

Stagecoach public meeting 7.16.08

David Palmer, Executive Director, Stagecoach Transportation Services, opened the meeting with welcoming remarks and introduction of his staff, VTrans and Milligan & Company. He also welcomed legislators in the audience and Stagecoach's board of directors. He pointed out that there is a commuter survey that Stagecoach is conducting, encouraging attendees to complete them. He further explained the purpose of the meeting, stating importance of public participation in the process, as input from the audience will be incorporated in the recommendations.

Dan Wagner, Milligan & Company started the meeting by providing the overview of the meeting, pointing out that there is a handout with the overview of the powerpoint presentation. He then went over the SRPTP process. He discussed the state's transit map, explaining that the demand response routes are not indicated on the map. He continued with the trends in federal and state funding for operations of public transit, which shows continuous increase. Wagner commented that Vermont is one of the top states in the nation providing funding in this area. He then provided an overview of governance, operations, the service area and types of services provided by Stagecoach. He then discussed fares, fleet and administrative facility located in Randolph. Palmer commented that Stagecoach has a bus storage facility in Bradford. Wagner then discussed Stagecoach's operating budget, pointing out the various funding sources.

Wagner then highlighted the next steps in the SRPTP process and that materials will be available on the project website, and comments can also be sent in through the website. He then opened the discussion.

The following are the comments provided by the audience.

- Stagecoach was asked to provide a breakdown of fuel usage. Palmer said all are gasoline.
- DHMC worker, taking the 89er daily, embarking in Sharon stated need for bigger buses and possibility of pre-buying tickets to have guaranteed ride.
- Commuter service is good, but the frequency of service is not adequate.
- River Route rider indicated that more people would like to ride the commuter bus, but are discouraged because of limited capacity; people have been bumped on the way home; VTrans should add more park and ride lots. There should be more service for DHMC employees as DHMC provides financial contribution to Stagecoach
- Vermont Rail Advocacy stated the need for connection between local buses and wider network, such as Amtrak (intermodal service). It offers a possibility of revenue sharing.
- Representative from the Energy Commission in Sharon stated that the Sharon park and ride lot is very crowded and needs to be enlarged. Is there any consideration to increase the 89er due to increased ridership? Any consideration of providing additional service due to closure of Butt Bridge on September 1, 2008 (backside of river in Sharon to Rte 14)?

- I-89er early AM rider stated the need for more capacity and service. Works 4/10 hour workweek. Rider stated does not take bus in the afternoon due to work schedule. Stagecoach buses are clean but need more of them.
- 89er rider indicated that only one route comes back from the VA. If the bus is full, there is no guarantee if a second bus would come back for the return. Buses are not large enough; not enough routes.
- Commuter restated the capacity issue and inadequacy of the bus size, indicating the need for more public transportation options or providers to choose from for a universal system. Would diesel buses help?
- River Rte rider. The bus is great, but number of passengers are increasing at Fairlee & Thetford, the bus does not have the capacity. The second bus in the morning doesn't go to the VA. The return trip has sometimes to be repeated (Chaser bus), as some passengers are left behind. No guarantee of ride home. There is a wheelchair person interested in taking the bus to & from work. If this happens, it would eliminate four passenger seats.
- Rider indicated that the bus drivers are phenomenal. Some passengers have stopped taking the bus because of the space issue. There are potential new riders but because of unreliability and capacity, they are not using the bus. Only VA riders get the heads-up notice about space; but there is reluctance to provide the same notice to DHMC passengers. Stagecoach has not been very responsive to complaints. CRT has replaced buses with bigger ones when capacity was exceeded. Link Express has also increased service to meet increasing ridership. Stagecoach is more focused on E&D (human service transportation) service than commuter service. Commuters are asking VTrans to have Stagecoach release the service to another company if Stagecoach can't meet the increasing demand for service.
- A River Route passenger stated that riding Stagecoach is a privilege not a right, indicating the need for addition service earlier in the morning and later in the afternoon; 6:00 pm leaving Dartmouth to work later hours.
- Passenger praised Stagecoach and State of Vermont, indicating willingness to help Stagecoach as a nonprofit, helping with efforts to get more funding for Stagecoach. "We should become a model for the rest of the US, showing our environmental responsibility."
- New bus rider indicated service was very wonderful, but there was great need to rework the schedule is more of an express service to the VA Hospital; two trips at 4:00 pm, two trips at 5:00 pm and one trip at 6:00 pm. One bus should arrive earlier to make Dartmouth employees get to work on time. Backup bus has been helpful in picking up everyone.
- DHMC rider indicated that two years ago there were not many people on the bus; many people didn't know about the service; then suddenly ridership grew. The buses are too small and the service is not reliable. Wants to work on a solution together.
- 89er rider indicated that Stagecoach was instrumental in deciding to work at DHMC, stating the willingness to help Stagecoach come up with a

solution, including possibility of fare increase or multiple presold ticket that allows Stagecoach plan capacity; provide standby options like airlines do; provide discounted fare if you buy annual ticket to guarantee seats.

- Attendee indicated the need to have a platform to the state for increasing funding to Stagecoach because fares represents 2% of Stagecoach's operating budget.
- Audience member asked for removal of no-standing policy.
- Rider advocate stated the need for bigger buses and if there was anything do be done to streamline the process to have more and bigger buses.
- Commuter bus rider indicated that money saved by taking the bus allows college tuition payment for their daughters, stating willingness to go to work one hour earlier as a rider to meet the bus schedule. Additional seats are needed.
- 89er rider asked if Stagecoach was interested in operating the commuter service, if not, then let another bus company take over. Stagecoach should offer same price for all bus fares and address the first come-first served service. Different fare price in place now.
- 89er Rider indicated that DHMC and the College subsidize the service. Wagner pointed out that it's reflected as local share of funding.
- Rider asked about the possibility of a van in Sharon parking lot for direct service to the VA and some schedule modifications for the return trip.
- 89er Commuter indicated that DHMC employees are not notified of the capacity issue to "free up" additional seats on the 4:00 pm bus.
- Rider suggested finding out how many riders on the buses and how to meet their needs, so there is guaranteed ride.
- Rider stated that the biggest issue is frustration about lack of response to proposed solutions. Look long-term about vehicle capacity as ridership will grow. First-come-first serve policy has been communicated.
- Sharon Energy Committee member stated the need for more parking, especially in the winter when school's in session and their lot cannot be used. Resurvey the VA, DHMC hospital and college if there is interest in bus service, also for areas in between; suggested earlier pickup service both ways.
- Audience member inquired about the cost of this study and information about expenses in addition to revenues, showing expenditure in various areas – gas, admin, drivers, maintenance. Also, questioned the no-standing on the bus rule.
- 89er rider stated that most comments are about immediate problems, but long-term solutions are also needed. Improving service will increase ridership, therefore the need for more service; more coordination between all transit services and providers; development of hubs for coordinated transfers; more rail service along the existing lines for alternative choices.
- Audience member indicated the increased potential for mobility due to availability of Stagecoach service and stated the possibility of lightrail service.

- Rider inquired about the possibility of coordinated ridesharing in Randolph for shopping or medical trips; around 9:00 – 9:30 am.
- K. Chadwick (VTrans) addressed the audience, discussing a meeting with Dartmouth College and Stagecoach about the possibility of a vanpool service from Sharon Park & Ride. She further discussed that VTrans is negotiating a contract with a third part for vanpool service throughout the State. There is a tax incentive for employers and a subsidy for each vanpool formed of up to \$300. Insurance is carried by third party administrator. There is a rideshare coordinator at the state level, who can be contacted for more information.

Palmer thanked everyone for attending and their feedback. He indicated that 75 percent of ridership is not present; the commuter group is only 25 percent of the ridership. People with special needs and social services did not attend the meeting to provide their input. Stagecoach will follow up on the comments provided tonight. He stated that a subscription service was instituted in 2005, but was quickly reprimanded by FTA and VTrans, as all federally funded service must be on a first-come-first serve basis. He stated that the No Standing Policy is because of Stagecoach's risk policy. Palmer indicated that there will be bigger buses on River Route and the realignment of the current schedule. 89er will have an additional commuter segment and Stagecoach will be applying for additional funding for this. He stated that longer term issues will be included in the SRPTP and addressed the farebox return issue.

There was an additional question about who to contact at the VA and College about the interest in increased ridership and how to best communicate if space is limited at night in Norwich as there is no functioning phone to arrange for alternate transportation. Palmer gave the audience the names Stagecoach works with currently.

The meeting adjourned.