focus on RESEARCH

Researchers from the Center for Rural Studies ask: Do seasons affect our mobility? Our livability?

Dr. Jane Kolodinsky and her team of researchers, including Chip Sawyer, Thomas DaSisto, Erin Roche and graduate student David Propen, have nearly completed the first phase of the UTC-funded project, “Mobility and Livability: Seasonal and Built Environment Impacts”. The team has collected panel data, one survey for each season—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—that includes data from 700 respondents from Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

The investigators will estimate the impact of season on the level of both revealed and unobserved travel demand using activity-based analysis for rural northern communities. Or, as Dr. Kolodinsky describes it, “We want to know whether or not it is true that people in northern climates are unhappy because they can’t get where they want to go. If there are, there are policy options we can suggest.”

“How do people manage to do what they want or need to do if they have less options for transportation?” asks Dr. Kolodinsky.

“We’ve only examined the data for a small group of elders in the spring season,” Dr. Kolodinsky explains, “but thus far, we’ve been surprised to find that there is very little unmet demand for transportation options. Basically, seniors in general are able to get where they want to go.”

Dr. Kolodinsky has great respect for the TRC’s approach to research, describing the transdisciplinary teams as being at the cutting edge at UVM. “It is an emerging process, in its infancy, but I’m betting that it’s a wave of the future. This is a great, problem-oriented, holistic approach to major social problems,” she says.

UTC Students of the Year - Where Are They Now?

We are proud of our talented graduate scholars who come from a variety of colleges and disciplines and work towards finding solutions for big transportation problems. Every year in the fall, the TRC nominates one outstanding student to be awarded the USDOT University Transportation Centers (UTC) Student of the Year Award, a prize that comes with a $1,000 award and a trip to the banquet ceremony in Washington, D.C. during the week of the TRB annual meeting. We caught up with our first three SOYs to ask, “Where are you now?”

2007 - Emily J. Stebbins is a strategic planner in UVM’s Office of the Vice President for Finance & Administration, working on projects including enterprise risk management, pandemic planning, and continuous improvement. She earned a M.S. in CDAE from UVM in 2009, where her thesis project evaluated the technical and economic feasibility of biodiesel production in Vermont. Emily is the past Chair of the Burlington Planning Commission and was a member of the Vermont Council on Rural Development’s Council on the Future of Vermont.

2008 - Elaine Wang is a Program Officer with the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) Climate & Environment Program, which designs and delivers programs and services that help communities become more climate-friendly and sustainable. She joined ISC in November 2008 as the Angie Martin Fellow, and in April 2009 joined staff as a Program Assistant for the Climate & Environment Program. Elaine works to develop and implement programs that include ISC’s Climate Leadership Academy in the U.S. and China.

2009 - Jim Sullivan graduated in May 2009 with an M.S. in Civil/Environmental Engineering. Jim began work full-time as a Research Analyst with the Transportation Research Center. He has had two publications come from his thesis work since then, one in “Transportation Letters: The International Journal of Transportation Research” and one in “Transportation Research Part A”. As a researcher at the TRC, Jim has been focused on the areas of land-use / transportation modeling and transportation energy / system efficiency.

SEASONAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT IMPACTS OF MOBILITY

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jane Kolodinsky
Community Development & Applied Economia
Funding Agency: US DOT
Partners: Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), New England Transportation Institute (NETI) and Resource Systems Group, Inc. (RSG)

The Transportation Research Center kicked off the Transportation Systems Academy (TSA) in October 2009 to provide job training at the Northern State Correctional Center Facility campus in Newport, Vermont. The program is part of the TRC’s workforce development program, funded by a $1 million grant from the US DOT Transportation Education Development Pilot Program (TEDPP).

The TSA brings together partners from the TRC, Vermont Local Roads, New Hampshire & Technology Transfer Center, and educators from the Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT).

CHSVT superintendent Wilhemmina Picard describes the program as a “true win-win” for everyone involved. She says, “The students gain valuable skills in a field they are really interested in, and the transportation industry gains workers with the certifications to get right on the job.”

“We are happy to be able to facilitate this partnership,” Ms. Picard explains, “because we know that workforce development programs help our offenders gain skills to do something positive once they reenter the community.”

Eighteen participants are scheduled to graduate on May 6, 2010. The men will have completed 96 hours of course work. They will be certified in CPR and First Aid, Work Zone Flagging, and OSHA.

All of the Transportation Systems Academy participants are scheduled for release from the Northern State Correctional Center this spring and summer. Program coordinators are seeking partners—such as municipalities, state garages, or private sector employers—to provide “job shadow” situations to participants so that they can gain on-the-job experience. One participant has been released from the facility and has already started work on a municipal transportation agency.

“Jobs training of this kind greatly decreases the likelihood that the offender will return to prison,” Superintendent Picard explains. “They are also much more likely to acquire and retain a job when they are released.”

More information about this program can be found at www.uvm.edu/trc - click on “Workforce Development”.

3rd Annual Transportation RESEARCH EXPO 2010

The Transportation Research Center welcomes the public to an exposition of its projects and studies at the “3rd Annual TRC Research Expo” on Wednesday, May 12, 2010, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in Farrell Hall on the Trinity campus of the University of Vermont. This is an opportunity to see and discuss the innovative, transdisciplinary research occurring at the Transportation Research Center. The center was established in 2006 as a UVM “matrix center” with the goal of building teams of skilled researchers from diverse colleges together to contribute solutions toward critical transportation problems.

The Expo will include posters depicting work on funded research relating to: Integrated Transportation & Land Use Modeling, Tailpipe Emissions & Other Environmental Impacts, Tourism Travel, Seasonal Patterns in Mobility (including walking & biking), and Transportation Energy & System Efficiency.

Join us for this free, informative event!
The Transportation Systems for Livable Communities Conference will bring transportation researchers and key practitioners in livability together to share research results, explore practical challenges, and identify promising directions for future investigation. The conference will be held in Washington, D.C. from October 18-19, 2010 at the Keck Center of the National Academies.

Dr. Lisa Aultman-Hall, founding director of the University of Vermont’s Transportation Research Center (TRC), will chair the conference. She is also assisting the National Academies of Science’s Transportation Research Board (TRB) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in organizing the event, which will be the fifth annual Centers (UTC) Spotlight Conference.

The current Administration, under the leadership of U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, is considering livable as gaining national attention. The objective of the conference is to create a research blueprint for transportation systems for livable communities. Among those expected to attend are more than 150 university researchers, practitioners of sustainable transportation, and public and private sector professionals.

The timing of the Transportation Systems for Livable Communities Conference could not be more apt. In recent years, the interplay between transportation systems and the degree to which a community is considered livable is gaining national attention. The current Administration, under the leadership of U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood, is promoting livability as a focus in national transportation policy. Secretary LaHood has described a livable community as “a community where, if people don’t want an automobile, they don’t have to have one. A community where you can walk to work, your doctor’s appointment, pharmacy or grocery store. Or you could take light rail, a bus or ride a bike.”

Dr. Aultman-Hall’s committee has created a more formal definition for the conference. “Transportation for livable communities,” she explains, “is a transportation system that works with land-use to give everyone multiple travel choices for meeting their daily needs affordably, safely, and efficiently.” Conference participants will contribute to further development of this definition and measures of livability. The outcomes will be used to facilitate future state and federal transportation investments that promote community livability.

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