

Vermont Better Roads Program: More Funding and a New Name
Applications due April 15

History. Established in 1997, the Better Backroads Program of the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) provides financial and technical assistance to support municipal road projects that protect and improve water quality in Vermont's lakes and streams. These road projects also lower maintenance costs. The program had previously been under the direction of the Northern Vermont Resource Conservation and Development Council until 2013, when VTrans assumed its management and implementation in coordination with the Department of Environmental Conservation of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR DEC). The program's focus has been to inventory, prioritize, plan, and correct road-related erosion problems through cost-effective road drainage and erosion control techniques on municipal gravel back roads.

Program Changes. With additional funding in FY17 from the Transportation Bill and Act 64, the program now also includes paved municipal roads, hence the slight name change to Vermont Better Roads. The program is adding two additional grant categories (C and D) and increasing the maximum grant amounts as follows:

- Category A. Road Erosion Inventory and Capital Budget Planning, increased from \$4,000 to \$8,000 state cap with a \$2,000 local match.
- Category B. Correction of a Road Related Erosion Problem and/or Stormwater Mitigation/Retrofit for both gravel and paved roads, increased from \$10,000 to \$20,000 state cap with a \$5,000 local match. Examples include rock- or grass-lined ditches, road drainage turnouts, stone check dams, splash pools and Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) management practices.
- Category C. Correction of a Stream Bank or Slope Related Problem, capped at \$40,000 state with a \$10,000 local match. Projects involving stream and river/road conflicts must have consultation with an ANR River Management Engineer or Army Corps Engineer prior to submittal of an application. Examples include stream bank stabilization or restoration and stone-lined slopes.
- Category D. Structure / culvert upgrades, capped at \$40,000 state with a \$10,000 local match. Examples include culvert and structure upgrades and replacements, culvert head cut, and gully stabilizations.

The Vermont Better Road grants represent a maximum of 80 percent of the total project cost. A minimum 20 percent local match is required and can be met through payment in cash as well as services such as staff time and use of equipment, as long as that in-kind service is not funded by state or federal dollars.

Scoring Criteria. For many years, all applications for Category A planning grants have been funded. Priority funding will be given to those projects identified as part of a Category A planning grant, tactical basin plan, culvert inventory and to towns that have not yet received a Vermont Better Roads grant. (Tactical basin plans are prepared by DEC and prioritize sub-basins of Vermont's major watersheds for enhanced monitoring, assessment, planning, and project development.)

The FY17 Vermont Better Roads application (http://vtransengineering.vermont.gov/sites/aot_program_development/files/documents/ltf/FY2017%20Vermont%20Better%20Roads%20Grant%20Program.pdf) includes detailed guidelines for scoring projects. *The application deadline is Friday, April 15, 2016.*

Intersection between Better Roads Program and DEC’s Municipal Road General Permit. The Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) is currently under development, but municipalities can get ahead of the curve by taking advantage of the technical and financial assistance offered under the FY17 Vermont Better Roads Grant Program. By the end of this year, DEC is slated to have a draft general permit with a final permit completed by January 2018. Permit coverage will be phased in between 2018 and 2021, with a 20-year implementation schedule prioritized by water quality benefits and based on individual municipal transportation capital plans.

The purpose of the roads permit is to bring priority road drainage systems up to basic maintenance standards that meet water quality standards. The MRGP standards will be consistent with the current VTrans Road and Bridge Standards, and will likely include measures such as stone-lined ditches, check dams, drainage turn outs and GSI management practices. Under the MRGP, municipalities will develop a Road Stormwater Management Plan, which will identify the sections of their road networks that are connected to surface waters through ditches, culverts, or other drainage structures and determine if the road and drainage systems meet the new permit standards. The road sections that do not meet the standards will be deemed “priority road segments,” and must be brought up to the MRGP standards as soon as possible, over a period of time not to exceed 20 years. Towns do not have to wait until the MRGP is issued to begin work on problematic road drainage and erosion prone road segments. Proactively identifying and addressing road-related water quality issues via funding from the Vermont Better Roads Program is a great way for towns to get ahead of the curve in demonstrating compliance with the upcoming MRGP.

Questions and Technical Assistance. For questions regarding the FY17 Vermont Better Roads Grant application, general program related questions or for technical assistance, please contact Alan May of the VTrans Municipal Assistance Bureau (802-828-4585). For technical assistance, you can also contact: Kevin Gadapee, Vermont Local Roads Branch Manager (802-828-3537) or your local VTrans district staff.

For questions related to projects affecting rivers and streams please contact:

- Chris Brunelle, ANR Rivers & Streams, Northwest Vt. (802-777-5328)
- Patrick Ross, ANR Rivers & Streams, Northeast Vt. (802-279-1143)
- Todd Menees, ANR Rivers & Streams, Southeast Vt. (802-345-3510)
- Jaron Borg, ANR Rivers & Streams, Central Vt. (802-371-8342)
- Josh Carvajal, ANR Rivers & Streams, Southwest Vt. (802-490-6163)

Direct any questions about the upcoming Municipal Road General Permit to Jim Ryan, DEC Municipal Roads Program Coordinator, at 802-490-6140 or jim.ryan@vermont.gov.

Milly Archer, Water Resources Coordinator
VLCT Municipal Assistance Center



Berm directs runoff onto road.



Stone-lined ditch stabilizes road surface and prevents erosion.



Inadequate road drainage causes road washouts and pushes sediment downhill.



Stone-lined turnout directs flow to vegetated area.