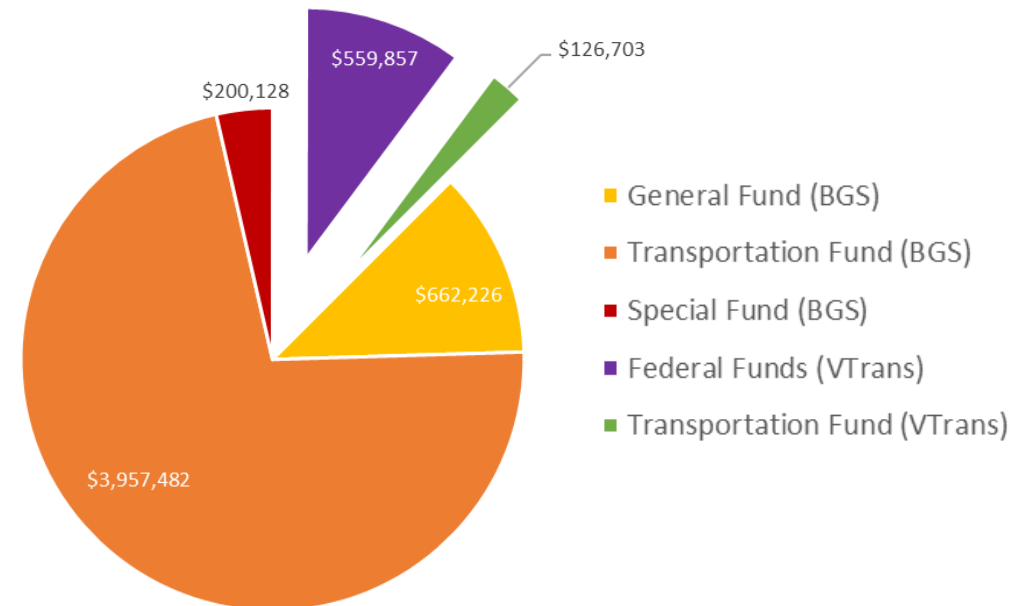
System Funding

- Relatively level funding over the past five years (FY 2015-2019)
- Collaborative SEP14 Agreement allows for VTrans program funds to be allocated to major preventative maintenance projects
 - Over \$680k per year on average allocated through agreement

Total Visitor Information Center Budget Appropriations

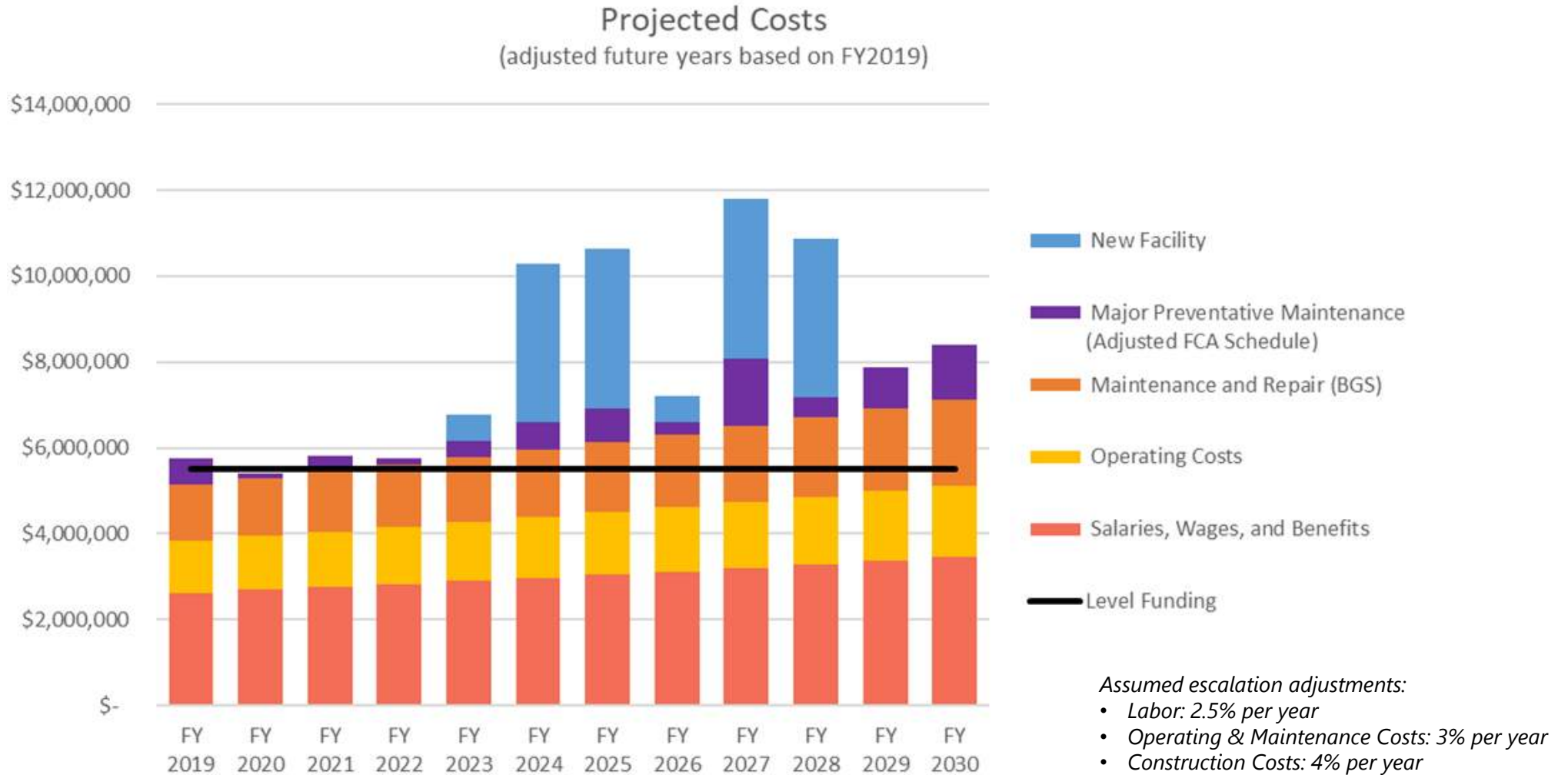


Average Budget Appropriations (FY 2015-2019)



Need for Change

■ Preliminary Projection of Projected Revenue & Expenditures – 10 Years



Future Scenarios for Evaluation





Future Scenarios

- **Minimum Acceptable Service Level:** Determine the minimum acceptable level of services that enables Vermont to meet various requirements placed upon the system
- **Status Quo:** Utilize the existing status of VIC services and funding as a useful and known point between the minimum and future states.
- **System Expansion:** Envision the enhancements and or changes in services and/or funding to meet the needs of tomorrow's traveler

