

Deerfield Valley Transit Association (DVTA) Stakeholder Meeting - July 17, 2008

Bill Evans of Milligan & Company opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, explaining the purpose of the meeting. Evans 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 service is not indicated on the map.

Evans reviewed trends in federal and state funding for operations of public transit, which shows continuous increase, commenting that Vermont is in the top tier of states in providing funding for public transit. He provided an overview of governance, operations, the service area and types of services provided. He then discussed fares, fleet and facility. Ridership and operating budgets were reviewed, pointing out the various funding sources.

Evans highlighted the next steps of the process and the availability of materials on the project website. He added that comments can also be sent in through the website or through snail mail. He then opened the discussion.

The following is a list of questions and comments from the audience:

- Randy Schoonmaker, executive director of DVTA, provided a list of suggestions for improvements to transit service (see attached).
- An attendee noted that DVTA should seek funding from the towns. The Tri-County Planning Commission should assist DVTA with this effort. The towns have been financially impacted by Act 60 & 68 and may not be receptive.
- Schoonmaker noted that local match currently comes from schools, housing developments and Mt. Snow. DVTA may request funds from towns in the future.
- An attendee stated that Act 60 and Act 68 are negatively impacting local services, including transit.
- An attendee noted that the way to support public transit is a long-term earmark program and well as sponsorship.
- Establish service between Wilmington and Bennington was identified as an important need. Schoonmaker noted that Bennington has told DVTA that passengers on their buses must be dropped off at the border and then Bennington will transport them to their final destinations. This will reduce usage of this service. Demand for service from Bennington to Wilmington is unknown.
- DVTA is not sure if the requested service between Brattleboro and Bennington is necessary.
- An attendee suggested VTrans should reconsider its service plan criteria as it relates to the priority of service that will impact economic development. Within this area, economic development is a priority and transportation is a critical link.
- Schoonmaker stated that Van Go was cancelled in October because of additional funding needed to be allocated for dialysis treatment. Van Go was designed to provide transportation for people who were not sponsored by a state or federal program. This service is still needed but funds are not available to continue the service. Increased fuel costs have constrained the budget.

- An attendee encouraged transit providers to examine the benefits of doing regional marketing.
- The local schools would like to contract with DVTA to perform field trips and other special service trips.
- There is a need for evening service from West Dover to Wilmington.
- An attendee noted that DVTA should look at the possibility of incorporating green concepts into new bus purchases. This would not only provide environmental benefits but may also reduce the need to use petroleum based fuels.
- The state should provide incentives for providers that develop unique ideas that reduce fuel usage and improve the environment. The providers along with VTrans should also be going to the congressional delegations looking for assistance in this area.
- A transit rider recommended providing more outreach to assist non-frail elderly with ways of making it easier to use transit services. Many non-frail elderly are not yet aware of the available services. A large proportion of Vermont's population is either elderly or will be within the next five years.
- A transit rider stated that additional service early in the morning and late at night is needed during the ski season to transport workers to the Mt. Snow area. Many who work in the restaurants, house keeping in hotels and laundry service do not have cars.
- More frequent service during mid day hours from Wilmington to Brattleboro is needed.
- An attendee suggested additional service frequency on upper and lower handle road and during the winter season on the Wardsboro route.
- Mt. Snow's biggest priority is later service hours for employees.
- Travel patterns will be changing. The need for public transit will increase and we need to start preparing for it now.
- Economic development should not be the lowest priority in the state service plan.
- If seniors are going to age in place, it will require more investment in transit services.
- The state should reward communities that guide development that feeds into public transit systems.
- Schoonmaker stated that DVTA will commit to be the first system to replace its fleet with alternative fuel vehicles. He noted that currently, the challenge with alternative fuels, such as cooking oil, is that it is in such high demand that it is difficult to find steady supplies. The issue with electric buses is that companies have not yet developed an affordable option that could operate in Vermont's winter climate.

The meeting was adjourned.