

GMTA – Stakeholder Committee Meeting 7/14/08

Krista Chadwick from VTrans opened the meeting with introductions. Chris Cole of Green Mountain Transit Agency expressed the importance of the process for GMTA. Bill Evans from Milligan & Company followed by stating that this is the third meeting with GMTA, following kickoff and strategic planning meetings, held earlier in the spring. He stated that there have been huge changes for the organization in the last four years. Through this process, GMTA can see where it is heading in the next five years. Evans discussed the agenda for the meeting. He stated that the comments from today's stakeholder and public meetings will be incorporated in the plan over the summer.

The stakeholder committee members introduced themselves.

Evans discussed the VTrans funded route map. He stated that in addition to the routes, there are also flexible services run in local areas and volunteer networks, which all together create a universal coverage, for at least some markets. Evans discussed the level of funding for public transit in Vermont. In aggregate, the funds are for operations. He pointed out that the chart shows continued increase in level of funding in the state. There was new federal legislation that created more rural funds; highway funds have also been flexed into the transit program in Vermont. Per capita, Vermont is one of the leaders nationwide to do this.

Evans stated the governance of the organization is unique in the state, illustrating the rebirth of an existing organization to create a truly regional entity with direct relationship to the professional staff of CCTA. It shows confidence that public transportation is something that people can rally around. GMTA today is a more cohesive organization. Evans discussed GMTA's operations. Chris Cole added that there is one service contract with RCT for the Mountain Road Shuttle in the Town of Stowe, for ADA Paratransit transportation.

Evans discussed the service area of GMTA. He noted that the role of Vermont Transit has diminished and is no longer a factor in providing commuter and intrastate transportation. LINK Express thus has greater impact. One member noted that Morrisville is not shaded on the service area map. Cole stated that the entire County of Lamoille should be included as the service area as GMTA is the fixed-route provider there, while RCT provides demand-response service. Evans asked about the effects of this on governance of GMTA and RCT. Cole pointed out that there is county representation on the board with two board members from Lamoille County (Regional Planning Commission and Town of Stowe). Cole stated that in the future there may be some kind of additional subcontracting with RCT.

Evans discussed the various services provided by GMTA. Cole stated the E&D routes should be included on the map. They are targeted as general public routes and should be portrayed that way. Evans discussed how Milligan & Company will illustrate the service on the future maps. One member stated that these routes are not the way the public perceives mass transit, so it requires an educational process to bring it to the public attention. These routes will be on GMTA website and schedules soon. A member mentioned that GMTA provides services for some summer events. Cole confirmed that they are not charter services; they are marketed through promotional materials separate from their regular service. This can be part of the plan to identify desire for summer service.

A Stowe Mountain Resort member stated the town trolley service should become year round in GMTA's FY2010 operating service plan; there is a growing desire and activity that could support year-round public transportation along the mountain road. There is a new peak project to include a new 200 room hotel year-round. The employee base is growing substantially; approximately 200 additional employees. The resort would like to eliminate car use along the service area. Whether service should be at free level in summer is open to discussion. There has been steady increase in use of public transportation due to fuel prices. From a resort perspective, public transit is an important issue. The Stowe Area Association is also a contributor and it is anticipated that other businesses will probably increase their contributions. The member noted that there is an existing ACT 250 tie-in; increase of \$2,500/year contribution over 10 years for increase in services; about ½ way through the process. Cole stated that there seems to be a move toward cutting service due to revenue reductions/cost increases. As demand for such services grows, there should be some dialogue about cost sharing. State policy puts economics at the bottom of the list of priorities; provision of service to transit dependent is number one priority. Some poor performing routes are serving the transit dependent population. The funding is limited at this point. A discussion of regional transportation and usage followed. Cole stated part of plan should look at regional transit routes for future funding as there is no regional funding to address regional need (for example, limited morning availability from Burlington to Stowe as Waterbury park and ride is not available on the LINK Service in the morning). A member asked about whether the plan will include route recommendations and service gap. Chadwick stated that the statewide maps included in the powerpoint presentation were taken from Section 45 Study to the Legislature on regional transportation connectivity; VTrans' focus is now where services do not connect. Member stated one gap is in connectivity at the CVMC hospital where the two Hospital Hill Routes no longer connect at the Hospital. Dan Wagner of Milligan & Company added that the maps also do not include Go Vermont (new rideshare program) on the commuter route list.

Evans discussed fare structure, fleet and facilities of GMTA. Evans expressed that ridership has grown every year. Meredith Birkett from Chittenden County Transportation Authority stated that half-fare doesn't apply to LINK and that Mad Bus and Stowe are fare-free.

Evans discussed the budget. He then stated that comments should be directed to Milligan & Company, either directly or through the website.

The following is a list of comments from the stakeholder committee:

- From Elder and Persons with Disabilities perspective, it is difficult to plan for chemotherapy and dialysis patient trips. Since demand can't be determined, you can't budget for it. Thus, supplemental state funding would be useful (GMTA currently travels to Berlin, Burlington and Dartmouth trips for dialysis). Ticket to Ride clients stop using the service during these times.
- Non-critical care service users don't understand lack of budget impacts on their programs; there is a roller-coaster process (trip amounts change year-to-year).
- Mad River Valley (Waterbury and Montpelier); year-round service.

- There was service to Northfield and Montpelier that hopefully will be viable in the future. This service was discontinued about 2 years ago; service was designed around Norwich University and Vermont College; ridership was low. New service should concentrate on shopping trips as the only grocery store is between Northfield and Northfield Falls and location of senior centers are about 2+ miles away. GMTA currently provides limited human service trips.
- There is a need for Route 2 service (St. Johnsbury to Montpelier or Cabot to Montpelier) and in general service to routes. There are successful van pools in place. Evans asked if van pools are effective and should be part of the plan. Cole stated it would not be part of GMTA and CCTA plans as the state will be managing it (Go Vermont). A member stated communications for desire for van pool goes through the provider and should be coordinated with VTrans. Cole stated there looks to be a need for the plan to identify commuter and van pool corridors.
- There is limited local match commitment from area businesses/Towns due to other demands.
- The plan should include smaller businesses (70 plus employees such as Cabot), smaller health centers (Mad River, Plainfield, Barre, etc.) and senior centers on maps by Milligan & Company for growth service areas, not just hub areas. Demand for these routes will grow as population ages.
- Plan should determine demographic threshold for commuter route versus demand response.
- Chadwick gave an overview of the statewide vanpool program.
- There are some major employers with potential need: National Life; Blue Cross Blue Shield, Sugarbush, Central Vermont Medical Center, Small Dog, Industrial Park with energy company, Smugglers Notch, Trapps Family Lodge, Stowe Area Association (on Mountain Road). GMTA service area mostly includes employers with 50+ employees versus 100+ employees. Evans said he would exam this further.
- Circulator Route in Montpelier (park and ride lot – downtown Montpelier), for connections and reducing parking demand is before City of Montpelier Council now.
- There is a need for a City of Barre jitney type service (has most transit dependent people in VT because of the number of housing authorities).
- Burlington-Waterbury commuter service is critical and enables opportunities in the future (can commute now from Montpelier to Waterbury, from Burlington to Montpelier, but not between Burlington and Waterbury due to location of park & ride lot).
- There is need for Stowe summer service to become year-round. Ski services all emanate from Stowe (currently no service to the mountains).

- Would like to see the three ski mountains in GMTA serviced from Burlington: Burlington to Smuggler's Notch, Burlington to Mad River, and Burlington to Stowe Mountain.
- There is need for a maintenance and storage facility in Mad River Valley.
- There is a need for GMTA facility update and expansion in Berlin (storage for buses).
- Expansion of Stowe facility is needed. Also, if service expansions then there is a need for storage.
- In the Morrisville commuter shed, there is a need for possibly a storage facility as currently there is a deadhead run. The other possibility is better coordination with VTrans for use of their District facilities in Morrisville.
- A joint facility with Sugarbush was discussed with Mad River Planning Commission.
- A transit center has been discussed in Montpelier for some time; Montpelier has an FTA Earmark for this project. GMTA is interested in servicing it (environmental issues with the site are holding it up).
- Waterbury is the hub of the service area; therefore a transit facility in the village should be created. Currently, GMTA is using their park & ride facility, although challenging location to use on the LINK Service – the challenge is finding a funding partner for regional services.
- Envision a commuter route in Lamoille County (Cambridge to Morrisville) along Route 15 (IBM, St Michaels College, UVM, Fletcher Allen are the major employers/destinations).
- Marketing materials don't discuss volunteer service as those are not open to the public because of lack of capacity to support it; GMTA spends a lot of time recruiting volunteer drivers, but has little success. There was a suggestion for recruiting volunteer drivers with an incentive that they get gas reimbursement for a shopping trip or promoting "Buddy Driving" marketing scheme.
- There was a comment to reinstate accessibility to a meal site program in Northfield (hunger and nutrition focus); Northfield has lost two grocery stores in the last few years, thus access to food is limited. Northfield Savings Bank has expressed interest in providing funding but not to the extent needed for the service. Northfield had two services (commuter and meal site service) which were eliminated.

The meeting adjourned.