

GMCN Stakeholder Meeting
July 17, 2008

Donna Baker, Green Mountain Community Network's (GMCN) Executive Director, opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, telling a story about frogs and their adaptable nature. She stated that most transit organizations resemble frogs in that respect. The problem is that adaptability doesn't allow them to realize drastic changes to their environment that may be fatal to them. She added that today's meeting will allow GMCN to examine issues it can take advantage of to survive. She then introduced Krista Chadwick from VTrans and Sen. Bob Hartwell, and GMCN board members present at the meeting. She then introduced Dan Wagner of Milligan & Company.

Wagner stated the purpose of the meeting, going over the agenda. He then provided a description of the SRPTP process, emphasizing the role of the public in preparing the plan. He then discussed the State public transportation network that only shows the fixed and deviated routes, but not the demand response network. He then discussed the state and federal funding for public transportation (operating) which shows an increasing trend.

Wagner then went over GMCN's governance (all board members are appointed, representing the geographical distribution); operations which including a volunteer network; service area, discussing the types of services provided through GMCN; and provided an overview of their current fares, fleet and facility.

Wagner discussed ridership, explaining that the graph only illustrates the deviated fixed routes not the Medicaid and FTA Elderly and Persons with Disabilities services. He then discussed the operating budget, which mostly comes from Federal and State revenues.

Wagner then explained the next steps of the process. Wagner opened the discussion to the group for comments and suggestions. The following are comments and questions received during the meeting:

- There is no commuter service between Wilmington and Bennington. There is a need for a seamless regional system. Currently resident can take Moover to Brattleboro, but can't take it to Bennington. Moover has dropped a route due to fuel costs.
- Another issue is to resurrect the Greyhound bus (service from Burlington to Bennington (along Route 7) to New York and Boston). Yankee Trail is available to Downtown Albany. Connecting Vermont public transportation companies along the same routes takes too long.
- Greyhound's discontinuance of routes was handled poorly. The service required about \$250,000 which was not provided by the State. Greyhound may not be interested in resurrecting the service; but should be looked into. A private bus company is looking to expand along the west side of the state. Long haul passengers are not going to transfer three times with limited baggage space. The

- new or existing service should serve Albany Airport. There should be a focus on statewide transport, not just within each county.
- Extending rail service (Amtrak) would be too burdensome on the taxpayers.
 - With the rising fuel costs and environmental issues, all options, including rail service should be examined. There should also be relevant connections to neighboring states.
 - It shouldn't be an either/or situation. There should be bus and train services (inter- and multimodal options).
 - Manchester has a lot of businesses that stay open late. To draw people from other communities, additional service with extended hours is needed. Effective-efficient transportation need for North to South travel on the Western part of the state, especially in key hours of the day (i.e. elimination of multiple bus transfers) is essential. The area is tourism dependent, with visitors coming from out of state.
 - Baker shared upcoming GMCN initiatives: work with Manchester Chamber of Commerce; submitting for funding for a new East-West service, connecting to Connecticut River Transit (Rte 11 – Manchester to Londonderry [in the summer, Stratton Mountain in Winter]); daily service).
 - The park and ride in Manchester could become a multimodal center.
 - There is a need for universal dispatch system in Bennington County—between organizations and businesses that operate service. GMCN can act as a brokerage for coordinating the rides.
 - There is a need for educating the public about public transit (how and why to use public transportation), including disabled travelers.
 - There was a discussion about the possibility of some Medicaid eligible clients to take fixed route service rather than door-to-door service to save taxpayers money.
 - There was a suggestion for dovetailing the internal systems with other transport to have a seamless connection between door-to-door to fixed service.
 - Public transportation is an important factor in economic development. There should be more emphasis on workforce transportation, in collaboration with employers. Service should be aligned with shifts.
 - There was a suggestion about ADA transportation for day clients, in coordination with GMCN. In the case of disabled transportation, a central dispatch wouldn't work because the need to ensure client is ready on time. Funding is limited to attendance and doesn't cover transportation hours; thus, if clients spend more time on public transit, then the agency won't get reimbursed.
 - There are also privacy issues that preclude the public from agency transportation.
 - Wagner discussed the history of federal rural transportation, requiring maximizing feasible transportation available, allowing for expansion of human service transportation network to the general public. Barriers expressed here do not exist in other parts of the state. As part of this study, the human service agency transportation will be mapped.
 - There are similar needs to Manchester. Getting people here is an issue, especially visitors, coming from out of state who can't get to Bennington, using public transportation. This is the gateway to Vermont from two states. There is a need for hub connectivity. Job access routes are a necessity.

- There is a need for tourist access routes (to lodging facilities and other places of interest). Connectivity to Berkshire County for tourists is essential.
- Expansion of in-town service in Bennington is needed, especially to grocery stores or multi-level interests/needs.
- In outlying areas, as part of the planning of new developments, service capacity needs should be assessed. GMCN should be part of those discussions earlier.
- In Manchester region, dovetailing public transportation with school transportation system.
- There was a question about volunteer transportation and whether family members can be reimbursed for transportation. Immediate family can't be reimbursed through the Medicaid program; only in hardship cases, then they can be reimbursed and the rate is less than that for volunteer driver reimbursement.
- Disabled population groups fought for door to door transportation and we want to keep it. In addition, this population group wants ALL vehicles in Vermont to be lift-equipped for all persons with disabilities to travel throughout the state.
- At the last legislative session, a bill was introduced to issue g.o. bonds in anticipation of federal funding for bridge repairs and upgrade of railbeds; some of the bond funds can be released to be used for public transportation service. Stakeholders should make suggestions to their respective Representative for what the legislature should do.
- As GMCN can't lobby because of receipt of federal funding, stakeholders should advocate for GMCN needs. The Bennington Chamber usually organizes an annual visit/trip to the legislature.
- There is a need to work with regional areas across borders to improve transportation. Some of the Vermont areas are serving as bedroom communities in neighboring states. Krista Chadwick stated that there is a state initiative, "Go Vermont," a statewide van pool service, administered by a third party. VTrans is in final negotiations for the RFP. VTrans has also a carpooling website. There is also a tax-incentive for employers who sponsor the vanpools.
- Consider hybrid and alternative fuels when purchasing new vehicles.
- "Our residents want the quality of life here and are willing to travel far for work, across the state borders."

Chadwick re-emphasized the availability of the website for access to documents and submitting comments. The meeting adjourned.