



State of Vermont
Department of Buildings & General Services

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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 40 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. Obuchowski

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

Brian R. Searles

Brian R. Searles, Secretary
Agency of Transportation

Lawrence Miller

Lawrence Miller, Secretary
Agency of Commerce & Community Development

**Future Program of Travel Information Services
And
Promotion of Vermont Businesses & Products to Motoring Public**

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**Future Diagram for Travel Information Services
and
Promotion of Vermont Businesses and Products to the Motoring Public**

Act 40 of 2011, Sec. 32. INFORMATION CENTERS - The secretaries of transportation and of commerce and community development and the commissioner of buildings and general services shall study and recommend on or before January 15, 2012 a future program for delivery of travel information services to motorists and the promotion of Vermont businesses and products to the motoring public. To the extent possible, the secretaries and the commissioner shall explore means that do not utilize new structures.

As instructed by the 2011 General Assembly in the Capital Bill, the Joint Rest Area Committee -- comprised of representatives from the Agency of Transportation, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the Department of Buildings and General Services - convened to review and suggest recommendations for the development of a comprehensive strategy and vision for the future of how travel information services will be provided to the travelling public. For the purpose of this report we shall refer to the Joint Rest Area Committee as the "Committee."

A history of the program -- annually collected data, studies, position papers -- and a customer satisfaction survey have been reviewed by the Committee in conducting an analysis of the program. The more relevant documents are referenced as attachments. For the purpose of this report we shall refer to the Vermont Information Centers Division network of facilities as "visitor centers."

Universally, visitor centers -- also known as rest areas, welcome centers and information centers -- are well utilized and appreciated by the travelling public and, in Vermont, by the businesses, attractions, craft persons, artists, and communities showcased at the visitor centers. A recently conducted customer satisfaction survey (See executive summaries in the Appendix) reflects the high level of satisfaction and value attributed to the service provided by the State to travelers and to stakeholder groups who utilize State visitor centers as a marketing venue. The survey showed that 89.1 percent of the traveling public rated their overall experience at Vermont rest areas as "extremely satisfied" (60.3 percent) or "very satisfied" (28.8 percent). The stakeholders group, Vermont businesses, indicated a comparable level of satisfaction, with 86.8 percent of respondents selecting either "extremely satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experience at a Vermont visitor center.

Vermont's visitor centers are part of a national grid of facilities with the common mission of providing safety breaks and related services to the travelling public. The nation's rest areas are governed by strict federal law and, while popular, cost tax payers in Vermont close to \$4,000,000 annually for these services to be provided. This report recognizes the issue of cost while also reaffirming the positive benefits derived from these facilities.

It is important to note that while other State programs have a defined and more homogeneous population they serve, our visitor centers last year hosted over 3,000,000 travelers (six times the state population) serving a large cross-section of motorists including; out-of-state and out-of-country visitors, Vermonters commuting back and forth to work and home, and commercial truck traffic that utilize these sites for mandatory layovers.

Originally built and operated by the Agency of Transportation during the construction of the interstate system, rest areas were intended to enhance safety for motorists by creating safe resting stops for fatigued drivers. In the late 90's it was recognized that rest areas had an opportunity to provide a dual mission of services to the travelling public: (1) providing road and weather information, directional services, travel suggestions and (2) in the last 13 years as

a stage for our tourism industry -- to showcase and promote Vermont's many attractions, products, events, and programs to our visitors.

- In the past year, Vermont's visitor centers hosted 638 displays and promotions and distributed over 3.8 million brochures of Vermont businesses. The centers' staff is persistent to pursue businesses, artists, craft people, events, and attractions to promote their products - generally on a one-month rotation basis.
- The centers provided the opportunity for local non-profit organizations to host 251 safety breaks -- with complimentary coffee and fresh baked goods - and raise thousands of dollars for the non-profits through donations.

Visitor centers provide copious amounts of fresh Green Mountain Coffee Roasters coffee to motorists who always marvel that it is FREE. This serves a dual purpose of (1) refreshing the traveler and (2) promoting a Vermont product.

It is often said that in a state absent billboards, our visitor centers serve as a place travelers stop to find out where to go, what to do and how to get there. Today, it only makes sense that these facilities would be multifaceted to take advantage of all the opportunities to serve as marketing tools that promote our State's businesses and attractions.

A report (Report to the Legislature on the Funding of Rest Areas and Information Centers, Sec.27 of Act 62 of 2011) issued this past November by the Joint Fiscal Office studied the cost associated with the marketing and promotions components of the services provided at Vermont's State-funded visitor centers. The report confirmed what had been speculated for some time: the transportation-related costs of operation were 85.6% while the marketing and tourism-related cost component was only 14.4%.

Additionally, in a recent analysis that was conducted of visitor centers operated by the State of New Hampshire on its interstate system it was concluded that both states are almost identical in terms of spending and number of visitor centers they operate. One difference between the two states was in the number of interstate highway miles served by state-operated facilities: Vermont operates sites over 318 miles while New Hampshire spans 256 miles. It should be noted that both states operate additional facilities off the interstate system as well.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Define the inventory of visitor centers necessary to both serve the traveling public and promote Vermont's attractions and businesses.

In 1993, the State of Vermont operated 24 staffed rest areas along the interstate corridors. That number was reduced over the years -- in 2009 four centers were closed - to the current total of 15 centers (and one center supported by a grant).

A review of the existing network of State-funded visitor centers indicates while there could always be more, currently our network conforms with the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standard for the spacing of visitor centers (approximately 60 miles apart). In those areas where the 60 mile standard is exceeded, there are signed services available to the traveling public at exits along the interstate.

Additionally, while it is believed that visitor centers provide a critical function, it is recognized that the cost for providing these services by the State and its taxpayers is not insignificant (\$3.9 million in FY12). The Committee concurs with the legislative instructions it was given -- "*To the extent possible, the secretaries and the commissioner shall explore means that do not utilize new structures.*"-- and recommends that the State

impose a moratorium on new construction of rest area facilities along the interstate corridor and on any state or federally-assisted highways.

It is further recommended that the State consider limiting the number of visitor centers the state will support to 16 once the Bennington Welcome Center comes on line in 2013. Establishing a target or maximum number of centers the State operates will allow for a program that is programmatically and fiscally more predictable and, as a result, perhaps more sustainable. Furthermore, the Committee suggests that the State consider adopting an aggregated spending average target of no more than \$1.25 per visitor.

Recommendation #2: Define the future blueprint for filling identified service voids along the interstate or State highways with the most economical approach.

In the future, if service voids are identified or it is deemed necessary to provide additional services to the travelling public, it is recommended that those services be provided through public-private partnerships (PPPs) with businesses or attractions located along the interstate corridor or on state highways. The strategy should encourage participation in the State's Ambassador Program hosted by the Department of Tourism. If the State chooses to embark on establishing additional PPPs, it is recommended that they preclude the need for public funding and that incentives be made available to interested private service providers by only providing directional signage on the interstate or State highways leading to the facility.

The strategy suggested in this document encourages public-private partnerships that further the expansion of State-sanctioned Ambassador travel service centers on both State highways and on the interstate system (See attached map in Appendix). The strategy also distinguishes between interstate and state highway needs. For services along the interstate corridor essential components of a partnership facility are: restrooms, food, gasoline, telephone, truck parking, and information within one mile of the identified interstate exits.

The State currently enjoys a relationship with the P & H Truck Stop on Interstate 91 as an example of a successful PPP. This relationship was entered into in 1997 when the closing of the Bradford Southbound rest area created a service void along this corridor. (Refer to P & H Truck Stop Agreement in the Appendix for more information).

Recommendation #3: Define the process for system preservation - Replacing Old Facilities with New Facilities or Public-Private Partnerships.

In the event the State chooses to maintain its inventory of visitor centers in its present configuration, Randolph and Derby Line will need to be programmed into future renovation/replacement plans. Randolph and Derby Line were built in 1970 and 1968, respectively. Both are approaching the end of their viable life cycle. A replacement for these two facilities should be considered in a 5- or 10-year systems preservation plan as required to use FHWA funds for system preservation.

It should be noted that the alternative to rebuilding at an existing site could be to examine locating a new center(s) off the interstate or other major traffic route that could serve the needs of both south and northbound travelers. Interest in providing visitor center services privately has been expressed by various developers. The Committee believes the concept has merit worth exploring as long as it precludes the need for public funding and allows for recapture of the facility in some manner if the developer were to abandon interest in providing these services in the future.

Recommendation #4: A lack of Consensus on the concept of Commercialization

This report contains a history of commercialization efforts over the past few years but does not take a position regarding commercialization of rest areas/ visitor centers. There is no consensus regarding this issue at either the national level or the State level. While it is clear

that commercialization of these facilities could result in a revenue stream that would minimize the financial impact of providing these services with public funds, it is believed by many that the negative effects of a change in this strict policy prohibiting commercialization could create greater problems than it solves. As such, it is the recommendation of the Committee that the State defer action on commercialization of State-owned visitor centers on the interstate until time that the federal rules would allow for those commercial activities to occur within the boundaries of federal rules and regulations.

Conclusions

While it is difficult to predict the future, it is clear that the travelling public will continue to enjoy a rapid expansion of technology which will make travel information more dynamic and easier to obtain. Today, an explosion of applications on smart phones and other portable devices puts the most up-to-date information at the finger tips of travelers on demand and in real time. Recognizing the need to provide remote travel service to motorists, VICD has been exploring alternatives to face-to-face service. A kiosk design, linking travelers to information center representatives that are centrally located, is being considered for a pilot project at a future Vermont Ambassador Center or other PPP. (See graphic concept in Appendix)

Having said that, the survey data indicates travelers for the present continue to value and demand the marketing services and more basic conveniences provided by our visitor centers. As a result, we have determined that the State's network of visitor centers is necessary to travelers in a State that relies so heavily on tourism as an economic engine of Vermont's economy.

In a State that continues to be predominantly rural, with limited directional signage and marginal commercial activity along its interstate corridor, it is essential to accommodate the needs of the traveling public and commercial truck traffic with those services that can't be obtained over WIFI, the internet, or a smart phone. These visitor centers provide motorists with facilities that are safe and convenient; they serve as a refuge during inclement weather and provide a valuable marketing opportunity to Vermont businesses, attractions, producers, craft people, and communities to showcase their products face to face. As in most rural states that provide these services to the motoring public, they are deemed as essential components of the state's strategy for providing for the needs of the traveling public.

The Committee concludes its recommendations.

History of the Vermont Information Centers Division

The Vermont Agency of Transportation built and operated rest areas during the 1960s and 1970s as the federal interstate system expanded across the country. During that period, rest areas were designed with simplicity and functionality in mind. The philosophy behind highway rest areas was to provide basic services to the traveling public while on the interstate system. During the early years of the interstate, few services were available at the exits. Hence, rest areas were used for bathroom breaks and as a place for travelers to stretch their legs without having to exit the interstate. Truckers then and today utilize rest areas as a safe place to rest over during long treks.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the volume of traffic was much less than it is today. Rest areas could expect anywhere from 50 to 100 visitors a day. As travel increased, the numbers of visits to rest areas also increased to what we experience today -- a daily average of between 500 to 800 visitors per center. This increase in traffic proved to be valuable to Vermont's tourism industry. The increase in travelers to Vermont rest areas created an opportunity for businesses, and tourism operators to reach guests when they are eager for information.

Vermont Information Centers Division

Program History...

- 1960s and 1970s – Vermont Agency of Transportation
 - Built and operated rest areas
 - Federal interstate system expanded across the country
 - Mission to provide rest rooms and safety breaks

 - Traffic Volumes Increase at Rest Areas
 - 1960s and 1970s – 50 to 100 visitors per day at a site
 - Today – 500 to 1000 visitors per day at a site
 - Increased traffic valuable to Vermont's tourism industry
 - Increased traffic accelerated the deterioration of facilities
-

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In the late 1980s, the state instituted a reconstruction of the rest areas under the management of the Agency of Transportation. In 1992, the management of highway information centers was shifted to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development in order to expand the mission by providing quality Vermont tourism information to the traveling public. A partnership of state agencies, regional marketing organizations and chambers of commerce was formed to ensure that the expanded mission for servicing the traveling public is met. Although this move was critical in expanding the charter given to the Information Centers Division, the Department of Tourism was challenged with maintenance and operations of failing systems. The added traffic accelerated the deterioration of already obsolete facilities. Septic and water systems were put under great pressure. Buildings began to deteriorate from overuse. Parking lots and ramps were soon inadequate to handle the additional traffic of both passenger and commercial vehicles.

Program History... (continued)

- 1992 – Commerce & Community Development
 - Manage highway information centers
 - Expanded mission to provide tourism information to travelers
 - Challenged with maintenance and operations of failing systems.
- 1997 – Buildings & General Services
 - Management transferred to Buildings & General Services
 - Expedite upgrade of facilities from rest areas to Information and Welcome Centers
 - Funding
 - Funded through Transportation Fund until FY 2007
 - Funded through General Fund for FY 2007 thru FY 2011

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In 1997 Governor Dean transferred the Information Center Division to the Department of Buildings & General Services in order to expedite the update of facilities from rest areas to Information and Welcome centers. The 1997 Memorandum of Understanding between VTrans, ACCD, and BGS called for BGS to "...construct or renovate two rest areas per year until the program is complete." One of the features of the new facilities was an enhanced level of travel information available to the visitor. The new centers were upgraded to take advantage of initiatives such as information technology systems available to the state through federal grants.

Sites Closed in the 1990s

In 1993, the legislature (Act 59) authorized the Agency of Transportation and ACCD to close:

1. Putney (northbound I-91) -- closed in 1993
2. Coventry (northbound I-91) - closed in 1995
3. Fairfax (northbound I-89) -- never closed; now known as Georgia North

Subsequent legislation temporarily delayed or stopped some of those closures. However, the 1995 Legislature (Act 60) adopted a plan to close 7 rest areas to save \$1.3 million while renovating the remaining 13. Those identified to close included:

1. Coventry (northbound I-91) - closed in 1995
2. Bradford (southbound I-91) - closed in 1995
3. Sharon (northbound I-89) - never closed
4. Sharon (southbound I-89) - never closed
5. Westminster (southbound I-91) - closed in 1995
6. Georgia (northbound I-89) - never closed
7. Fairfax (southbound I-89) - never closed

1996 legislation (Act 183) called for the razing of Bradford Southbound (I-91) and Coventry Northbound (I-91). Partly in response to public outcry, Act 183 of the Acts of 1996 reversed segments of Act 60 of 1995 and called for the renovation of multiple sites.

- Continued operation of Sharon Northbound (I-89)
- A study committee to report on closing/combining Fairfax/Georgia/Highgate
- Fairfax Southbound will be reopened
- Georgia Northbound will remain closed

To recap, only four of the seven sites identified in 1993 and 1995 were actually closed and subsequently razed:

1. Putney (northbound I-91) in 1993
2. Bradford (southbound I-91) in 1995
3. Coventry (northbound I-91) in 1995
4. Westminster (southbound I-91) in 1995

2009 Closures

In 2009, the Legislature authorized (Act 50) the closing of four visitor centers. The following sites were closed in February of 2009 and subsequently razed by the Agency of Transportation.

1. Hartford (northbound I-91)
2. Highgate (southbound I-89)
3. Randolph (northbound I-89)
4. Sharon (southbound I-89)

Additional language in Act 50 allowed the adjustment in hours of operation at all remaining sites. In August-November of 2009, the hours of operation at 9 of the remaining 15 sites were reduced to 12-hour days; 4 sites remain open 16-hour per day (Sharon, Guilford, Williston North, and Williston South); 2 sites have more restricted hours (Alburgh and Montpelier).

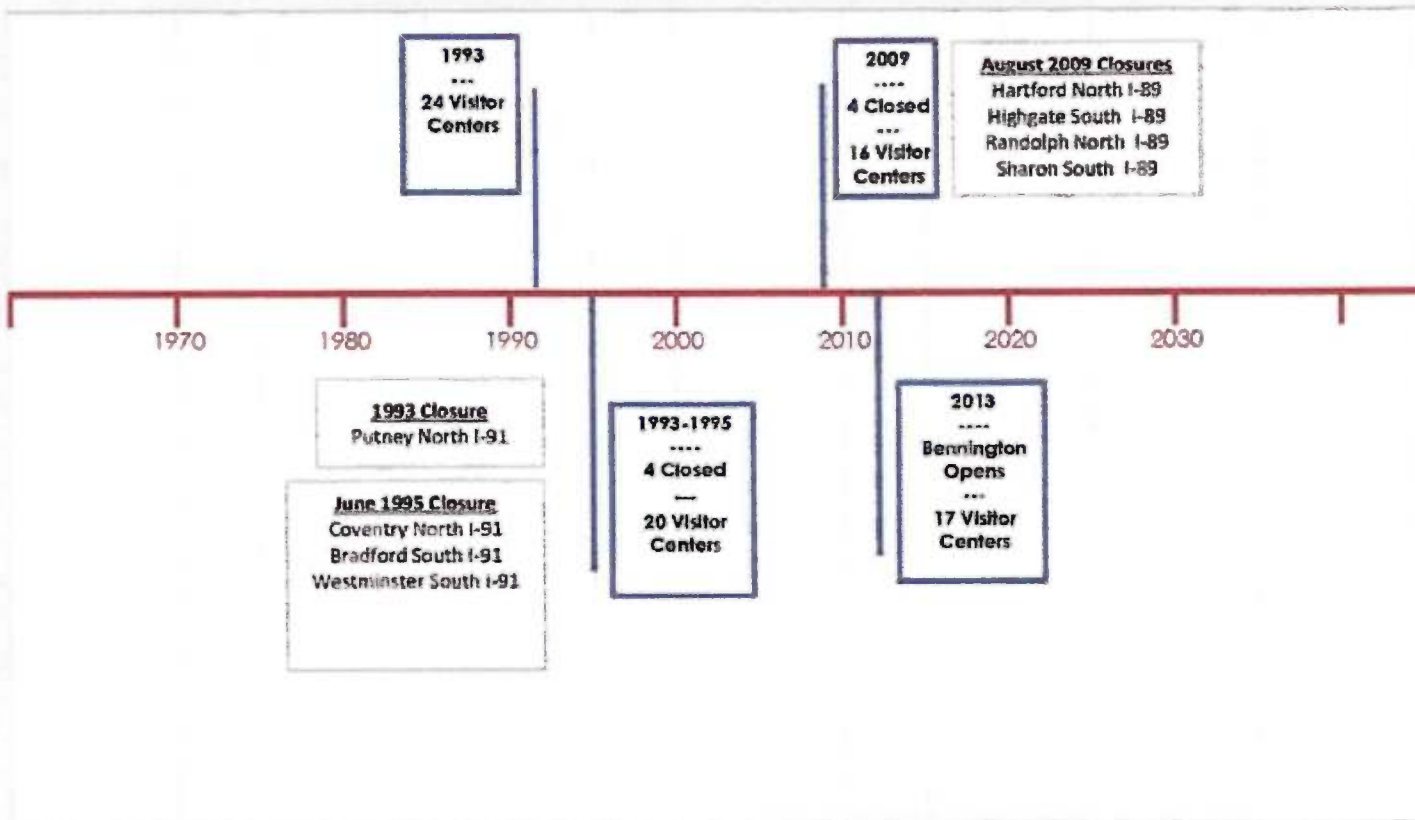
Construction/Renovation of Sites in 1995 thru 2013

| | | |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1995 | Bradford | renovation |
| 1995 | Waterford | renovation |
| 1996 | Alburgh | new construction |
| 1996 | Lyndon | renovation |
| 1997 | Fair Haven | renovation |
| 1998 | Montpelier Visitor Center | opened |
| 1999 | Georgia North and South | renovation |
| 1999 | Guilford Welcome Center | new construction |
| 2002 | Williston North & South | new construction |
| 2005 | Sharon North | new construction |
| 2012 | Hartford South | new construction * |
| 2013 | Bennington Welcome Center | new construction ** |

* Hartford expected to reopen in spring of 2012

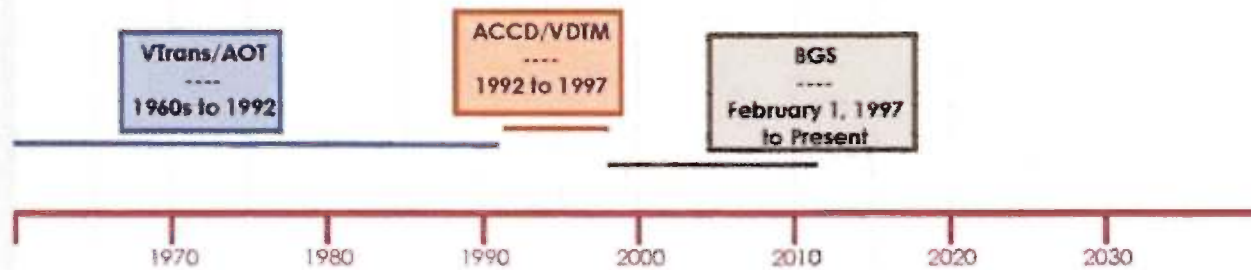
** Bennington expected to open in July 2013

Number of Visitor Centers – 1993 to 2013



2011-12-28/DWF

Operation of Visitor Centers -- 1960s to Present



Authority to Operate

Agency of Transportation: Owner of land and facilities.

Department of Tourism & Marketing: Act 144 of 1992, Section 250 - transferred 24 positions from VTrans to ACCD.

Department of Buildings & General Services -- 1997 MOU with VTrans; Act 18 of 1999, Section 39(3)

2011-12-16/DWF

VERMONT INFORMATION CENTERS DIVISION - TODAY

The Current Network of Visitor Centers

The Vermont Information Centers Division (VICD) is a division within the Department of Buildings & General Services. Today's mission has been expanded from the early 60's to include a strong marketing function.

Vermont Information Centers Division

Mission...

- VICD Mission
 - Provide travel information and a safety break to travelers that is accountable and fiscally responsible
 - Serve as Vermont's Billboards
 - Promote the "Vermont Experience" by marketing Vermont's businesses, attractions and events to the traveling public

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The VICD program consists of 16 centers; this includes twelve (12) State-run visitor centers and four (4) partnered locations.

Vermont Information Centers Division

Program Overview...



- 16 Information/Welcome Centers
 - 4 Sites Closed February 2009*
- 4 Supervisory Districts
- 30 Classified Employees
- 42 Temporary Employees
- Hours of Operation Vary **
 - 9 facilities reduced to 12-hour days
- Predominantly single-layer staffing
- 318 Miles of Interstate Highway
- General Fund Program (removed from Transportation Fund as of FY 2007)
- Division Website:
http://bgs.vermont.gov/information_centers

* 4 facilities closed in February 2009: Highgate, Hartford North, Randolph North, Sharon South
** 4 facilities operate 16 hours/day (Gullford, Sharon, Williston North, and Williston South) since 2009-08-16; 9 facilities operate 12 hours/day (Derby, Lyndon, Bradford, Georgia North and Georgia South, Waterford, Randolph, Hartford, Fair Haven); Alburgh and White River 8 hours; Montpelier 11 hours.

Program Operations

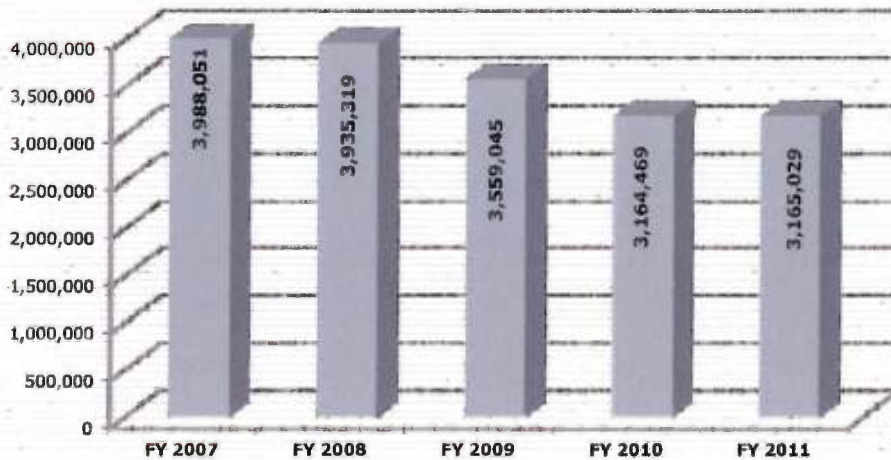
- Operate 12 state-run visitor centers and provide oversight at the 4 partnered locations
 - Monitor visitor count statistics
 - Collected daily per site
 - Annual data reporting
 - Provide staffing for 12 sites
 - Provide clean, safe facilities
 - Provide information of interest to the traveling public
 - Four partnered locations:
 - Williston North
 - Williston South
 - Georgia South
 - White River Junction (grant)

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Visitation

Overall Visitor Count

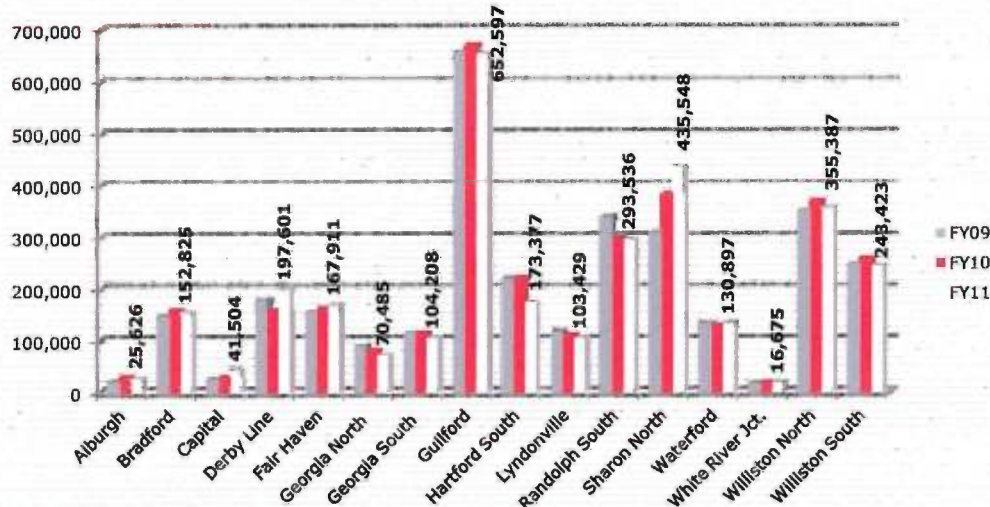
Overall Visitor Count - FY 2007-2011



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Visitor Count Per Site

Visitor Count Per Site FY 2009-2011...



Note: The amounts shown represent the FY 2011 Visitor Count at each site.

AMBASSADOR TRAINING PROGRAM

The Ambassador Program was created by the Vermont Information Centers Division (VICD) Training Team to prepare their employees to serve the 4 million visitors who stop at the visitor centers along Vermont’s major highways. The Team devised testing modules (e.g., customer service, Vermont historic sites, Vermont attractions, etc.) that are administered electronically. The Team worked with community partners to develop additional statewide tests and tests relevant to specific regions of the State and to the businesses and attractions within those regions (e.g., NEK, Okemo Valley, etc.).

There had long been an identified need for Vermont information to be available to travelers in locations where the traditional “information centers” are not available. In conjunction with the Ambassador Training Program, the Department of Tourism and Marketing (VDTM), has spearheaded an initiative to fill this identified void in visitor services and to create a system of information providers throughout the State. Businesses and organizations that complete this training will have the opportunity to post a simple INFO sign that will alert the traveling public to a family-friendly location where visitors can expect information and rest room facilities are available.



SEE: Ambassador Map in the Appendix illustrates the INFO locations that have been established through VDTM.

Ambassador Training Program

Training Component/Quality Control

- Reinforce Division goals and missions
 - Measure, clarify, and unify standards
 - Provide a common level of understanding about the services we provide
 - Customer Service (2004-2007)
 - Interpersonal Skills (2005)
 - Team Building (2006)
 - VICD Ambassador Program (2006-2007)
 - Online Ambassador Certification Program (2010)
-

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Facilities – New/Planned Construction

At the beginning of May 2011, construction began on a new facility at the Hartford Southbound (I-91) Information Center. This new facility is expected to open in the spring of 2012. The construction is funded by a federal earmark; this earmark also financed the sewer treatment facility in the Town of Hartford which also serves the Hartford Information Center.

Construction of the Bennington Welcome Center is expected to begin in the spring of 2012, with an opening anticipated for July 1, 2013. Again this is financed by a federal earmark of \$80-\$90 million for the Bennington Bypass and \$5-6 million for the construction of the facility.

Facilities -- System Preservation -- Major Maintenance Program for Rest Areas

FHWA has allowed states to use federal-aid funding for preventive maintenance activities that extend the service life of highway facilities. States have worked with FHWA to establish various preventive maintenance activities which include roadway activities such as seal coats, thin overlays, and restoration of drainage systems and bridge activities such as crack sealing, scour countermeasures and painting. Many other activities that were previously considered routine maintenance may be considered federal-aid eligible on an area-wide or system-wide basis as preventive maintenance. Our Vermont FHWA Division Office has recently indicated that there may be maintenance activities involving rest areas that could be construed as preventive maintenance. They are willing to work with the Agency of Transportation and the Department of Buildings and General Services to determine which activities are federal-aid eligible.

Financial Information – Rest Area Capital Expenditures FY 1999 – FY 2011

The rest area capital expenditures that were budgeted and expended over the past 13 years can be seen in the VTrans chart in the Appendix.

Vermont Information Centers Division/BGS

| | FY 2008 | FY 2009 | FY 2010 | FY 2011 |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Operation Expenditures | \$4,901,496.98 | \$4,670,411.86 | \$4,030,377.51 | \$3,891,421.79 |
| Major Maintenance | \$51,630.61 | \$25,793.12 | \$162,262.39 | \$113,113.76 |

VTrans Capital Construction

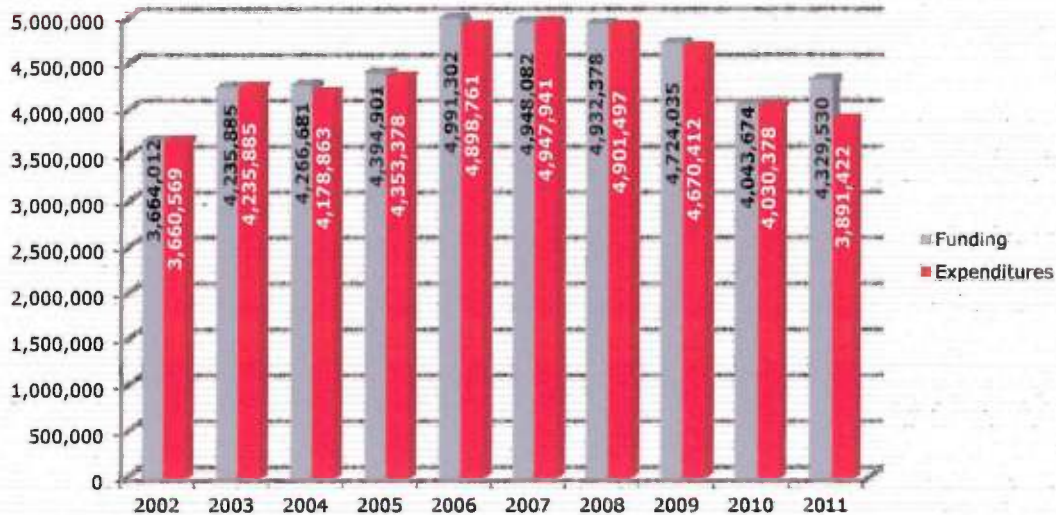
| Project Name & Number | FY 2008 | | FY 2009 | | FY 2010 | | FY 2011 | |
|--|----------|-----|----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | PE | CON | PE | CON | PE | CON | PE | CON |
| Bennington NH 019-1(28) Welcome Center | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$82,087 | \$0 | \$361,363 | \$0 |
| Fair Haven NH BLDG(9) Parking Improvements | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$2,992 | \$0 | \$47,070 | \$0 |
| Hartford IM BLDG(6) Reconstruction of SB Rest Area | \$850 | \$0 | \$5,902 | \$0 | \$135,850 | \$0 | \$12,671 | \$8,941 |
| Hartford IM BLDG(10) Sewer Line | \$86,761 | \$0 | \$30,734 | \$1,453,991 | \$0 | \$656,935 | \$0 | \$168,160 |
| Statewide | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| | \$87,611 | | \$36,636 | \$1,453,991 | \$220,929 | \$656,935 | \$421,104 | \$177,101 |

PE = Preliminary Engineering

CON = Construction

Funding & Expenditures

Funding & Expenditures – FY 2002-2011



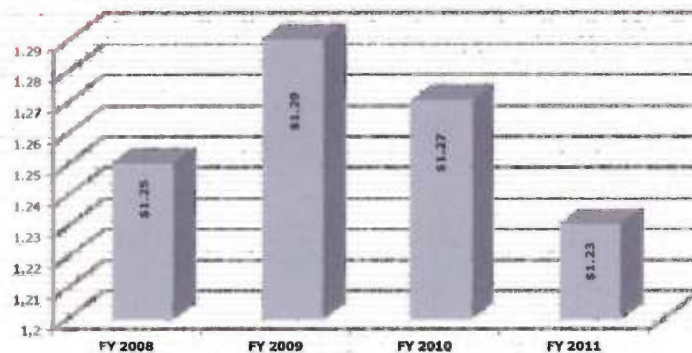
Note: General Fund FY 2007 thru FY 2011.

9

Financial Information – Overall Cost Per Visitor

Cost Per Visitor

Overall Cost Per Visitor FY 2008-2011...



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Commercialization of Visitor Centers

The current surface transportation law prohibits interstate rest areas built after January 1, 1960 from offering commercial services like food and fuel. Federal laws and regulations state very clearly that no charge may be made to the traveling public except for phones and articles dispensed from vending machines (23 CFR 752.7(g)). Congress "grandfathered in" existing commercial rest areas when it passed this general prohibition, which is why some states are allowed to operate commercial facilities on some of their roadways.

Despite Vermont's 2003 legislative approval to pursue the sale of Vermont products at visitor centers, federal prohibitions prevent the State from considering any commercial activities at any of the State-owned visitor centers. The U. S. Code (USC) and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) governs commercial activities on the interstate. VTrans and the State of Vermont agree to follow these rules when they use Federal Aid Highway Funds to construct visitor centers.

*23 USC 111 and 23 CFR 752.5 state "No charge to the public may be made for goods or services except telephone and articles dispensed by vending machines."
23 CFR 1.23(b) states "...the use of the ROW shall be devoted exclusively to highway purposes." (From Lawrence Dwyer, Acting Division Administrator, FHWA, Vermont Division)*

The following language from the 2009 Transportation Bill directed the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to approach the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Vermont's congressional delegation to discuss exemptions or changes to the current privatization laws that would allow for commercialization to take place.

*Act 50 of 2009, Transportation Bill (H.0438)
Sec. 105. REST AREA COMMERCIALIZATION*

By July 1, 2009, the secretary of the agency of transportation shall:

- (1) request from the Federal Highway Administration a waiver from the provisions of Title 23, section 111 of the United States Code prohibiting commercial establishments from operating at rest areas along the interstate highway system; and*
- (2) seek the assistance of the state's federal congressional delegation for the purpose of securing the waiver.*

In June of 2009, then-VTrans Secretary David Dill wrote to both FHWA and Vermont's congressional delegation seeking assistance in obtaining a waiver from the 23 USC 111 and 23 CFR 752.8 requirements relative to the sale of material by commercial entities at interstate rest areas and welcome centers. Ernest Blais, FHWA Division Administrator responded that "FHWA does not have authority to waive the legislation requirements of 23 USC 111 or 23 CFR 752.8." (A copy of those letters can be found in the Appendix.)

Opposition from Business Community: Opposition to commercializing rest areas has been expressed by various members of the Vermont business community. There is fear for the economic impact that could result from the sale of goods on the highways - drawing potential business away from downtown community businesses.

American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials: VTrans Secretary David Dill attended a 2010 Board of Directors meeting of the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO); he provided documentation of the group's discussion that was generated by the downturn in the economy. State Transportation Secretaries/Commissioners are on the BOD -- representatives from 15 states participated in the discussion. Information was presented on a survey of states (35 states responded) - states

provided the number of rest areas that had been closed, the reasons for closure, identified solutions/remedies, ideas for pilots or limited commercialization, and current law. The document also outlined the obstacles and opportunities under current law. (See the complete "CEO Roundtable Discussion Commercialization of Rest Areas: Summary Brief for BOD Meeting" in the Appendix.)

2011 Inquiry: In early 2011, encouraged by AASHTO, VICD again questioned the possibility of selling goods at those sites not located on the interstate highways - Alburgh, Fair Haven, and Bennington. Because these facilities were built with federal funds, the prohibition applies to those locations as well.

Randolph-Sheppard Act: As stated above, Federal laws and FHWA regulations regarding rest areas prohibit any charge to the public for goods and services; however, there is an exception permitted in statute (23 USC 111(b)), for telephones or articles dispensed through vending machines. This provision specifies that vending machines may be installed to dispense "such food, drink, and other articles as the State transportation department determines as appropriate and desirable." The phrase "other articles opens sales to any item that can be sold in a vending machine, but the statute also requires that priority must be given to Randolph-Sheppard Act agencies. The Act provides rights and privileges for the blind and visually impaired to operate concession services at rest areas on the Interstate System. The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) is Vermont's designated Randolph-Sheppard Act agency. DBVI currently has vending machines in 12 of the 16 VICD sites.

Vending Program - Vermont Division of the Blind & Visually Impaired

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) receives commissions from vending machine sales on the interstate according to the Randolph-Sheppard law. The revenue is used to create a summer work experience program for youth ages 16 to 24 that are blind or visually impaired. The program is called Learn, Earn, and Prosper (LEAP) which is a collaboration of several organizations including the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC), the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Linking Learning to Life, ReSource, and the Gibney Family Foundation. This partnership allows students from around the State to participate in a residential work experience where they learn critical independent living and job skills. This early success in the work world with appropriate support and accommodations is a catalyst for lifelong employment. The experience gives students a solid set of independent living skills, a high degree of self-confidence, and brings out a passion to go on for additional training and education so that they will become productive wage-earning members of society.

The DBVI also collaborates with VYCC for a public-private partnership to support the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) for people who are blind to run small snack bar businesses on state property. In essence we have partnered with the VYCC, a private, non-profit organization who bring a high level of entrepreneurialism to the BEP. This public-private partnership while new to us is something VYCC has been doing with state government for a long time. The partnership allows both of us to do what we do best and the results have been impressive. Sales at a snack bar in Burlington run by a blind operator have gone from \$40 a day to more than \$250 dollars a day in sales since VYCC has partnered with us to provide the appropriate training and support for the blind operator. No state or federal funds are needed for either of these programs because it is sustained through revenue from vending commissions on the interstate. (See more information regarding the LEAP Program in the Appendix)

Marketing - Promotions

VICD centers provide free display space to promote Vermont businesses and attractions. Each location schedules rotating displays with area businesses and attractions from their region of the State. Many businesses have provided furniture or stoves for the centers that remain for years. A placard is displayed to tell of their donation.

Vermont Information Centers Division

Promotions

- Promote the Vermont experience to our visitors through:
 - Statewide brochure distribution
 - Free display space
 - Live demonstrations
 - Event banner display
 - Event promotions
 - Visitor referrals
 - Promotional display panels
 - Static Interactive Displays



Static display at Gullford Welcome Center

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Marketing -- Brochure Program

All sales and management for the VICD Brochure Program operates out of the Fair Haven Welcome Center. There is a contract with an outside vendor to warehouse and distribute brochures to all VICD locations. In CY 2011, 3.8 million advertising pieces were distributed. This represents 533 brochure customers.

Vermont Information Centers Division

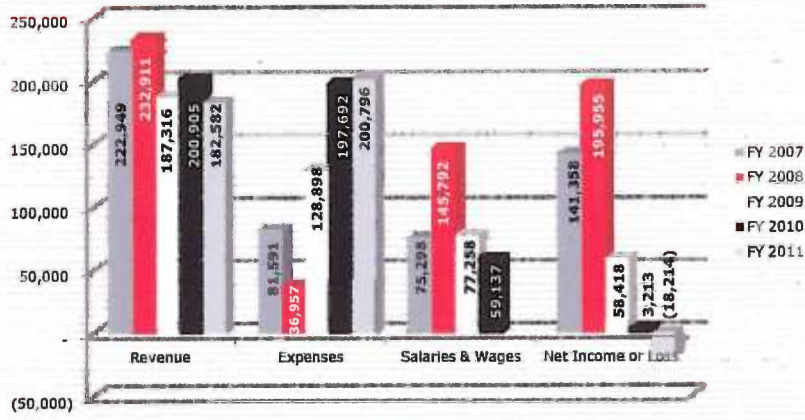
Brochure Program

- Manage a successful Brochure Program
 - Monitor rates, revenue, and usage
 - May 1, 2011 to November 30, 2011
 - 533 individual pieces registered
 - 64 new registrants
 - Over 3,800,000 brochures and publications distributed
 - Potential to reach over 3,000,000 visitors at VICD sites
 - Closing of four VICD sites in February of 2009 has impacted revenues.

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Brochure Program Revenue

Brochure Revenues FY 2007-2011



Since 2003 inception: Total revenue : \$1,597,817.76 Total net income: \$23,206.19

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Marketing - Advertising Panel Sales

The Advertising Sales program is managed from the VICD Montpelier location. There had been a contract in place through the Department of Tourism and Marketing that VICD utilized. However, the success of the advertising panels increased significantly once it was taken in-house.

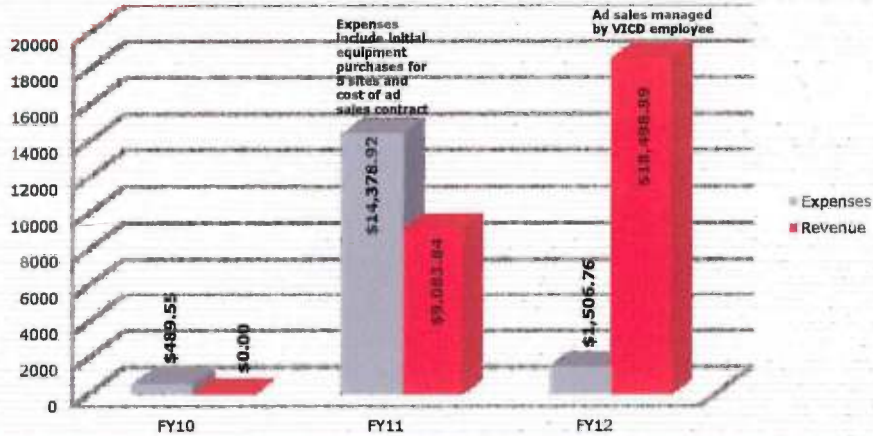
Marketing & Promotions

- O5 - Market Opportunities to Promote the Vermont Experience to Travelers.
- Outreach
 - Tell the VICD Story
 - Brochures
- Partners in Promotion
- Marketing
 - Entrepreneurial Efforts -- Selling Advertising Space
 - Contract through CMO/ACCD to sell advertising space
 - Frames and Skins Installed at 5 sites
 - Derby Line
 - Fair Haven
 - Guilford
 - Randolph
 - Sharon

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Marketing

**Advertising Sales -- Revenue & Expenditures
FY 2010 thru FY 2012 (to 11/30/11)**



FY 2011— Ad Sales Initiated at 5 sites: Derby, Sharon, Guilford, Randolph, Fair Haven
 Total expenditures since inception: \$16,375.23
 Total revenue since inception: \$27,582.73
 Total Sales since inception: \$39,523.20

Coffee Break Program

The (VICD) coffee break program began in 1999 with a pilot program that partnered the VICD sites with Green Mountain Coffee Roasters (GMCR). During the pilot, GMCR provided the equipment and the coffee and VICD provided the manpower to make the coffee available to the traveling public. During this two-year pilot, \$52,683 in donations was collected.

Once the success of the program was evident, in 2001 a Request for Proposal was issued to find a vendor who would be interested to provide their equipment and product at a discounted price in exchange for advertising in the VICD sites. GMCR was selected, and the program was instituted in 16 VICD sites. The program continues to serve GMCR coffee.

Thirteen sites currently participate in the Coffee Program. Guilford Welcome Center has not participated in the program; the Vermont Division of the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) Vending Program (under the Randolph-Sheppard Act) offers GMCR coffee at that location. The coffee revenues from the Williston North, Williston South, and Georgia South locations are the property of the Lake Champlain Regional Planning Commission (LCRCC) that operates those sites.

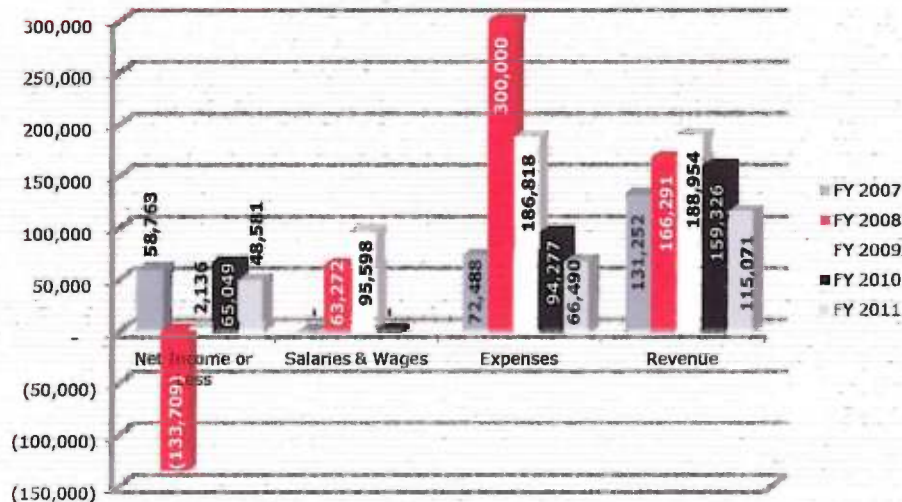
Coffee Program

- F3 – Manage and provide oversight for the Coffee Program
 - Monitor donations and expenditures
 - Offered to promote traveler’s safety break.
 - Green Mountain Coffee Roasters coffee is provided at all VICD sites.
 - Exception: Guilford – Vending Program of the Division of the Blind & Visually Impaired provides coffee at this site (Randolph-Sheppard Act).

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Coffee Fund Expenses & Revenue

Coffee Fund FY 2007-2011



- FY 2008 and 2009 Salaries & Wages reflects personnel expenses associated with this program
- Since 2003 inception: Total revenue (from donations) - \$919,540.81 Net Income - \$131,885.17

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WIFI Program

Free WIFI is currently available at all VICD locations.

Vermont Information Centers Division

WIFI – Free Service

- F4 – Contract for WIFI services to provide free wireless internet access to the traveling public.
 - Monitor usage and expenditures
 - Free WIFI is available at all 16 VICD sites as of FY 2011.
 - VICD has paid all WIFI costs since September 2007 when the service became free to the traveling public
 - Accumulated Costs*
 - FY 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 = \$266,652.
 - Negotiated with contractor to reduce cost of monthly user fees from \$1.75 to \$0.75 per unique user

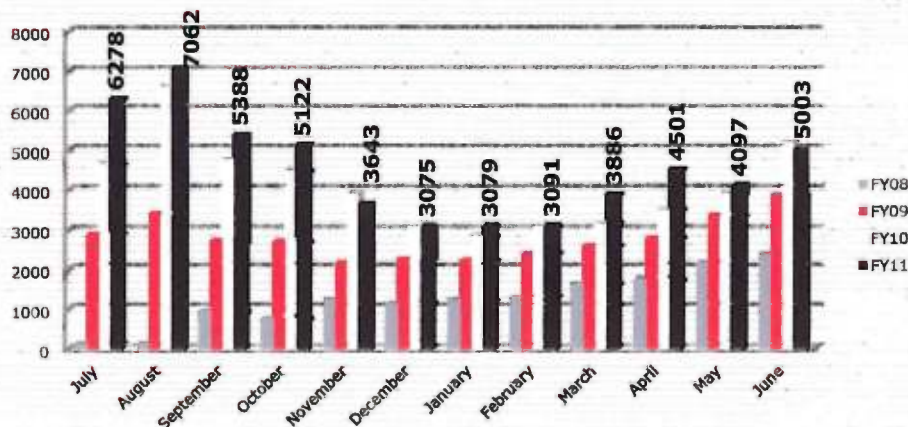
* Costs include monthly user fees (for each unique user) as well as operating costs.

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Vermont Information Centers Division

WIFI -- Growth of Utilization

Growth of Free WIFI Utilization
(Number of unique users/month – FY 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

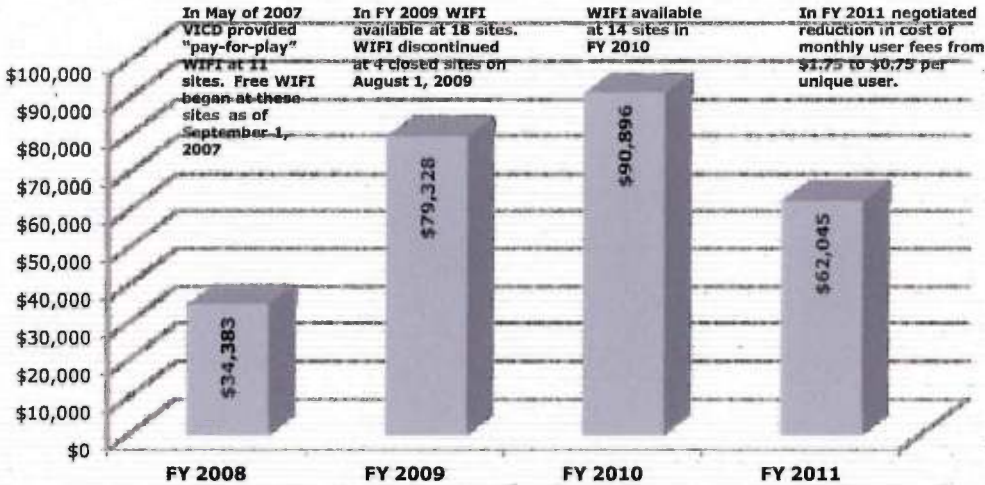


Note: WIFI offered free to traveling public beginning in September of 2007

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WIFI – Cost of Free Service

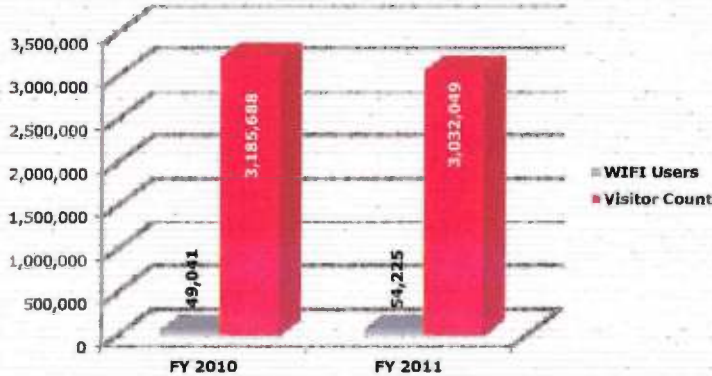
Cost of Free WIFI (FY 2008 thru FY 2011)



The program grew as technology/connectivity became available at additional sites. Free WIFI will be available at all 16 sites with the addition of Montpelier and White River Junction in CY 2011.

WIFI Utilization

Comparison WIFI Utilization & VICD Visitor Count FY 2010-2011
 * At only the 14 sites offering WIFI *



174,355 Total Users since May of 2007 inception
 103,266 Users in FY 2010 and FY 2011
 Utilization increased as additional sites were added
 All 16 sites will have WIFI by the end of CY 2011

FY 2010: 2% of visitors utilized WIFI
 FY 2011: 1% of visitors utilized WIFI

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

| | A | B | C |
|---|----------------------|---|--|
| 1 | TOPIC | QUESTION | ANSWER |
| 2 | Advertising | What are the rules regarding advertising at visitor centers? | All advertising must be restricted to the interior of a building or not be legible from the main traveled way if the facility is a bulletin board or kiosk (23CFR752.7(c)). Other provisions require that advertising must be limited to matters relating to the traveling public, equal access must be provided at reasonable rates to all advertisers considered qualified by the State, and at least 40% of the advertising space must be devoted free of charge to providing information to the traveling public and public service announcements. |
| 3 | Advertising | What can the advertising revenue be used for? | All revenue generated from the lease of advertising space is subject to 23USC156(c) which states that revenues attributable to the lease of real property on a federally funded project shall be used for projects eligible under title 23USC. A title 23 project is defined as highway construction including preliminary engineering, acquisition of ROW and actual construction or for highway planning and research. Generally, operations and routine maintenance are not considered eligible as title 23, but the division has in the past determined that revenues generated from the rest areas may be used for "preventative maintenance" or capital improvements to rest area facilities. |
| 4 | Define Rest Areas | What is the difference between a rest area, visitor center, information center, and a welcome center? | These terms are generally used to mean the same thing. In Vermont the welcome center distinction is reserved for a facility located at an entry point to the state, a rest area generally refers to a pull-off with no facility. |
| 5 | Design of Rest Areas | What is a basic rest area? | In accordance with Section 14 of Act 80 of 2005, the Department of Buildings & General Services, seeking to develop designs to serve as models for future rest areas, revisited two existing designs and made programmatic changes to reduce the size and cost of constructing rest area facilities while acknowledging that the design must be capable of meeting future needs in 10, 20, or even 30 years. SEE the Documents Available Upon Request List. |
| 6 | Design of Rest Areas | Why are our new visitor centers so big? What rules or guidelines do we use to build visitor centers? | Federal rules dictate that new visitor centers/rest areas be built to accommodate projected increases in visitation out 30 years. The Guideline for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways prepared by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) identifies the criteria states should use when designing and building new facilities. |
| 7 | Displays | What are the rules regarding the displays in visitor centers? | Our centers provide you with a direct link to the traveling public, offering you free exposure of your products or services. The theory is simple; attractive, inviting displays or demonstrations set up in our Information Centers to show our guests what really makes Vermont special! |
| 8 | Energy Alternatives | Are there electric charging stations in the rest areas? | There are currently no electric charging stations in Vermont rest areas. However, electric vehicles show great promise in reducing green house gas emissions and reducing the state's dependence on fossil fuels. State agencies are coordinated with an array of stakeholders to facilitate the deployment of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. State facilities, including rest areas and park-and-ride areas, will be considered as potential locations for this infrastructure in the months ahead. Issues such as parking capacity, costs, charging technology, and use of federally supported facilities for this purpose will all have to be addressed as the State moves forward to make electric vehicles a viable transportation option. |
| 9 | Energy Alternatives | What energy systems have been installed at rest areas? | There is a wind turbine at the Alburgh Welcome Center. Geo-thermal technology is used to heat/cool the Sharon Welcome Center. Solar panels and a wood pellet furnace are being installed at the new Hartford Information Center. |

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

| | A | B | C |
|----|--------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | TOPIC | QUESTION | ANSWER |
| 10 | Federal Regulations | Are visitor centers mandatory? | There are no federal or State requirements that compel states to operate visitor centers. However, when they do they are required to abide with federal rules governing these activities. If a state were to close down all visitor centers along the interstate, and there were no available services as there are in urban areas, FHWA would have serious concerns for public safety (see Truck Traffic below). |
| 11 | Federal Regulations | What rules (Federal and state) govern establishing or operating visitor centers? | 23 U.S.C. 111 - Access to Interstate 23 U.S.C. 156 - Lease Revenue from ROW Purchased with Federal Funds 23 C.F. R. 750 - Highway Beautification (Signing) 23 C.F.R. 752 - Landscape and Roadside Development State - See List of Legislation in the Appendix |
| 12 | Funding Source | What is the funding source for the operation of the Vermont Information Centers Division? | This has been a General Fund program since FY 2007. |
| 13 | Future Traffic Needs | What defines future traffic needs? | States use the AASHTO Guide for Development of Rest Areas on Major Arterials and Freeways. It includes guidance for upgrading existing rest areas as well as locating new rest areas. Traffic type and volume are two important pieces of data that are used in calculating the number of people using the facility which in turn determines the number of parking spaces as well as number of restrooms. Our rest areas on new location, like Bennington, are designed using the traffic 20 years into the future just like the roadway. Our existing facilities that are being upgraded/replaced also use future traffic data to determine if there are adequate number of truck parking spaces for example. In addition, the geometrics and design of the ramps leading into and out of the rest areas need to accommodate more traffic and in some instances like at Hartford Southbound the ramps need to be reconfigured to meet current standards and increased traffic. |
| 14 | Idling | What impact will idling laws have on truck traffic in rest areas? | This would impact the trucking industry who must leave their vehicles running in order to heat/cool vehicles. |
| 15 | Motorist Aid Refreshment Break | What are the criteria for a non-profit organization hosting a Refreshment Break? | The guidelines for Motorist Aid Refreshment Breaks can be found on the VICD website. SEE: http://bgs.vermont.gov/information_centers At the bottom of link in right hand column - application and guidelines for hosting a break. |
| 16 | New Construction | Are there plans to build new visitor centers? | Hartford South is under construction and will open to the public in the spring of 2012. A new center is scheduled to be built in Bennington; projected opening date is July 1, 2013. |
| 17 | Operation | Which State agencies and departments play a role in the operation of Vermont's State operated visitor centers? | Under an MOU the Department of Buildings and General Services is responsible for the day-to-day operations of Vermont's State visitor centers. The Agency of Transportation has ownership of the land and buildings, maintains parking lots and lighting and provides funding for operations. All state agencies have a vested interest in the marketing opportunities that are available at State visitor centers. |
| 18 | Privatization | Why don't you let private businesses run the rest areas? | Due to Federal prohibitions of commercialization, there is no financial incentive to entice private businesses to operate rest areas. |

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

| | A | B | C |
|----|------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | TOPIC | QUESTION | ANSWER |
| 19 | Right Sizing | What does right-sizing refer to relative to information centers? | SEE: Item #6 (above) "Design of Rest Areas" |
| 20 | Service Void | How would a "service void" be defined. | AASHTO (American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials) Guidelines recommend maximum spacing of 60 miles (one hour) between rest areas. Signage on highway notifies travelers if the distance is greater than 60 miles. SEE: Draft RFP that spells out the ideal -- truck parking, rest rooms, etc. |
| 21 | Staffing | What service do staff provide to the traveling public? | VICD staff provide travel information to visitors highlighting the businesses/attractions of Vermont; they promote the Vermont experience to our visitors. They also maintain the cleanliness of the facilities and grounds, including keep walkways free of snow and ice. Visitor centers are staffed for the safety of visitors; there have been incidents in the past that reinforce this decision. |
| 22 | Truck Traffic | What service do rest areas provide to the trucking industry? | Drivers are required by regulation to take mandatory rest breaks. The rest area provides a safe place for the truck driver to rest. In addition overall highway safety is improved as drivers are rested. |
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| 30 | Revised 2012-01-13/DWF | | |
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