

Advance Transit (AT) Stakeholder Meeting - July 21, 2008

Dan Wagner of Milligan & Company opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, then stated the purpose of the meeting and reviewed the agenda. He then provided a description of the Short-Range Public Transportation Plan (SRPTP) process, emphasizing the role of the public in providing input for the plan. He then discussed the State public transportation network, adding that the map shows the fixed route service provided by AT. He stated that Vermont 'flexes' funding from highways into public transportation. He then discussed the state and federal funding for public transportation (operating) which shows an increasing trend. Wagner inquired about New Hampshire's (NH) policy. Van Chesnut, AT's executive director, stated that NH provides considerable less state funding than Vermont.

Wagner then reviewed AT's governance and discussed board composition.

Wagner discussed the operations and AT's service area. Chesnut noted that the Town of Hartland was no longer in the AT service area; AT's website has the most accurate service area. Wagner then discussed the types of services provided by AT. AT provides fare-free service, although they accept donations. Carol Hardy of AT added that CMAQ funding in Vermont permitted the removal of fares. Wagner discussed fleet and facilities.

Wagner reviewed ridership data. Chesnut explained that the lower ridership data in 2005 was due to cuts in the Hartland service as the town was not providing funding for the service any more. Wagner then discussed the operating budget, which mostly comes from contract revenues. Hardy and Chesnut stated that there was no farebox revenue. Contract revenue is derived from the college and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC); Wagner advised to move that portion of funding to local match.

Wagner then explained the next steps and opened the discussion to the group for comments and suggestions.

- Chesnut discussed potential improvements suggested in previous meetings with consultants and will compile a list. These include service increase (hours and frequency); evening hours especially, by one or 1.5 hours, schedule coordination with Amtrak timetable. He stated that it is not feasible to do provide weekend service given the current funding situation.
- Chesnut mentioned the emphasis on connectivity, citing the new facility near I-91 and I-89, site for a park & ride lot (swim center) and the possibility of a shuttle from there to major employers in New Hampshire.
- An attendee pointed to the park & ride lot in Norwich and the possibility of work with the Regional Planning Commission to complete a municipal park & ride grant application. There has been discussion about the feasibility of extending the route to the site, but there are some scheduling impacts.
- A member discussed service from Woodstock along US 4 corridor and the need to ascertain demand to determine priorities. Costa Pappis, of the Vermont Agency of Transportation, stated that a corridor management plan for Route 4 is currently

underway and that recommendations from that plan should be considered in the SRPTP. Chesnut added that Upper Valley has a corridor management plan for the other side of Route 4 and transit has come up as a priority.

- An attendee discussed the Woodstock in-town shuttle in conjunction with the National Park Service (Trans Systems is doing the study). There was a question about who would operate it, which at this point has not been determined.
- There was a discussion about the type of information collected for the employer survey. One participant indicated the use of zipcode data from College and DHMC.
- The Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC) is looking to develop a transportation demand management plan. It will include recommendations for communities through enabling legislation to facilitate. The other part is what employers can do. UVLSRPC is planning to survey employers along specific corridors to provide some suggestions on how to alleviate peak travel demand. There are plans for a new campus about 1 mile of the existing facility located at Great Hollow Road. Among the transportation issues is parking.
- An attendee stated that earmark funding is available for a multimodal facility. The intercity bus terminal for Dartmouth coach is an opportunity; location has not yet been determined.
- Chesnut stated that there is currently no transit service at the existing industrial park at airport; there will be some business expansion by a biofuels company and another biotech business. A Regional Planning Commission representative added that Mass Como at Route 120 has been permitted; there are issues with the road to the industrial park, especially with congestion.
- An attendee raised the following needs: park & ride near the VA Hospital; 60-minute headways of the three VT routes and whether that was considered a commuter route; adequacy of hourly service for Orange and Green lines; location of parking in Norwich.
- Chesnut explained that the property along Route 5 in Norwich where the school has playing fields could serve as a potential park & ride lot. There is a coop nearby that buses its employees (from Norwich to Hanover).
- An attendee noted that a multimodal center in consideration of Amtrak service, located in Vermont.
- Pappis mentioned VTrans' scoping study of park & ride lots.
- One location considered was the VA (see 2004 legislative report available on VTrans website; there was also an earlier study).
- Dartmouth College has a masterplan for expansion which includes a parking facility expansion component, currently under permitting. Chesnut suggested discussing the issue with Joanna Whitcam in facilities office at Dartmouth College. Discussion of location and responsibility of park & ride lots.
- An attendee mentioned the need for statewide policy change and funding availability for developing additional park & ride lots along commuter routes.
- TMA representative mentioned that most commuters are traveling longer distances and closer park & rides may not be necessary. Pappis suggested including that discussion in the plan.

- Chesnut stated that the bridge between White River Junction and Lebanon was under inspection (used by Orange and Green lines) to determine repair or replacement. If the bridge is downgraded, there will be a negative impact on AT's service.
- An attendee mentioned the potential of a park & ride lot at farmers market/coop, linked to the growth of Green line.
- An attendee noted the need for addition run on Green, Red, and Orange lines, in peak hours especially.
- The Downtown Lebanon to Downtown Hanover connection is difficult.
- There is a need for an online trip planner. Chesnut mentioned that the State of Vermont is looking at a grant program to sponsor a demonstration project. There is local funding from DHMC and AD, along with the I-95 Corridor Coalition grant. The system will have real time passenger information at bus stops. Initially the information will only include AT, but may others transit providers may be added.
- There has been an increase in ridership for AT, beyond the transit-dependent segment.
- Saturday service has eliminated and instead the commuter service was improved, as it is less cost effective to provide weekend service.
- An attendee suggested the shift of in-town and existing routes, as well as longer distances commuter corridors, to subscription services. Wagner discussed the issue of subscription per FTA rules.
- Chesnut indicated that a passenger survey is critical and AT's study of the New Hampshire side of the service will include one. There is also a Lebanon-sponsored TMA survey, but with limited scope.
- The plan should identify longer distance commuter routes.
- An attendee noted the need for more capacity from Keenan and Lyme, where a park &ride is also needed; and Plainfield (12A, 89 South).
- AT is building a new facility. Available funding may not suffice to provide an expanded facility that may be needed based on potential increase in capacity.
- An attendee noted the need for service from Stratford.
- In town parking (Hanover, DHMC, medical service) and mobility has always been an issue for AT. An added layer is the cost of commuting in conjunction with employee recruitment and retention.
- Chesnut stated that 1995 organizational goals and objectives are still valid
- There should be a review of schedule, ridership growth and traffic growth.
- Construction project along the Green Route is causing problems (Route 5).
- AT did not have marketing grants until this year.

The meeting was adjourned.