



# Vermont Employers and Transportation Change: A Case Study

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October 26, 2010

# *Presentation Overview*

## *An Experiment in Rural Public Transit:*

Community leaders, an engaged local business, and transportation authorities in two counties work together to pursue commuter bus service for a rural Vermont town

# *The Community Partners*



**ACTR**  
transportation  
for everyone

# NRG Systems

- 2009 Sales: \$42 MM
- 113 employees
- LEED-Gold facility, with electricity supplied by solar and wind energy
- Commitment to environmentally sustainable practices company-wide and in Vermont and the U.S.



# *Hinesburg Rides*

Offers three volunteer-driven programs:

- Rideshare – Connecting Hinesburg residents for shared commuting and travel
- Volunteer Drivers – Providing rides for neighbors to medical appointments, shopping, and other needs
- Employee Partners – Building low-cost, environmentally sustainable commuting options with local businesses



# ***Town of Hinesburg, Vermont***

- Small rural community chartered in 1762 – 6 miles square with population of about 4,500
- Village includes 4-town union high school, several manufacturers, and local businesses and services
- 15 miles from Burlington on State Highway 116, the main Burlington route for eastern Champlain Valley



# *Hinesburg's Transportation Challenges*

## *Transportation infrastructure:*

- 65+ miles of highway and 42% paved roads
- 1.75 miles of sidewalk
- No bicycle lanes
- No public transit

## *Problems to solve:*

- Severe commuter congestion on Route 116
- 35% of daily trips don't start or stop in Hinesburg
- During 7 – 8 AM commute, 91% of cars were driver only

*Source: Center for Rural Studies (2005) and Transportation Research Center (2009), University of Vermont*

# ***Building Hinesburg Commuter Bus Service***

- CCTA identified Route 116 commuter service between Hinesburg and Burlington as a high priority in 2003
- Over 1,500 Hinesburg residents commute daily to Burlington and other Chittenden County destinations
  - An estimated 250 people from Burlington suburbs travel to Hinesburg-based jobs
  - 900 residents in Route 116 towns to the south commute to or through Hinesburg each day





# *Why the Bus Matters for Our Town*

- Reliable public transit is core infrastructure for a healthy community, like strong schools and services
- Public transit is a tool for sustained economic growth, attracting and retaining companies that generate jobs

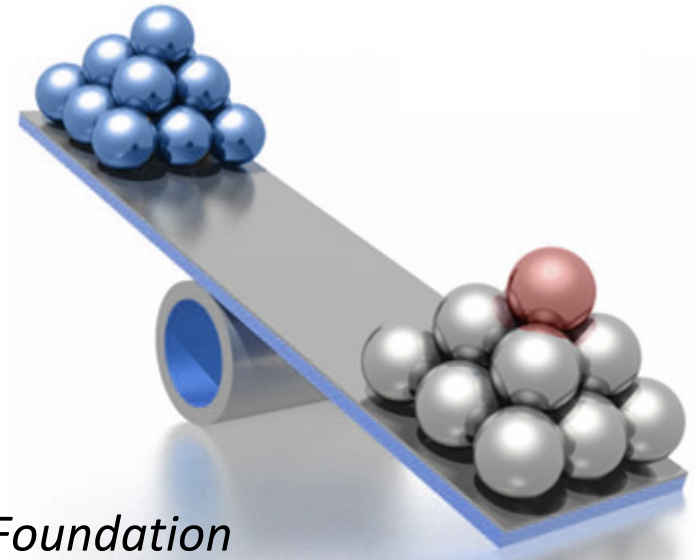


- Bus service will support two vulnerable groups: older adults and lower-income people
- Improved public transport may help land a new business in a vacant Hinesburg factory, closed due to fire in 2008

# *An Added Multiplier Effect*

From December 2008 study (Shapiro & Mathur):

Philanthropic investments in public affairs and community infrastructure programs have the highest multiplier effect – 22:1 – of any form of philanthropy



*Source: Vermont Community Foundation*

# ***Evolution of the Bus Proposal: Concept #1***



NRG Systems-convened meeting in March 2008 – “What if we want to get bus service in our town in 6 months, not 6 years?”

*Result:* CCTA and ACTR delivered parallel proposals for Route 116 commuter service within their defined areas – Hinesburg north to Burlington for \$56,000/year and Bristol north to Hinesburg for \$55,000/year

# ***Evolution of the Bus Proposal: Concept #1***

*Why the first idea didn't work:*

- Costs not sustainable because there is no federal subsidy – service stops when NRG checks stop
- Funding would run out before ridership established – no long-term change in commuting habits
- One bus can't be in two places at once – commuter hours will fit residents or employees, not both
- No town buy-in for “NRG's bus”

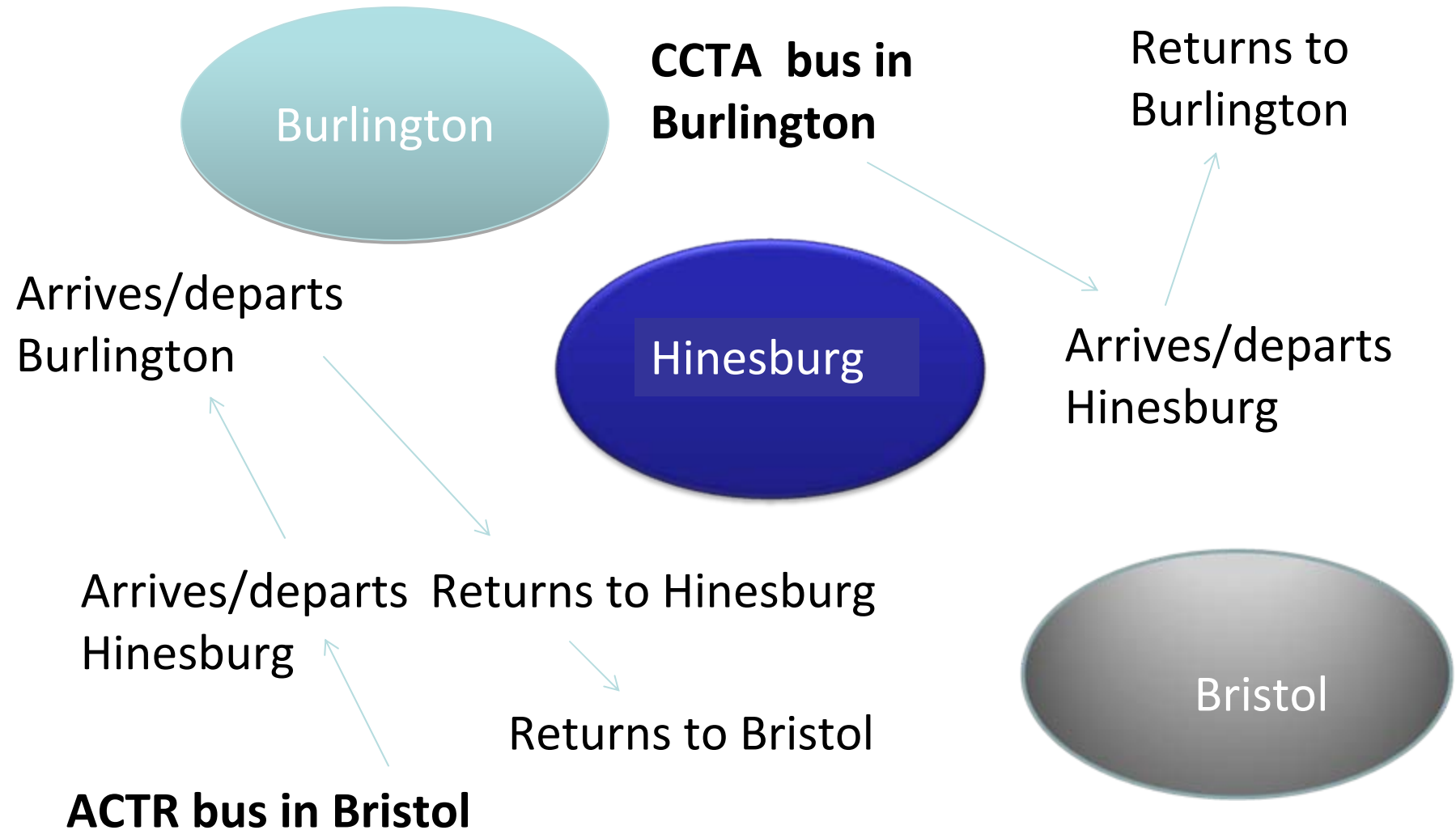
## ***Evolution of the Bus Proposal: Concept #2***

*Parameters for the new proposal:*

- Deliver adequate commuter service so people will actually ride the bus
- Offer both Hinesburg residents and employees good commuter options
- Maximize federal funding to reduce Hinesburg's and NRG's share
- Look for route efficiencies and scale of service to fit our rural community



## Concept #2: Combined CCTA/ACTR Service



# *Hinesburg/NRG Systems Partnership*

*NRG Systems agreed:*

- Donate the 10% capital match and other upfront costs – about \$38,000 over 2 years
- Consider additional support to help the Town meet estimated annual operating costs of \$34,000 for the bus in future years
- Donate staff time to support Hinesburg Rides on public outreach, press releases, and presentations



# *Hinesburg/NRG Systems Partnership*

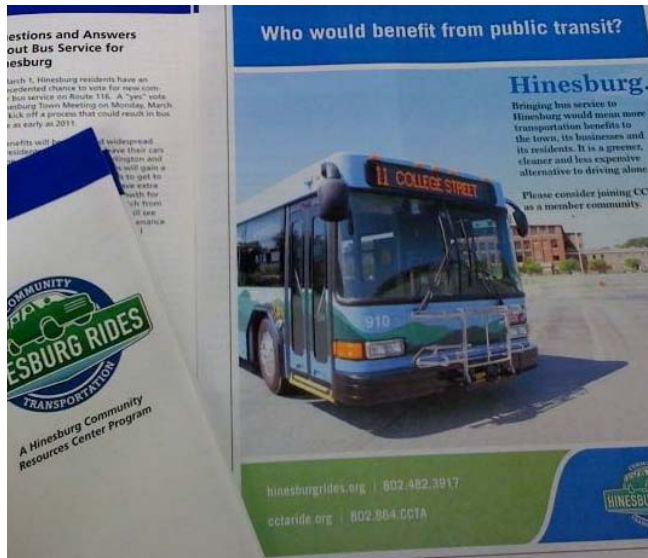
*To move forward on the bus, the Town would have to:*

- Vote yes at Town Meeting to join CCTA as member township
- Set aside Town funds equal to half-year service – about \$13,000, or \$6.61/year in taxes for typical household
- To cover 20% operating costs in future years, pending successful advocacy for new route





# ***Selling the Idea to Local Residents and Businesses***



- Public presentation to Select Board to add bus vote to Town Meeting agenda and budget
- Media campaign via local paper and *Burlington Free Press*
- All-residents mailing of Town Meeting alert and FAQ brochure
- Presentation to business/professional association and workplace discussions, resulting in 5 key endorsements
- Well-attended community information meeting prior to vote, supported by CCTA and ACTR

# *March 2010 Town Meeting*



# *Next steps for the bus*



# Questions?

