

Highway Maintenance Workers in Vermont

January 17, 2023

Highway maintenance workers (HMWs) support 13,623.73 miles of class 1-4 highways in Vermont. The titles associated with this occupational category include road crew, highway maintainers, equipment operators, and flaggers. These positions typically do not call for college degrees. However, their job duties, safety expectations, and technical requirements can be quite complex, and many of these positions require certifications, special training, and/or licensure. The Vermont Department of Labor supplies a breakdown of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required by these positions in the Economics and Labor Market Information division's [occupation profile](#). Among the requirements are knowledge of public safety, security, building, and construction; skills related to mechanical operations and repair; and work tasks that may require use of technology, hand tools, or transporting vehicles and equipment (which may require a commercial driver's license).

Statistics

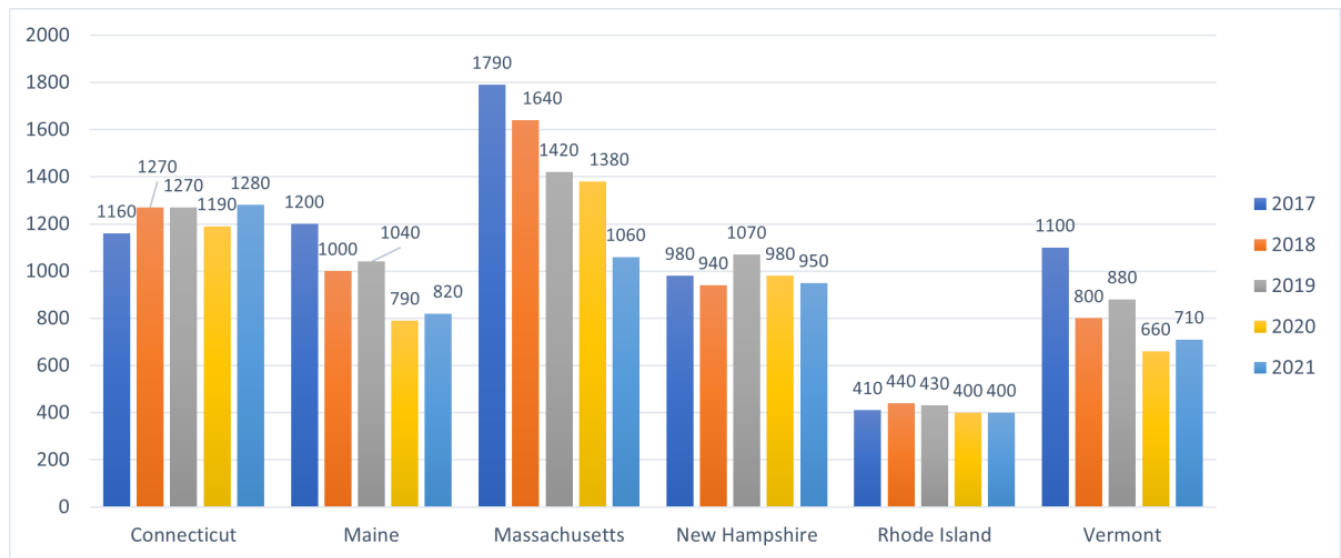
Decline in Number of New England Highway Workers, 2017-2022

In 2018, the number of highway workers in Vermont precipitously dropped to 800 from 2017 levels of 1100 staff. This occurred before COVID-19, and we are unsure of what instigated such a rapid decline. In 2019, the number climbed a bit, but then dropped in 2020 as municipalities instituted COVID-related measures such as hiring freezes, layoffs, and stay-at-home orders. In 2021, numbers climbed again but have not returned to pre-COVID levels, achieving only 64% of 2017 staff.

Given the millions of dollars in aid from ARPA and the Infrastructure Reinvestment and Recovery act, the expectation is that more road infrastructure will be built in the coming years.

As such, it is useful to assess whether the lack of workers is related to a reduction in open positions, disincentives to hire more workers, fewer applicants for those positions, and/or unidentified variables. Audrey Watson in the article [Occupational Employment and Wages in State and Local Government](#) writes that between 2020-2021, unemployment rose to 6.5% in all local government occupations in the US. Additionally, according to a January 2022 assessment by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 40% of jobs lost during 2019 had not returned to their pre-COVID levels.

Highway Maintenance Worker Labor Changes in New England



The short-term occupational projections for Vermont in the highway maintenance worker category are currently set at an average annual opening of 90 positions. [These projections](#) cover a three-year period (2021 to 2023) and do not factor in 2017 and 2018 levels. Over the long term (2020-2030), the number of positions is not expected to rise to 2017 levels.

Wages

Vermont's hourly rates for local highway workers fall within the median for the US and New England. Considering that Vermont has one of the highest concentrations of jobs for HMWs in the US, it makes sense that wages would need to be competitive to attract job seekers. Additionally, although the number of workers has fallen, wages have increased every year in Vermont since 2017.

National Average Hourly Pay Rates for Highway Maintenance Workers Across All Industries

Percentile	10%	25%	50% (Median)	75%	90%
Hourly Wage	\$ 14.01	\$ 17.65	\$ 22.06	\$ 23.32	\$ 29.31
Annual Wage	\$ 29,130	\$ 36,700	\$ 45,880	\$ 48,500	\$ 60,970

Pay Rates for Highway Maintenance Workers in New England

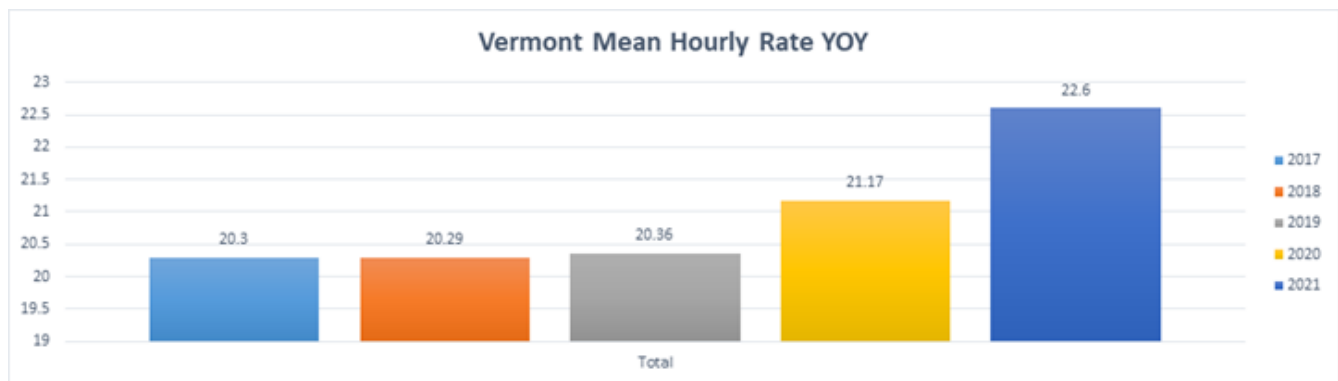
Area Name?	Municipal road miles	Local Government Employment	Hourly mean wage?	Annual mean wage	Hourly median wage?	Annual median wage	Employment per 1,000 jobs?
New Hampshire?	12,087	1430?	?\$19.84?	\$41270?	\$18.74?	\$38980?	2.255?
Maine?	14,112.87	1580?	\$20.23?	\$42080?	\$19.47?	\$40500?	2.670?
Vermont?	13,623.73	780?	\$22.44?	\$46670?	\$22.53?	\$46860?	2.762?
Rhode Island?	*NP	560?	\$23.50?	\$48870?	\$23.06?	\$47960?	1.227?
Massachusetts	24,936.14	1120?	\$24.89?	\$51760?	\$23.19?	\$48230?	0.330?
Connecticut?	17,446	2360?	\$27.56	\$57330?	\$28.78?	\$59850?	1.498?

Highest Concentration of HMW Jobs (Top Six States)

State	Employment	Jobs/1000	Location Quotient	Mean Wage/Hr	Mean Wage/Annual
South Dakota ?	1,910?	4.54?	4.53?	\$ 18.64?	\$ 38,770?

Wyoming?	850?	3.26?	3.25?	\$ 20.42?	\$ 42,470?
Mississippi?	3,080?	2.80?	2.79?	\$ 14.56?	\$ 30,290?
Vermont?	780?	2.76?	2.76?	\$ 22.44?	\$ 46,670?
North Dakota ?	1,070?	2.71?	2.71?	\$ 23.73?	\$ 49,360?

HMWs' Average Hourly Pay Rate 2017-2021: Annual VLCT Compensation and Benefits Survey



What You Can Do

Attracting & Hiring Talent

Highway positions should be highly competitive in Vermont. Very few of these jobs require more than a high school degree, and median wages for HMWs are competitive with all Vermont sectors. According to [labor market information](#) published by the Vermont Department of Labor in 2022, the median wage across all industries in 2021 was \$22.55 and, according to data from VLCT's Compensation and Benefits Report, it was \$22.53 for HMWs in Vermont. Furthermore, there are several state and non-profit funded training and professional development resources, and the benefits for full- and part-time employees are generous,

We would not expect to see a significant shortage in these roles. However, VLCT is hearing anecdotally from members that it is increasingly difficult to find any applicants, let alone qualified ones, to fill openings.

Ways To Enhance Your Marketing Efforts

- Create attractive materials that showcase your strengths as an employer and also the character of your community and the benefits of working there.
- Highlight professional development, on-the-job training, engagement opportunities; staff longevity statistics; and/or recent internal staff promotions and achievements (certifications, licensures, etc.).
- Post information on total compensation because municipalities often have very generous insurance benefits and perks.
- Use untapped marketing channels such as diverse hiring sites, vocational-technical high school programs, and Vermont Department of Labor workforce programs.

Retain Staff By Engaging and Supporting Them

If you are having trouble keeping staff, consider having an internal review and assessment to identify issues, and then address them. To engage and support your staff, you could:

- Provide positive and constructive feedback.
- Find ways to reward good work.
- Give staff opportunities to contribute meaningfully in improving work processes and enhancing safety.
- Fund and encourage staff development opportunities such as training, enhanced certifications, and licensure, so you can more readily promote from within.

Hiring And Job Descriptions?

VLCT has compiled a number of resources to support you when hiring. The toolkits below will assist both small and large members in their hiring efforts. Within them you'll find templates and tips to create effective job descriptions and hire for various roles. Additionally, PACIF's

Commercial Motor Vehicle Operations Toolkit can specifically help you when hiring HMW staff. It has an important pre-employment checklist, operations manual, and sample drug and alcohol testing policy.

- [Job Description Toolkit](#)
- [Hiring Toolkit](#)
- [Commercial Motor Vehicle Operations Toolkit](#)

Advertising & Marketing

You are able to post job advertisements for free on VLCT and Vermont Local Roads (a division of the Vermont Agency of Transportation) classifieds sites, as well as on the UVM MuniNet listserv. You can also use online employment search engines (Indeed, Monster, etc.), and your social media channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter).

- [VLCT Classifieds](#)
- [Vermont Local Roads Classifieds](#)
- [UVM MuniNet](#)

Training & Support?

Reinvest in your workforce! Professional development, safety, and skills training can be powerful incentives for workers to stay with an employer. In addition to saving the significant costs of high turnover, proper training can reduce the municipality's safety and liability risks. The Vermont Agency of Transportation and members of the VLCT Property and Casualty Intermunicipal Fund (PACIF) can take advantage of free and low-cost training and resources for developing their highway workforce.

- [AOT Highway Construction Training](#): training resources and subsidy program
- [Vermont Local Roads Scholar Program](#): workshops and certification in a learning management system
- [Vermont Local Roads ListServ](#): email system that connects municipalities and relevant stakeholders across Vermont

- [VLCT PACIF Loss Control Training](#): small and large group training on a variety of topics
??

Related Information

- [VLCT Road & Trails Topics Pages](#) (See also [Winter Road Maintenance](#))
- [Vermont Local Roads Technical Assistance](#)
- [Better Roads Grant Program](#)