

Advance Transit (AT) public meeting - July 21, 2008

Van Chesnut, AT's executive director, opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, and explained the purpose of the meeting. Introductions followed.

Dan Wagner of Milligan & Company provided an overview of the meeting and the Short Range Public Transportation Plan (SRPTP) process. He discussed the state's transit map, explaining that the demand response services are not indicated on the map.

Wagner reviewed trends in federal and state funding for operations of public transit, which show continuous increase, commenting that Vermont is in the top tier of providing funding for transit in the nation and very generous with 'flex' funding for public transit. He provided an overview of AT's governance and operations, noting that in-house maintenance is not typical for most rural providers in Vermont. He then discussed the service area and routes. He explained that under federal requirements, a transit provider is required to provide ADA complementary service when operating fixed-routes. He then discussed fares, fleet and facilities. He reviewed a ridership chart which reflects AT's Vermont transit riders. He then discussed AT's operating budget, explaining the various funding sources.

Wagner then highlighted the next steps in the SRPTP process and the availability of materials on the project website. He added that comments can be sent via the website or snail mail. Chesnut noted that there is a parallel process in New Hampshire, with funding from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation. There will be additional public meetings and work on the New Hampshire side of the service area. He then opened the discussion.

The following comments were received:

- A transit rider with a long commute from just outside the AT service area in West Hartford stated the need for a park & ride at the new patriot bridge in Hartford – some 6 miles from an existing transit route.
- A transit rider recommended that the West Hartford-Queechee Road loop should be linked to the park & ride noted above (commuter and limited service for E&D).
- A Norwich resident presented a petition for extension of service to Upper Valley destinations. A 2007 public forum in Norwich included a discussion of transportation issues. At the American Legion meeting, there was a motion to request a bus stop and the extension of a loop on Main Street to the American Legion site. The Legion offered some of its space to be used a park-and-ride. In December 2007, the Norwich Select Board suggested discussions with AT. A petition was presented to Norwich in May 2008. In July 2008, Van Chesnut discussed the project with the Norwich Select Board. There was audience question on whether the petition had been passed on to Upper Valley Plan Association and Dartmouth College? Chesnut indicated that he has done the necessary reviews and at the present time the project would not be feasible as it would stretch the existing schedule. However, as part of the SRPTP process, it

will be re-evaluated. Prior to any new service implementation, there would be a public meeting to discuss the implications.

- There was an audience question about how the public meetings were publicized. Costa Pappis of the Vermont Agency of Transportation discussed the various methods used: Agency public press release, notices in local newspapers, advertising through transit providers, organizational contacts through distribution lists, project website. Chesnut added information about how the New Hampshire meetings will be advertised.
- An audience member asked whether the plan will include off-shift public transportation. United Way gets feedback about issues and has a needs assessment. Wagner responded that the plan would address off-shift transportation and provided information on the Jobs Access Remote Commute (JARC) program.
- There was audience question about ADA para-transit service and budget implications. Chesnut indicated that AT received additional funding from NH to comply. Another AT staff member explained the impact their budget. Paratransit provision has added \$175,000 to the budget.
- A Veterans Affairs (VA) employee from Lebanon suggested the need for a direct route from Lebanon to the VA. The connection in West Lebanon is the problem. More frequent service from W. Lebanon to the VA – 30 minute headways instead of 60 minute - is also needed. There is a federal program for reimbursement if public transportation is taken to the VA; but there is no reimbursement for no-fare service. AT service should be coordinated with shifts at the VA.
- A transit rider noted the need for provision of additional bicycle racks (currently only 2 available) on buses.
- A local employer stated that employees at Airport Park's 15 businesses use AT and need it to expand. Distance from the bus stop to the Park is an issue.
- An audience member noted that the local college in White River Junction encourages new students not to bring cars because of the availability of AT. There should be service coordination with class schedules. Evening and weekend service is also needed.
- An audience member suggested the need to use alternate, environmentally-friendly, fuels in the long-run. Chesnut indicated that he is on a national committee on alternative fuel choices and exploring those issues. New U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules have resulted in the reduced NOx content of diesel. AT is progressively seeking grants to replace vehicles with alternative fuel use capacity and will be implementing biodiesel. The cost of hybrids at this time is too high given current budgets.
- There was a discussion of the scope of the planning process and coordination issues with the NH study. The Transportation Management Association (TMA) has been able to facilitate coordination in Upper Valley.
- An audience member mentioned the need for fundraising/voluntary contributions mechanism for increasing funding. Chesnut discussed AT's direct marketing effort and the new sponsorship program.
- A transit rider suggested AT not sacrifice local service for regional connectivity.

Chesnut indicated that both the Vermont and New Hampshire plans will be completed by the end of 2008 and that they are updated every five years.

The meeting was adjourned.