

Bennington County Regional Plan

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Bennington County Regional Commission
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Bennington County Regional Plan

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places, as well as diverse entertainment and activities.

Developing those types of dynamic places is, of course, an economic development initiative in and of itself. And many of the people who would be attracted by those great downtowns are the kind of people who might have an interest in opening a business there. The Better Bennington Corporation, community and economic development offices in Manchester and Bennington, local chambers of commerce, and organized [young professional groups](#) in the Northshire and Southshire have recognized this need and are working to encourage appropriate development and activities.

Infrastructure

The region's communities are generally well-served by public and private infrastructure, but clear needs exist in certain areas. While the area is served by a modern highway system, it lacks good access to the intercity passenger rail network. Extension of rail service to the region would not only provide direct access to the area from large population centers, but also would necessitate track improvements that would benefit freight rail service as well. Another concern on the transportation front is the quality of highway access between Bennington and Troy, New York, especially the section of NY Route 7 just east of Troy where commercial development and traffic volumes can lead to significant congestion and delays. These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter X of this Plan.

The region's two main growth centers, Manchester in the Northshire and Bennington in the Southshire, each are well-served by municipal water and wastewater systems. In many of the smaller towns in the region, however, a lack of either public water systems, wastewater systems, or both is a major impediment to all types of growth and development. In Arlington and Shaftsbury, for example, lack of a wastewater system severely limits potential for infill residential development in village centers and makes new commercial or industrial development all but impossible in these areas.

Vermont has invested and worked aggressively to bring broadband services to all parts of the state. High speed telecommunications currently is available throughout most of the region, with complete coverage still being pursued in some rural areas. Improvements in wireless/cell service for all carriers are still needed and all of the major providers currently are working to expand coverage. Bennington and Manchester also have each taken steps to assure the availability of free wifi internet service throughout their downtown areas.

Investment Capital

Economic development relies on significant investments of private funds, often leveraged with some type of public financing. The BCRC, BCIC, and municipalities are able to facilitate contact with state and federal agencies that potentially can provide loans, loan guarantees, tax credits, and other financial incentives to encourage private investment. Some towns also operate their own revolving loan funds, and can create other incentives through tax stabilization agreements, tax increment financing districts, and similar programs.

Another mechanism for incenting private investment is through active regional implementation of the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfield Program. The BCRC has obtained funds to conduct environmental assessments and develop remediation plans for vacant or

- Integrated communications, connecting components to open architecture for real-time information and control, allowing every part of the grid to both “talk” and “listen.”
- Sensing and measurement technologies to support more accurate and rapid monitoring, time-of-use pricing, and demand management.
- Advanced components to provide for superconductivity and storage of electricity.
- Control methods to monitor essential components enabling rapid diagnosis and precise solutions to any anomalous event.
- Improved interfaces and decision support for system operators and managers.

An extremely large investment in research and development will be required to implement smart grids and considerable federal funding has been directed toward this effort recently. It is important to note that this important new way of using electricity will rely on many new small generating facilities, distributed throughout the grid -- and most certainly within Bennington County -- as well as conservation through reduced demand. The technological aspects of demand management will need to be combined with ongoing conservation efforts to achieve a successful solution.

11.5 Information and Telecommunication Services

Bennington County is served by a modern and rapidly developing information infrastructure. Access to broadband internet connectivity and consistent wireless communication services, for voice and data, have become increasingly important to residents, schools, colleges, institutions, local businesses, and visitors to the region. Vermont has committed to ensuring that all parts of the state have access to broadband within the near future, with an ultimate goal of universal coverage at extremely fast fiber optic speeds of 100 mbps download and upload by the year 2024. Information on broadband service and maps showing current service status and planned upgrades can be found at broadbandvt.org. An important recent broadband project in the region involved extension of fiber optic cable to schools, libraries, and other “community anchors.” Extensions from this network will help provide greatly enhanced broadband coverage throughout the region.

Cellular telephone service providers have been steadily expanding their coverage area within the region with the installation of new towers and antennas at strategic locations. The widespread availability and use of tablet computers and handheld wireless phones, including “smart phones,” that offer portable access to the internet has led to an even greater demand for these wireless facilities.

The infrastructure required for wireless communication services include towers, antennas, equipment buildings, access roads, and electrical service. Bennington County is a challenging area for the development of wireless communication infrastructure. The narrowness of the inhabited valleys and highly visible slopes and ridges of the surrounding mountains require careful siting to ensure that adequate coverage is efficiently provided while not having undue adverse impacts on natural or scenic resources. Those concerns can be minimized by careful planning that includes siting antennas on existing buildings or structures, co-location of antennas on towers to limit the number of towers, and careful site design to avoid sensitive areas and avoid disruption of viewsheds identified as particularly important to local communities.

The Vermont Public Service Board has regulatory jurisdiction over the siting of telecommunica-



Narrow profile monopole towers such as this one tend to be less visually intrusive than larger lattice towers and towers with widely spaced arrays of antennas. “Stealth” towers designed to appear as trees or other landscape features can be effective, but only if they appear as natural parts of their surroundings.

tion facilities, weighing the public good of a proposal together with its environmental and social impacts. Municipal and regional plans are given consideration by the Public Service Board, so it is important that those plans include clear policy guidelines regarding sensitive areas, tower height, co-location requirements, and other factors. In some cases it may be preferable to develop one tall (140 feet or more) tower that provides coverage over a relatively wide area in a location where identified local and regional impacts can be avoided. In other cases, two or more smaller and lower towers (90 feet in height and possibly using a “monopole” design) might be needed to provide the same coverage while avoiding impacts to natural and scenic resources or residential neighborhoods.

Of course, print media, broadcast, cable, and satellite television, and local radio stations remain critical components of the region’s information infrastructure. Most of those services also now make use of digital outlets to deliver their content to the public. One daily newspaper, the [Bennington Banner](#), is published in the region. The [Rutland Herald](#)

also provides news coverage of Bennington County communities and is widely read in the area. The [Manchester Journal](#) is a weekly newspaper that provides coverage throughout the Northshire. The [Vermont News Guide](#) includes community announcements, letters, and classified advertisements.

Local broadcast television stations with signals that reach all or part of the region include network stations from the Albany, New York and Burlington, Vermont areas. Because of the distance from those cities and the mountainous topography in Bennington County, most people rely on cable and satellite television. Cable and satellite television companies also provide access to a wide variety of programming and often pair their services with internet and telephone communication as well. Local public access television stations —[GNAT-TV](#) in the Northshire and [CAT-TV](#) in the Southshire— are extremely important to local communities, providing an outlet for locally produced shows and regular coverage of municipal government, school district, and other public meetings.

[Vermont Public Radio](#) transmits high definition news and entertainment coverage from transmitters in Bennington, Manchester, Rupert, and Sunderland. [WBTV](#) is an important local AM station serving the Bennington market, while [WEQX](#) is an FM station broadcasting from Manchester.