

## **Randy Brock's Thoughts on Mass Transit in Franklin County**

Mass transit is a popular concept in theory. In a rural, thinly populated area such Franklin County, it is difficult to implement in practice. Public bus service provided by the Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) connecting St. Albans with Burlington appears to be a limited success, although route-specific profit and loss statistics are not available.

Within Franklin County, public transport, for now, is provided by the Northwest Vermont Public Transit Network (NVPTN) Inc., although CCTA will be assuming that function. Franklin County's public transit exists principally as a creature of Medicaid, to provide transportation the elderly and disabled in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties as well as medical trips to Medicaid-eligible residents. Its utility as a conventional mass transit facility to serve commuters and casual travelers is incidental to its main purpose. There is considerable question, given its limited schedules and low ridership as to whether it effectively serves either.

It is paid for almost exclusively through federal grants. Hours of operation and route schedules currently are inadequate to meet even minimal commuting needs. What is required is a detailed assessment to assess commuting needs, including working hours at key businesses and employee residence patterns to determine if mass transit is a viable Franklin County option and -- most important -- whether commuters are willing to pay for it. Last year, NVPTN had revenues of \$1,835,569, almost all of which were paid for by government. Total non-Medicaid fare box revenue was a paltry \$212. This strongly suggests that mass transit in Franklin County is not likely to be successful or cost-effective.

We must be exceedingly careful not to institute politically-correct mass transit systems that are neither cost-effective nor useful. The millions of dollars squandered on the ill-fated Champlain Flyer, the commuter rail connection between Burlington and Charlotte, should remain fixed in our memory.