

**SOUTHERN WINDSOR COUNTY
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)**

Meeting Notes of July 17, 2013

A meeting of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was held at the Chester Train Depot (563 Depot St, Chester) at 6pm. The quorum was not met.

Attendance – TAC members present: Kristi Morris, Springfield (Chair); Tom Kenyon (Vice Chair); Shep Thomas, Baltimore; Sharon Bixby, Ludlow; and Jennifer Grant, Springfield Chamber of Commerce.

Others present: Katharine Otto and Jason Rasmussen, SWCRPC; Deb Murphy, Vermont Rail System; Costa Pappis, VTrans; Kathleen Carrierre; Gary Fox; and Gayle Ottmann.

Meeting Opened: Kristi Morris opened the meeting at 6:05 pm.

Welcome and introductions

All agenda items that needed quorum were postponed until the next meeting

Vermont's Tourist Trains – Deborah Murphy (Manager of Passenger Service with Vermont Rail System)

Deb gave an overview of tourist trains that serve the area – including the Green Mountain Flyer. Some of the items discussed:

- Vermont Rail System is primarily freight, with a passenger train element
- Passenger rail is primarily in the form of excursion trains from Burlington, White River Junction and Bellows Falls
- Freight movement on the tracks has a significant impact on passenger rail – always trying to schedule tourist trains a year in advance, but the schedules for freight (especially Ethanol) can change a day or less in advance – depending on connections and conditions
- Vermont By Rail magazine – to be released 7/18 – to show how to use rail to get around Vermont
- Many different carriages for the trains – dining, sleeping, etc
- Freight interchange at Chester
- Chester Depot and rail line sometimes used in movies
- Can get more information about rail events and happenings through the Rail Action Network which is led by Christopher Parker

Vermont's Rail Network and Freight – Costa Pappis (VTrans)

Costa gave an overview of Vermont's rail network and freight. Some of the items discussed:

- 1960s – Vermont was rather unique in starting to acquire railroads and now has 305 miles (which are now operated by Vermont Rail System)
- Rail is the only mode of transportation that started as private.
- Rail has no dedicated federal funding – so very behind and very subject to the mood-swings of DC
- Rail has the advantage with heavy shipments – weight limit of up to 286,000 pounds far above the limit of 100,000 on most interstates
- lots of freight rail companies are very margin sensitive – small changes in price can change whether profit or loss
- New England Central Railroad (NECR) which runs through the region in Windsor is part of the "Knowledge Corridor" ARRA project. Vermont has completed its portion of projects, but Massachusetts are a few years out from completion. Will cut 1.5 hours off travel time
- Tracks are maintained by the freight – passenger rail cannot afford to take on maintenance costs of the tracks and infrastructure
- Downeaster – new train connection to Portland ME – managed to take advantage of both CMAQ funds (through Federal Highway Administration) and commuter rail funds (through the Federal Transit Administration)
- Approximately 100,000 carloads annually. Freight is trying to diversify from its traditional dependence in Vermont on lumber, with top commodities today including fuel, feed grains, limestone, salt, and lumber.

- All Vermont railroads are classified as short-lines or regional railroads.
- Vermont is highly dependent on the rail network in its surrounding states and provinces – as freight and passengers often cross the borders. Vermont wants to stay ahead in rail so ready when surrounding states have done their upgrades.
- Vermont's budget of approximately \$20 million annually is focused on:
 - o Improvements needed to keep state rail lines operational and in a state of good repair. (mostly bridge projects)
 - o Property management (Vermont usually owns 50-100 feet on either side of the rail tracks in their 305 miles of state owned rail)
 - o Intercity Passenger rail (Amtrak) operating funding
- Vermont has been seeing a good increase in Amtrak ridership. Montreal connection by rail has several hurdles yet to be resolved, but would be a major boost to ridership to keep passenger rail going.
- No more impediments to double stack freight trains in Vermont (Bellows Falls is fixed)
- Challenges for Freight Rail
 - o Small scale, capitalization of infrastructure.
 - o Short-term business fluctuations.
 - o Economy moving away from resource industries.
 - o Congressional division over rail, no dedicated funding.
- Challenges for Intercity Passenger Rail
 - o Funding Issues.
 - Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (2008) new cost allocation model, increasing Vermont's operating subsidy from \$4.5 million to approximately \$7 million.
 - No dedicated funding for rail (unlike other modes).
 - Condition of infrastructure.
 - o Uncertain federal legislative environment.
 - Example of the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail Program.
 - Roadway legislation.

Meeting concluded at 7:50pm