

Eclipse Planning Check-In

03/21/24

Much of northern Vermont is within the path of totality for the April 8 solar eclipse, making this an ideal place to witness the rare natural event. State agencies are planning for thousands of people to visit Vermont to view it (see [2024 Total Solar Eclipse in Vermont](#)), and towns and cities of all sizes as well as tourism-focused organizations are planning [local events](#).

VLCT is hosting webinars every two weeks from January 25 to April 4 to keep municipalities informed about State plans and to learn about community-level plans, so municipalities can anticipate how all these plans might intersect (or conflict!).

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State Planning Update

Max Kennedy, VEM Planning Section Chief, said the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) will be active from March 25 through April 9. Call takers will begin staffing during this period. At the end of next week, a situation report will be issued. It will have a summary of actions and updates from the week's operational period. There will be a second, week-long operational period, and then the SEOC will transition to regular 12-hour shifts.

Regarding communications infrastructure, at this time, there is no concern the cell network will go down. The State is continuing to run analysis and to look at high traffic corridors and events. Information has been given to providers so they can optimize their networks.

VEM will draft and share a list of industries and businesses the State has contacted. It will be publicized or provided for the April 4 Check-in. Examples are: utilities, towing, farms, gas stations.

Katharine Ingram, Department of Tourism & Marketing (VDTM) Trade and Partner Relations Manager, said a limited supply of eclipse glasses will be available at every welcome center. The State does not have additional glasses for distribution to municipalities. Welcome Center hours will be extended.

Traffic Modeling

Todd Sears, VTrans Deputy Director Operations and Safety Bureau, said that VTrans is working with the UVM Traffic Research Center on traffic modeling. A GIS product will be forthcoming that people can see.

He reviewed the assumptions on which the model is based.

- 160,000 visitors estimated, which translate to 60,000 additional vehicles as its base.
- People from Albany, Portland, and Montreal will stay local and not add to the visitor base.
- Most visitors into Vermont will come from the southern driveshed: Boston, Worcester, Springfield, New Haven, Hartford, Bridgeport coming up I-91.
- Incoming traffic likely will be staggered from Friday through Sunday.

- Given Vermont's bedstock, which is limited this time of year, most people are expected to day trip on Monday. This means Monday is expected to be busy as visitors come in and leave. The State is messaging "come early, stay late".
- NH and MA will have 90-95% coverage for the eclipse. This may limit Vermont visitation from these areas.
- Weather could mitigate visitor numbers.
- The State spoke with states impacted by the 2017 eclipse and used this information for planning. Technology in vehicles and as used by drivers is more sophisticated in 2024. Travelers today use apple maps, google maps, Waze, etc. This means they will self-detour, which should help mitigate traffic.
- There are some highway projects that are known pinch points for traffic..

From this information, the State used two different scenarios for the model. Remember, the model should augment your knowledge. It should not be used as a full predictor of what will happen.

- **Scenario A: Travelers coming from the south but focused on standard areas of interest, such as Chittenden County.** Potential congestion areas are:
 - US 4 in Mendon, Bridgewater, Woodstock
 - VT 103 in Ludlow and Clarendon
 - VT 100 in Waterbury
 - VT 9 in Brattleboro
 - I-89 corridor from exit 10 to Rt 2 in the Islands
 - Colchester Avenue and Main Street in Burlington
 - US 2 and VT 117 in Richmond
 - VT 15 in Essex
 - Arch Street in Pittsford
 - VT 2A in Williston and Essex Junction
 - North Grove Street in Rutland
 - US 5 in Brattleboro
 - Spear Street in South Burlington
- **Scenario B: Travelers are routed to locations that are optimal viewing and or that are hosting events.** Potential congestion areas are:
 - US 7 in Shelburne
 - I-89 Exit 12 ramps, Industrial Avenue, VT 2A in Williston
 - US 2 in South Burlington and Williston
 - US 2 and I-89 corridor from exit 10 to Rt 2 in the Islands
 - I-91 from Clay Hill Road to Exit 10
 - Colchester Avenue, Pine Street, and Main Street in Burlington
 - VT 15 in Essex
 - US 2 and VT 117 in Richmond
 - US 5 in Brattleboro
 - VT 100 in Waterbury
 - I-91 in Rockingham
 - Arch Street in Pittsford
 - VT 103 in Ludlow
 - US 7 in Ferrisburg and Pittsford

- VT 9 in Brattleboro

VTrans will be providing a GIS product that reflects the final results. UVM is still working on modeling, but the traffic impacts noted above are not expected to change.

VTrans will be using drones to monitor traffic along the interstate near Burlington. They are able to monitor using data feeds like cameras and sensors too. Again, the monitoring is for situational awareness for day-of-eclipse messaging. Changeable message signs will be used for communication along with other messaging avenues.

Todd shared the follow advice to help keep traffic volumes low:

- Stay home that day and walk or use a bicycle to travel.
- Do your errands early.
- Schedule appointments and do shopping before or after Eclipse day, not on it.
- If friends are coming up, invite them to come early and stay late.
- Check out the State eclipse page for help with messaging to residents and visitor.
- Use Waze to promote local road closures.
- Use Waze and VT 511 to monitor traffic backups.
- Be aware that self-detours may move traffic to local roads. Visitors (and their apps) won't know the terrain, so be patient and communicative. Give them the best information you have if they end up in your town.

Additional information will be released as it is ready.

Resources

New or Modified

- Online instructions for Waze: <https://www.waze.com/wazeforcities/>.

Previously Included

- Visit [VLCT's Eclipse Planning Check-in Recordings and Resources webpage](#) for check in slides and notes, updates, and new information.
- Email Katie Buckley (kbuckley@vlct.org) or Bonnie Waninger (bwaninger@vlct.org) from VLCT's Federal Funding Assistance Program if you have questions after the call.
- [State of Vermont April 8 Solar Eclipse webpage](#). This new link allows municipalities to list their events. To make a listing, create an account using "Manage Your Events" at the bottom of the webpage. Find events in neighboring communities to coordinate planning for impacts. Even if you aren't having an event, another community's event might impact your community.
- *Vermont State Parks*: A list of parks that will be opened can be found in the [Vermont State Parks blogspot](#). Park facilities will be closed for this event. Portable toilets and/or pit/composting toilets will be available. Parking will be available at each of these locations. Parking may be limited depending on the number of visitors. Check back for updates as some viewing locations may change due to on the ground conditions as the date nears.
- *The Vermont Department of Libraries* [Eclipse 2024 Information webpage](#).
- *Vermont Public's* [2024 Eclipse in Vermont webpage](#) includes events that are not included on the

State Eclipse webpage. Municipalities can use this webpage to check for additional events in neighboring communities to help coordinate planning and response activities.

- [Waze crowd-sourced navigation app](#) is a free, Google-owned GPS app that provides travelers with up-to-date navigation and traffic information. Municipalities can set up an account and use Waze to list local road closures and day-of-event warnings. The [Waze Communities Knowledge Hub page](#) includes How-To Guides and other resources.
- The State has a dedicated text notification system for the event to convey weather, traffic, and other information; text [VTECLIPSE](#) to [888777](#) to register.
- The State has a [survey form](#) municipalities can use to report events *for incorporation into traffic modeling*. Continue to use the [Vermont Vacation calendar](#) to have events published.
- PTS Dialer App instructions: Visit [cisa.gov/pts](#) for information about downloading and utilizing.
- Bruce Belt, Vermont PTS Area Representative, contact information: 202-993-6293 or bruce.belt@associates.cisa.dhs.gov.
- Contact Lynn Shea at 202-240-9720 or lynn.shea@associates.cisa.dhs.gov regarding uploads of bulk spreadsheet (multiple municipal contacts) for GETS and WPS.
- *Vermont Tourism and Marketing Program [Basic Listing Request Form](#)*. This form allows people to list their tourism-related services, including one-time lodging for the Solar Eclipse. One complimentary listing is permitted per business or organization.
- [“How Can You Tell If Your Eclipse Glasses or Handheld Solar Viewers Are Safe?”](#) *American Astronomical Society, 2024.*
- Howells, Kate. [“Are Your Solar Eclipse Glasses Safe?”](#) *The Planetary Society, 7 September 2023.*
- American Astronomical Society (AAS) list of approved reputable vendors: <https://eclipse.aas.org/eye-safety/viewers-filters>.

Resources and Examples for Messaging to Residents and Visitors

Please ask permission before borrowing language from these sites.

- [State of Vermont Eclipse Webpage](#) – Save yourself time and link to the State of Vermont Eclipse webpage for messaging. Includes text translations to 10 languages, a video in American Sign Language, and a link to the Vermont Language Justice Project’s Eclipse videos.
- [Vermont Language Justice Project Eclipse Videos](#) – A video about the Eclipse and preparedness in English, English with captions, using American Sign Language, and in 16 other languages. The video explains the eclipse and provides basic preparedness and safety information. These videos can help municipalities message to their residents and visitors.
- [Green Mountain Club Eclipse Webpage](#) – General advice section can be helpful for posts to Front Porch Forum, etc. Also has a page for [Eclipse FAQs](#).
- [City of Burlington Eclipse Webpage](#) – Frequently Asked Questions for visitors and residents.
- [Town of St. Albans Eclipse Webpage](#) – Description of the Totality Experience and an Eclipse Simulator.

- [Town of St. Johnsbury Eclipse Webpage](#) – Language about Vermont in April, traffic and parking, and eclipse glasses.

Q&A Report

- Q1.** Are there any recommendations for staging EMS services in communities that will experience the full eclipse and/or high visitor flows?
- A1.** The Department of Health and EMS is developing guidance. Max will check if it has been published. It is prudent to have folks aware and adjust staffing. Staging is tricky because events are local. Look at the events list as it relates to areas your EMS supports (and adjacent areas). Consider your staging area – within or outside event areas. Perhaps have more individuals on staff to be ready.
- Q2.** Is there a risk of stations running out of gas?
- A2.** We don't know. This depends on the volume and capacity of in-state fuel. The State contacted the Fuel Dealers Association well in advance to make them aware of traffic predictions and so they could adjust their resupply schedules. The recommendation remains to have a full tank of gas. When messaging, use the language you use for winter storms.
- Q3.** Is there a list of road closures, especially in Chittenden and Grand Isle Counties
- A3.** VEM's Public Information Officer is working on a list. **Watch for road closure updates on the State's eclipse page.** This will be a static list of closures known in advance, not live updates. Please use Waze for your closures. There will be new closures for events that happen that day.
- If have known closures, use your usual communication venues, like VT Alert, Front Porch Forum, newspapers, etc. to alert residents in advance. Municipalities are advised to sign closed roads. Some people will still drive on these roads due to mapping software.
- A Check-in participant noted that VTrans has advised all road construction companies that road projects should be shut down from April 5 through the morning of the 9th due to increased flow of traffic
- Q4.** Are there any recommendations or guidance for schools? Should they close or have half days?
- A4.** Only schools can make this decision. Neither the Agency of Education nor VEM is providing formal guidance about closing schools. We don't know exactly when traffic impacts will occur. Most traffic concerns are on the back end of the event. Eclipse totality occurs near the time the school day ends so plan accordingly.
- Q5.** I'm a journalist planning a news segment on this. Is there a reputable scientist that I could interview who can explain the "science" behind the eclipse?
- A5.** Participants offered the following:
- Mark Breen, The Eye on the Sky
 - Neil Perlin, Elmore, VT
 - Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury, VT
 - Jack St. Louis, Vermont Astronomical Society

- NASA state agent in UVM faculty, Ellen Brennen. Burlington is hosting a public information session tonight at 6 pm in Contois Auditorium and streaming live.

Q6. What is the State Eclipse webpage link?

A6. <https://www.vermont.gov/eclipse>

Q7. Do we know if Green Mountain Transit is changing their bus service on that day?

A7. Max will follow up for that information.

A participant from Burlington posted that buses from Burlington's Downtown Transit Center will run a normal schedule until noon. The schedule then transitions to hourly service from Noon to 6 pm and returns to its normal Monday schedule after 6 pm.

Q8. Will the National Guard be used that day?

A8. Currently, there is no identified mission for the National Guard. This may change as the State ramps up for the event.

Q9. Is there any information about boat traffic? Will the VSP of the Coast Guard have assets on lake?

A9. The US Coast Guard is engaged with the State's planning. The State does not have boat traffic information. It is weather dependent. On Sunday when the weather is known, there will be messaging on water safety. The State is not anticipating many boats.

Q10. Where should we look for new information?

A10. Continue to use the Vermont.gov/eclipse website. Emergency Management Directors will receive information from the State through the Situation Reports and if there are significant updates.

Q11. How can I find information or resources for VT 102/Essex County? This is a major north/south route. What about bridge traffic plans, especially VT/NH bridges

A11. VTrans is working with New Hampshire. VT 102 and VT 3 in Essex looks fairly clear in the model. VT 110 coming in from New Hampshire could be congested.

Q12. When traffic model info released?

A12. The narrative provided today can be shared today. The GIS version is expected next week.

Q13. Can a town close a road by logging on to the shared VT Waze account? Is that correct?

A13. VEM has a Waze account guide ([Waze for cities](#)). Anyone can mark a road as closed using Waze. Other users are asked to validate this information. Towns and cities can post information too. Watch VLCT's Eclipse Planning webpage for this information. The State recommends having signs if the municipality closes a road.

Max said municipalities can set a timeline for a road closure. This will override user input.

Q14. Do Google maps and Waze connect?

A14. Max thought Google owned Waze. They do talk.

- Q15.** How do we know if our municipality may already have a Waze account? Can multiple accounts represent the municipality?
- A15.** Check with people in your municipality. A Waze account has to be tied to the municipality through an email or website.
- Q16.** How does a town confirm who VEM has for its three contacts?
- A16.** The three contacts are taken from the municipality's Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP). Participants can check their municipality's plan, which is adopted by the Selectboard.
- Q17.** Can we still get Eclipse glasses?
- A17.** The State has distributed its Eclipse glasses and doesn't have more. Municipalities can contact Kelsi at Echo in Burlington. Her email is kvonderlinn@echovermont.org about bulk purchases. Glasses also can be purchased through [Echo's website](#). Online, the glasses are \$3 each. They are Echo-branded.
- Q18.** Has the State contacted railroads?
- A18.** No, but they are working on it. VTrans has reached out to cell and electrical providers.