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Agency of Transportation

August 29, 2011

Shap Smith, Speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives
John Campbell, President Pro Tem of the Vermont Senate

Dear Rep. Smith & Senator Campbell:

I hope this letter finds you and your Members safe in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene. I am sure you are busy, as are we across state government, responding to the impact of this historic weather event. We are all working to ensure that State Agencies of Vermont are responding to this disaster in a well coordinated manner and are reaching out to you to both inform you of our efforts and to ask for your assistance in verifying information we are receiving regarding the needs of your communities.

As you know our infrastructure has received significant damage and we spent the much of the day today in an emergency response and assessment mode. Our district forces, the front line of VTrans, have been out in force since the rain began on Sunday morning working, straight out, to ensure safe travel. The leadership team at VTrans was very busy today evaluating the extent of damage and need across the state and developing action plans to address them. We are beginning to see some road openings by the district forces today and we will see more tomorrow and in the near future.

At this time our priority is to restoring access to communities that have been cut off from the rest of Vermont. Our goal is to provide basic access to these twelve communities for life sustaining supplies which, in some cases, will take some significant work due to the extent of the damage. It may take a little while for the roads to be passable for residents of these communities. Our district staff, working with Vermont Emergency Management, has compiled (below) the following list of communities that are isolated from the rest of the state. We appreciate verifying whether this information is accurate and complete. Our goal is to have these roads passable for supply vehicles by Tuesday PM.

District 1: Marlboro, Route 9

District 2:

Cavendish, Route 131
Stratton Route 100 (Town road)
Wardsboro Route 100

District 3:

Pittsfield Route 100
Mendon/Killington US4
Plymouth Route 100

District 4:

Rochester Routes 100
Stockbridge Routes 100 and 107
Granville Route 100
Hancock Route 125
Strafford (partially cut off – they have access to a town road)

Tomorrow we will also be evaluating and assessing more permanent solutions for public access to these communities, although this may take more time and resources. We are also coordinating relief efforts with Vermont Emergency Management and FEMA for the delivery of supplies for these communities which will be delivered on Tuesday evening.

In addition, by end of day tomorrow we will have a VTrans team of engineers and technicians to every state road closure to develop action plans to restore the asset for public use. We are also sending bridge inspection teams to inspect and evaluate all bridges that were closed or that were damaged in the flood.

We know there are a great number of communities in need. VTrans' next area of focus is opening roadways to those communities that the utilities have identified as necessary to restore service.

We have enlisted dozens of contractors to initiate repair work and are requesting assistance from FEMA, our neighboring states and are coordinating all State agency efforts through the Emergency Operation Center.

We will continue to communicate with the media and the Legislative leadership in order to keep you up to date with our activities, and so that you can help inform us of outstanding needs in Vermont communities. Please do not hesitate to share your needs with either me or Chris Cole, Director of Policy Planning and Intermodal development (chris.cole@state.vt.us 828-1647). Given the extent of need out in the District, we encourage you to contact us in lieu of the district forces or other staff at VTrans, so that they can remain focused on rebuilding our state.

This level of destruction to our State infrastructure is unprecedented in modern Vermont history. It will take all levels of government, and the people of the State of Vermont, working together to meet our challenge

Many thanks for your service.

Sue Minter, Deputy Secretary of Transportation