

Albany-Bennington-Manchester Bus Options

Section 11 (b)

Act 40 (2015)

Final Report

January 14, 2016

Prepared by:

Vermont Agency of Transportation

For:

House Committee on Transportation

Senate Committee on Transportation

Table of Contents

Background	1
Existing Services	2
Estimated Costs for Service Options	6
Advantages and Disadvantages of Each Option	9
Implementation Timelines	12
Appendices.....	12

Background

Section 11 of Act 40 directs the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to study options for initiating and operating an Albany-Bennington-Manchester bus service.

Sec. 11. STUDY OF MONTPELIER TO ST. ALBANS COMMUTER RAIL SERVICE, ALBANY TO BENNINGTON TO MANCHESTER BUS SERVICE

(b) The Agency, in consultation with the Joint Fiscal Office, shall study the expected benefits and costs to the State of Vermont, implementation steps, and timeline associated with various models for initiating and operating an Albany to Bennington to Manchester bus service, and shall report its findings and any recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Transportation on or before January 15, 2016.

VTrans staff consulted with the Joint Fiscal Office, the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC), Amtrak, intercity bus carriers, and Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN), to develop bus options and alternatives for this study. The following four options were identified:

- 1) Amtrak Thruway Service
- 2) State-Managed Intercity Bus Carrier
- 3) Local Transit Provider
- 4) Rerouting Existing Burlington-Albany InterCity Bus Route to serve the Albany-Rensselaer rail station.

With the exception of the rerouting option, which currently provides 1 daily-return trip, all service options include two-daily return shuttle trips. Estimated costs are detailed in Table 1. Note that these are high-level operating cost estimates that are contingent on ridership and revenue assumptions, as well as contracting assumptions.

Table 1: Summary of Estimated Operating Costs for Each Option

Options	Full 50-Seat Motor Coach	12-15 Seat Vehicle
Amtrak Thruway Service	\$490,544	\$392,435
State-Managed Intercity Bus Carrier	\$379,600	\$237,250
Local Transit Provider	N/A	\$229,950
Rerouting Existing Burlington-Albany InterCity Bus Route	No change from current	No change from current

*Not Available

Existing Services

There are two intercity bus services that connect Bennington to Albany but neither serves the Albany-Rensselaer rail station.

Yankee Trails Bennington Bus Service

Yankee Trails provides intercity bus service between Bennington and Albany. The service includes two daily-return trips to Bennington: a late morning and early evening arrival, and a late morning and early evening departure (see schedule in Table 2). According to the posted schedule, the trip takes 1 hour and 45 minutes, compared to 56 minutes by automobile to cover the 39.6 route miles between Bennington and Albany. This route does not serve the Albany-Rensselaer rail station, and does not serve Manchester.

Table 2: Yankee Trails Bennington Service Schedule

Morning Schedule

Leave Here	At This Time	Arrive Here	At This Time
Hoosick Falls	6:45am	Potter Hill	7:00am
Potter Hill	7:00am	Boyntonville	7:02am
Boyntonville	7:02am	Pittstown	7:05am
Pittstown	7:05am	Raymertown	7:15am
Raymertown	7:15am	Haynerville	7:20am
Haynerville	7:20am	Center Brunswick	7:25am
Center Brunswick	7:25am	Sycaway	7:30am
Sycaway	7:30am	Troy Terminal	7:40am
Troy Terminal	7:40am	Watervliet	7:45am
Watervliet	7:45am	Menands	7:50am
Menands	7:50am	Albany-State Plaza	8:05am
Albany-State Plaza	8:05am	Albany-Greyhound	8:10am
Albany-Greyhound	9:10am	Menands	9:20am
Menands	9:20am	Watervliet	9:25am
Watervliet	9:25am	Troy Terminal	9:30am
Troy Terminal	9:30am	Sycaway	9:35am
Sycaway	9:35am	Center Brunswick	9:40am

Center Brunswick	9:40am	Haynersville	9:45am
Haynersville	9:45am	Raymertown	9:50am
Raymertown	9:50am	Pittstown	9:55am
Pittstown	9:55am	Boyntonville	10:00am
Boyntonville	10:00am	Potter Hill	10:05am
Potter Hill	10:05am	Hoosick Falls	10:10am
Hoosick Falls	10:10am	Hoosick	10:40am
Hoosick	10:40am	Old Bennington	10:45am
Old Bennington	10:45am	Bennington, VT	10:50am

Mid-Day Schedule

Leave Here	At This Time	Arrive Here	At This Time
Bennington, VT	11:05am	Old Bennington	11:10am
Old Bennington	11:10am	Hoosick	11:20am
Hoosick	11:20am	Hoosick Falls	11:30am
Hoosick Falls	11:30am	Potter Hill	11:45am
Potter Hill	11:45am	Boyntonville	11:50am
Boyntonville	11:50am	Pittstown	11:55am
Pittstown	11:55am	Raymertown	12:00pm
Raymertown	12:00pm	Haynerville	12:05pm
Haynerville	12:05pm	Center Brunswick	12:10pm
Center Brunswick	12:10pm	Sycaway	12:15pm
Sycaway	12:15pm	Troy Terminal	12:25pm
Troy Terminal	12:25pm	Watervliet	12:30pm
Watervliet	12:30pm	Menands	12:35pm
Menands	12:35pm	Albany-Greyhound	12:50pm

Evening Schedule

Leave Here	At This Time	Arrive Here	At This Time
Albany-Greyhound	5:15pm	Albany-State Plaza	5:25pm

Albany-State Plaza	5:25pm	Menands	5:35pm
Menands	5:35pm	Watervliet	5:40pm
Watervliet	5:40pm	Troy Terminal	5:50pm
Troy Terminal	5:50pm	Sycaway	6:00pm
Sycaway	6:00pm	Center Brunswick	6:05pm
Center Brunswick	6:05pm	Haynersville	6:15pm
Haynersville	6:15pm	Raymertown	6:20pm
Raymertown	6:20pm	Pittstown	6:25pm
Pittstown	6:25pm	Boyntonville	6:30pm
Boyntonville	6:30pm	Potter Hill	6:35pm
Potter Hill	6:35pm	Hoosick Falls	6:40pm
Hoosick Falls	6:40pm	Hoosick	6:55pm
Hoosick	6:55pm	Old Bennington	7:15pm
Old Bennington	7:15pm	Bennington, VT	7:20pm
Bennington, VT	7:25pm	Old Bennington	7:27pm
Old Bennington	7:27pm	Hoosick	7:40pm
Hoosick	7:40pm	Hoosick Falls	7:50pm
Hoosick Falls	7:50pm	Potter Hill	8:00pm
Potter Hill	8:00pm	Boyntonville	8:05pm
Boyntonville	8:05pm	Pittstown	8:10pm
Pittstown	8:10pm	Raymertown	8:15pm
Raymertown	8:15pm	Haynersville	8:20pm
Haynersville	8:20pm	Center Brunswick	8:25pm
Center Brunswick	8:25pm	Sycaway	8:30pm
Sycaway	8:30pm	Troy Terminal	8:40pm
Troy Terminal	8:40pm	Watervliet	8:45pm
Watervliet	8:45pm	Menands	8:50pm
Menands	8:50pm	Albany-Greyhound	9:05pm

<http://charter.yankeetrails.com/corporate/benningtonsched.aspx>

U.S. 7 Burlington to Albany Bus Service

Vermont subsidizes an intercity bus route between Burlington and Albany with service to Bennington and Manchester. The one daily-return trip does not serve the Albany-Rensselaer rail station, but makes stops at the Albany International Airport, and the Albany Bus Terminal (see schedule in Table 3).

Table 3: Burlington to Albany Intercity Bus Service Schedule



Route 7

Morning	Location	Parking	Afternoon
7:05AM ↓	Colchester, VT Park and Ride - I-89 Exit 17	🚗	↑ 8:00PM
7:30AM ↓	Burlington, VT UVM Royal Tyler Theater		↑ 7:35PM
7:50AM ↓	S. Burlington, VT Airport	🚗	↑ 7:15PM
9:00AM ↓	Middlebury, VT Storrs Ave Southbound at Franklin St next to Davis Family Library		↑ 6:05PM
9:25AM ↓	Brandon, VT Union St. side of the Green		↑ 5:40PM
9:50AM ↓	Rutland, VT Marble Valley Regional Transit Ctr.	🚗	↑ 5:15PM
Connection from and to Route 4 Service at Rutland Stop			
10:05AM ↓	Rutland, VT Marble Valley Regional Transit Ctr.	🚗	↑ 5:00PM
10:25AM ↓	Wallingford, VT Cumberland Farms		↑ 4:40PM
10:55AM ↓	Manchester, VT Zoey's Double Hex Restaurant		↑ 4:10PM
11:30AM ↓	Bennington, VT Bus Terminal, 215 Pleasant St	🚗	↑ 3:35PM
12:35PM ↓	Albany, NY Airport (southbound discharge only)	🚗	↑ 2:30PM
1:00PM ↓	Albany, NY Greyhound / Trailways Terminal	🚗	↑ 2:05PM

<https://www.vttranslines.com/bus-schedules/>

Estimated Costs for Service Options

1. Amtrak Thruway Service

This option involves Amtrak providing dedicated bus shuttle service as an extension of its exiting trains in Albany, NY. Amtrak would operate the service and include it in its national ticketing system.

VTrans asked Amtrak to develop a cost estimate for a dedicated Albany- Bennington-Manchester thruway service using two daily-return trips. Amtrak anticipates that such a service would require a state operating payment of approximately \$490,544 annually for a full 50-seat motor coach (total estimated expenses of \$664,544 minus total revenues of \$174,000).

Amtrak’s estimate is based on a forecasted 3,400 passengers generating 423,500 passenger miles, and \$173,000 in ticket revenue. Food & beverage revenue would generate an additional \$1,000 in revenue. It is also assumed that the Thruway service would operate in conjunction with the *Empire Service*, and optimized to provide connections to other routes (see Table 4).

Table 4: Proposed Amtrak Thruway Schedule

VERMONT DEDICATED THRUWAY CONNECTION										
6280	6268	◀ Thruway Bus ▶				6269	6237	6253		
Daily	Daily	◀ Normal Days of Operation ▶				Daily	Mo-Fr	SaSu		
		Mile	▼		▲					
7 20A	3 10P	0	Dp	Manchester, VT	Ar	1 15P	9 10P	9 55P		
8 10A	3 50P	25	Dp	Bennington, VT	Ar	12 35P	8 30P	9 15P		
9 30A	5 10P	65	Ar	Albany/Rensselaer, NY	Dp	11 10A	7 20P	8 05P		
280/254	68	◀ Connecting Train Number ▶				69	237	253		
Daily	Daily	◀ Normal Days of Operation ▶				Daily	Mo-Fr	SaSu		
		Mile	▼		▲					
10 10A	5 40P	0	Dp	Albany/Rensselaer, NY	Ar	10 50A	7 00P	7 45P		
10 35A	6 08P	28		Hudson, NY		10 20A	6 33P	7 15P		
10 56A	6 29P	53		Rhinecliff, NY		10 00A	6 13P	6 55P		
11 15A	6 45P	68		Poughkeepsie, NY		9 45A		6 40P		
11 55A	7 25P	109		Croton-Harmon, NY		9 03A		5 58P		
	7 46P	127		Yonkers, NY		8 44A		5 39P		
12 50P	8 20P	142	Ar	New York, NY - Penn Station	Dp	8 15A	4 40P	5 15P		

In addition to the operating cost of the motor coach at \$621,000, an additional \$43,544 in reservation and call center costs, shared stations, insurance, and other costs are assumed.

Amtrak reported that using a smaller 12-15 seat vehicle could reduce the operating subsidy to \$392,435.

As of this writing, the States of Vermont and New York have not proposed a methodology for splitting revenue and expenses for this service, which may impact the cost-estimate if the two States decide to – cost-share the service. Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) Section 209 cost-sharing requirements may also be applicable.

A more detailed accounting of estimated Amtrak Thruway costs and revenues is included in Appendix 1.

2) State-Managed Intercity Bus Carrier

This option involves the State contracting with one of the intercity bus carriers to provide dedicated shuttle service between Manchester-Bennington and the Albany/Rensselaer rail station.

To determine the estimated cost of such a service, VTrans' Public Transit Section reviewed fully allocated bus rates and averaged rates submitted by private bus companies for FY 14 intercity bus grant solicitations. These costs averaged approximately \$4.00 per mile for a 50-seat motor coach and \$2.50 per mile for a 12-15 passenger vehicle. Based on these rates, the operating subsidy to operate a two daily-return trip Bennington/Manchester to Albany service is estimated at approximately \$379,600 for a 50-seat motor coach and \$237,250 for a 12-15 passenger vehicle (see Table 5).

Amtrak provides options for through-ticketing and interline agreements with private carriers. Through-ticketing agreements allow Amtrak to sell tickets that will be honored for travel on the line of another carrier. That carrier will be paid the agreed value of the tickets honored, and can set the rate of compensation. Interline agreements can include a commission for Amtrak as the selling carrier. The usual commission rate is 20% of the ticket price. For example, if Amtrak sold a \$20.00 ticket, then Amtrak would retain \$4.00 in commission to pay for expenses related to credit card fees, use of stations, etc. The connecting carrier would be paid \$16.00.

Both through-ticketing and interline agreements allow for Amtrak branding (such as coloring the bus with the Amtrak logo and colors) although this will have to be negotiated with Amtrak. In both cases, Bennington and Manchester will appear in Amtrak's national reservation system.

Table 5: Average Cost Factors for Intercity Bus Carriers Before Revenue

		vehicle type	miles	cost/mile	trips/day	days/year	cost
Manchester, VT (via Bennington)	Rensselaer station, NY	over the road motorcoach	65	\$4.00	4	365	\$379,600.00
		12-15 passenger "Sprinter"-style vehicle	65	\$2.50	4	365	\$237,250.00
Notes:							
* cost/mile is fully allocated rate based on an average of rates submitted by private bus companies in the FY14 VTrans intercity grant solicitation solicitation.							
* two estimates are provided to illustrate cost of using a typical over-the-road motorcoach style vehicle versus a smaller vehicle such as a Mercedes Sprinter.							
* trips per day represent one-way, e.g. one trip over and back in the morning and one over and back in the afternoon/evening							
* assumes a vehicle and driver(s) can be located reasonably close to the route, minimizing deadhead time							

3) Local Transit Provider

This option involves the State contracting with Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) – the local and regional transit provider for Bennington County – to operate a dedicated shuttle between Manchester-Bennington to the Albany/Rensselaer rail station.

To determine the estimated cost of such a service, VTrans asked GMCN to generate a cost estimate for such a service. Costs are estimated at \$2.39 per mile for a 14-18 passenger vehicle for an annual subsidy of \$229,950 (Table 6). GMCN’s cost estimate did not include a 50-seat motor coach option. The transit provider has not operated this type of vehicle in the past and cannot estimate costs.

Table 6: GMCN Cost-Estimate for 14-18 passenger Vehicle

Cost Per Hour Analysis							
Rate per hour	\$105.00						
Vehicle Type	14-18 Passenger Cutaway Van						
Manchester, VT	Bennington, Vt	Rensselaer Station, NY	Hours per round trip	round trips trips per day	Daily Cost	days	Annual Cost
:00	:30	1:00	3.00	2	\$630.00	365	\$229,950.00
** Based on 2 round trips daily at an hourly rate of \$105.00							
Cost per Mile Analysis							
Round Trip Miles	Miles per day	Annual Miles	Cost per mile	Annual Cost			
132	264	96360	\$2.39	\$229,950.00			

Total Service delivery cost	\$229,950.00
Total Cost	\$229,950.00

Source: Green Mountain Community Network

Re-routing Existing U.S. 7 Burlington to Bennington Service

This option involves re-routing the existing U.S 7 Burlington-Albany Intercity Bus Route to serve the Albany/Rensselaer rail station. The route serves both Bennington and Manchester with Albany destinations which includes the Albany Bus Terminal and the Albany International Airport. Rerouting would involve replacing the airport service with the rail station. In the last 11 months, there were 369 trips to/from the airport – representing approximately 4% of current ridership along the entire route. Although the rail station is likely to attract a higher number of riders than the airport, ridership gains with a single daily-return trip are not anticipated to significantly reduce the \$450,000 annual subsidy the State currently pays for this service.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Each Option

1. Amtrak Thruway Service

Advantages

- National Amtrak Through-Ticketing – This option will place Bennington and Manchester in the national reservation system, allowing travelers to book a trip from anywhere on the national Amtrak system.
- Amtrak Brand – Bus shuttle will feature the Amtrak brand, therefore offering significant marketing and branding opportunities.
- Experienced in Providing Such Service – Amtrak has provided such services throughout the country for over a decade.
- Ridership Growth – there is a higher probability that ridership will grow in the long-run. The combination of national through-ticketing, Amtrak service levels and brand, makes it more likely that residents and visitors will use the service.

Disadvantages

- Costlier Option – This option is estimated to cost approximately \$111,000 more to operate annually than a state-managed intercity carrier for full 50-seat motor coach, and \$155,000 more for a 12-15 seat vehicle.

- Uncertainty over Future Costs – PRRIA Section 209 State Cost-Sharing provisions have injected significant uncertainty in costing-out such services on state partnership basis, as well as accounting for future Amtrak costs.

2. State-Managed Intercity Bus Carrier

Advantages

- More Affordable Option – This option costs significantly less than the Amtrak Thruway option for a full 50-seat motor coach, and a 12-15 seat vehicle.
- Experienced in Providing Shuttle Services – Intercity bus carriers have been under contract with Vermont to provide similar services along I-91, U.S 7 and U.S 4, and currently provide shuttle services in several states.
- National Amtrak Through-Ticketing – If negotiated with Amtrak, this option will place Bennington and Manchester in the national reservation system, allowing travelers to book a trip from anywhere on the national Amtrak system.
- Amtrak Brand – If negotiated with Amtrak, bus shuttles could feature the Amtrak brand.
- Ridership Growth – there is a higher probability that ridership will grow in the long-run if this option includes access to Amtrak’s national reservation system and brand.

Disadvantages

- Complex Multi-Party Agreements – Will require VTrans negotiate with a private carrier, who in turn will negotiate with Amtrak.

3. Local Transit Provider

Advantages

- Knowledge of Local Travel Markets – Of all options, GMCN has the best knowledge of local travel patterns and could more easily adapt services and bus stops to account for local preferences.
- Best Suited to Coordinate Local Transit – As the local and regional transit provider for Bennington County, GMCN is best positioned to integrate connecting rail service with local transit.
- National Amtrak Through-Ticketing – If negotiated with Amtrak, this option will place Bennington and Manchester in the national reservation system, allowing travelers to book a trip from anywhere on the national Amtrak system.
- Amtrak Brand – If negotiated with Amtrak, bus shuttles could feature the Amtrak brand.

- Ridership Growth – there is a higher probability that ridership will grow in the long-run if this option includes access to Amtrak’s national reservation system and brand.

Disadvantages

- Options for Larger Vehicle - Does not provide options for a 50-seat motor coach, making difficult to meet any future growth in demand. The transit provider may need to acquire a 50-seat motor coach.
- Experience in Providing Services - GMCN does not have experience providing such services or negotiating agreements with Amtrak.

4. Rerouting Existing Burlington-Albany InterCity Bus Route

Advantages

- Service Already in Place – This service already exists, and would require replacing the existing airport stop with the rail station stop. It is, therefore, the easiest of the options to implement.
- Likely Increase Ridership Along the Entire U.S. 7 Route – The rail station will likely attract more ridership route-wide than the airport stop.

Disadvantages

- Would No Longer Serve the Albany Airport – The rerouted service will result in dropping the airport service since the driver would ‘time-out’ under the current contract.
- Lowest Level of Service – This service is established as a daily return-trip, and provides the lowest level of service compared to all other options. It is likely to result in the lowest ridership of all options.
- National Amtrak Through-ticketing – This option will not provide national through-ticketing. Travelers will be responsible for purchasing separate fares for both the bus service and Amtrak service.
- Amtrak Brand – Does not include access to the Amtrak brand or associated marketing opportunities.
- Ridership Growth - Ridership is not anticipated to grow as quickly as other options due to the lack of national through-ticketing and access to the Amtrak brand.

Implementation Timelines

The following implementation timelines denote negotiation points that will likely be needed before any service can begin:

- 1) Amtrak Thruway Service – 3-9 months, will require an agreement with Amtrak, may require agreement with New York for PRIIA Sec 209 purposes.
- 2) State-Managed Intercity Bus Carrier – 3-6 months, will require competitive bidding, coordination with rail station for boarding/deboarding passengers, and may require through-ticketing or interline agreement with Amtrak.
- 3) Local Transit Provider – 3-6 months, will require coordinating with rail station for boarding/deboarding passengers, and may require through-ticketing or interline agreement with Amtrak.
- 4) Rerouting Existing Burlington-Albany InterCity Bus Route – 1-3 months, will require renegotiating existing contract with intercity bus provider, coordination with rail station for boarding/deboarding passengers.

BCRC has analyzed potential bus stops and last mile issues in Bennington and Manchester. The lack of local, after-hours public transit services, taxis, and car rental establishments will necessitate coordination to ensure travelers can make last-mile connections. Appendix 2 contains a preliminary analysis of possible bus station sites.

Appendices

- 1- Amtrak Thruway Cost-Estimate Details
- 2- Bennington County Regional Commission Bus Station Planning

Appendix 1

Route & Service Financial Evaluation Assumptions Amtrak Finance, Service Planning & Costing



Manchester - Bennington, VT - Albany/Rensselaer, NY Thruway Service

November 14, 2014

Summary

Operations Research & Planning (Connecting Transportation) requested that Amtrak Finance, Service Planning & Costing evaluate a proposed Thruway service between Albany/Rensselaer, NY, Bennington and Manchester, VT. Under this proposal, two daily Thruway round trips operate between Albany/Rensselaer and Manchester.

A Thruway service between Albany/Rensselaer and Manchester, VT results in increased state operating payments \$490,544 annually. A summary of revenue and expenses can be found in the table below:

Manchester - Bennington, VT - Albany/Rensselaer, NY Thruway Service PRIIA 209 Pricing Policy (all numbers in FY2015 dollars except where noted)

	<i>Impact of Change in Service</i>
Total Revenue	\$174,000
Total Expenses	\$664,544
Estimated State Payment or (Credit)	\$490,544

This forecast assumes the Thruway service operates in conjunction with the *Empire Service*, as the timed train connections and majority of passengers connect in Albany/Rensselaer for *Empire Service* trains and destinations. As of this writing, the states of Vermont and New York have not proposed a methodology for splitting revenue and expenses for this service.

Proposed Change

Operations Research & Planning (Connecting Transportation) proposes a Thruway service between Albany/Rensselaer, NY, Bennington and Manchester, VT. Under this proposal, two daily Thruway round trips operate between Albany/Rensselaer and Manchester.

The Thruway service connects with *Empire Service* in both directions and is scheduled to allow connectivity to the *Crescent* and *Silver Meteor* through transfers at Albany/Rensselaer and New York Penn Station.

Schedule

Operations Research & Planning (Connecting Transportation) proposed the schedule shown below:



VERMONT DEDICATED THRUWAY CONNECTION

6280	6268	◀ Thruway Bus ▶				6269	6237	6253
Daily	Daily	◀ Normal Days of Operation ▶				Daily	Mo-Fr	SaSu
		Mile	▼		▲			
7 20A	3 10P	0	Dp	Manchester, VT	Ar	1 15P	9 10P	9 55P
8 10A	3 50P	25	Dp	Bennington, VT	Ar	12 35P	8 30P	9 15P
9 30A	5 10P	65	Ar	Albany/Rensselaer, NY	Dp	11 10A	7 20P	8 05P
280/254	68	◀ Connecting Train Number ▶				69	237	253
Daily	Daily	◀ Normal Days of Operation ▶				Daily	Mo-Fr	SaSu
		Mile	▼		▲			
10 10A	5 40P	0	Dp	Albany/Rensselaer, NY	Ar	10 50A	7 00P	7 45P
10 35A	6 08P	28		Hudson, NY		10 20A	6 33P	7 15P
10 56A	6 29P	53		Rhinecliff, NY		10 00A	6 13P	6 55P
11 15A	6 45P	68		Poughkeepsie, NY		9 45A		6 40P
11 55A	7 25P	109		Croton-Harmon, NY		9 03A		5 58P
	7 46P	127		Yonkers, NY		8 44A		5 39P
12 50P	8 20P	142	Ar	New York, NY - Penn Station	Dp	8 15A	4 40P	5 15P

Benefits

Ticket Revenue

Amtrak Market Research & Analysis, through Steer Davies Gleave (SDG) forecast the incremental impact on ridership, revenue and passenger miles related to this proposal.

SDG forecasts an incremental 3,400 passengers generating \$173,000 in ticket revenue and 423,500 passenger miles.

Food & Beverage Revenue

Service Planning & Costing forecast the impact on food & beverage revenue based on the change in passenger miles. Annual food & beverage costs are forecast to increase by \$1,000.

Costs

Third Party Costs

No third party costs are forecast to change as a result of this proposal. There is no incremental change to train miles subject to the PRIIA 209 Synthetic Host Railroad Charge, nor is there any net incremental change to consists or train miles which result in changes to fuel costs.

Route Costs

Commissary Provisions

Commissary costs for *Empire Service* are forecast to increase consistent with the increase in food & beverage revenue.

Sales Distribution

Sales distribution costs for *Empire Service* are forecast to increase annually due to the increase in ridership.

Reservations & Call Centers

Reservations & call center costs for *Empire Service* are forecast to increase due to the increase in ridership.

Shared Stations

Shared stations expenses for *Empire Service* are forecast to increase annually due to the increase in ridership.

Commissions

Commissions expenses for *Empire Service* are forecast to increase annually due to the increase in revenue.

Connecting Motor Coach

Connecting motor coach expenses cover the cost of operating the Thruway service from Albany/Rensselaer to Manchester and are forecast to be \$621,000 annually, based on a daily rate of \$1,700 provided by Operations Research & Planning (Connecting Transportation).

Insurance

Insurance expenses are forecast to increase annually due to the overall increase in cost activity.

PRIIA 209 Additives

The marketing additive is forecast to increase due to the increase in revenue.

The on board service (OBS) additive is forecast to increase due to the increase in commissary provisions expenses.

The police additive is forecast to increase due to the increase in passenger miles.

The general & administrative (G&A) additive is forecast to increase due to the increase in route costs.

Financial Impact

A Thruway service between Albany/Rensselaer and Manchester, VT results in increased state operating payments \$490,544 annually.



STATISTICS & PERFORMANCE MEASURES
FY2015 PRIIA 209 Forecast

<i>Empire Service</i>	<i>Impact of Change</i>
<u>STATISTICS (all but Frequency, Unit Trips, Units Used and Labor Hours in 000s)</u>	
<i>Total Riders</i>	3,400
<i>Passenger Miles on State Corridor</i>	423,500
<i>Total Operated Passenger Miles</i>	423,500
<u>PERFORMANCE MEASURES</u>	
Load Factor (PM/SM)	0.11%
Cost Recovery (Revenue/Operating Cost)	(0.8%)
Passenger Mile/Train Mile	0.4
Operating Ratio (Operating Cost/Passenger Revenue)	0.9%
Passenger miles / Average Units Used	8,584

Most statistics and performance measures do not change significantly as a result of this proposal. Load factor increases 0.11 percentage points. Cost recovery declines by 0.8 percentage points. Operating ratio increases by 0.9 percentage points. Passenger miles per unit used increases by 8,584.

Conclusion: State Payment Impact

A Thruway service between Albany/Rensselaer and Manchester, VT results in increased state operating payments \$490,544 annually.

This forecast assumes the Thruway service operates in conjunction with *Empire Service*, as the timed train connections and majority of passengers connect in Albany/Rensselaer for *Empire Service* trains and destinations. As of this writing the states of Vermont and New York have not proposed a methodology for splitting revenue and expenses for this service.

Appendix 2

Local Issues and Opportunities: Albany-Bennington-Manchester Rail to Bus Connection

Introduction

Establishment of a new direct bus service between the Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak station and the Vermont towns of Bennington and Manchester will provide a much needed connection to intercity passenger rail service. These communities are located in close proximity to an Amtrak station that is served by numerous trains each day, including several making the relatively short trip between Albany and Penn Station in New York City. A direct bus connection between that rail station and southwestern Vermont, providing two or more round trips daily, would provide an attractive travel option that is competitive with other modes of transportation in terms of both cost and time. The service would greatly expand access to this part of Vermont for both vacationers and potential residents who could live in Vermont while maintaining a business connection in nearby metro areas. Vermont residents also would benefit from the improved access to this important passenger rail hub.

For this service to be successful, several issues must be addressed and resolved in Bennington and Manchester:

- Identification of appropriate bus stop locations.
- Availability of local transportation options (especially vehicle rentals) for arriving passengers.
- Support from the local business community and economic development interests.

Opportunities in each of these key areas are discussed below, with the ultimate implementation decisions and actions to be agreed upon by local and state officials.

Bus Stop Locations

Stops for the “rail-bus” should include several important characteristics, including: site availability, convenient access for arriving and departing buses, sufficient parking, existing or potential sheltered waiting area, and access to other transportation modes. Potential sites were identified by town officials in each community and are described below (Maps 1 and 2 show the locations of each site within Bennington and Manchester).

Bennington Sites

1. State Office Building, North Street (US Route 7)



This site is owned by the State of Vermont and is located directly on US 7, north of downtown and south of the interchange with VT 279. There is quite a bit of parking on the site, but space availability may be an issue during business hours. The stop location and associated parking would have to be clearly marked to facilitate

access and minimize conflicts with parking and operations at the office building. A sidewalk reaches the property from the south, but there is no safe pedestrian access to the north. The site is served by an existing Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) bus, which could adjust or expand its schedule to meet the arriving and departing rail-bus. A sheltered waiting area could be provided on the site or at the adjacent Bennington Chamber of Commerce.

2. Bennington Station Restaurant and Municipal Parking Lot



This building—Bennington’s historic train depot—is privately owned and currently is occupied by a restaurant and a small professional office. The adjacent parking lot is owned by the municipality. The property is at the corner of River Street and Depot Street, a block from both VT 9 (West Main Street) and US 7 (North Street). A small park along a stream and a town-owned multi-use path are located immediately to the south of the parking lot. The park is home to the summer Walloomsac Farmers’ Market. Plans are in place for the path to be extended along an old rail line northward to the Northside Drive commercial area and adjacent residential developments. A complete network of sidewalks connects the site to nearby densely developed residential and commercial areas and the center of downtown, located just two blocks to the southeast. The site is near existing GMCN bus routes and the main GMCN service center. As noted, the large parking lot is owned by the Town of Bennington and usually has many parking spaces available. Shelter could be provided along the parking lot/park or in connection with the existing buildings.

3. Town Office Property



The Bennington town office building is located one block south of the center of downtown along US 7 (South Street). Public parking is available behind the building, but the lot can be crowded during business hours and

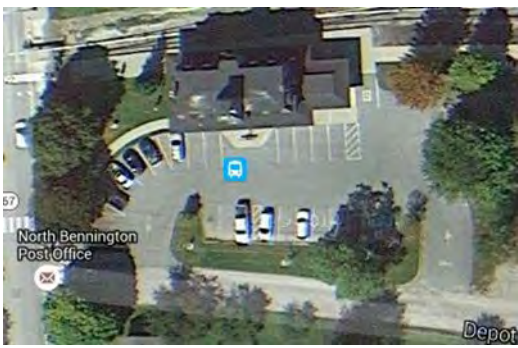
when the National Guard building (located in the middle of the rear parking area) is occupied. Access to the parking area is from both South Street and a small traveled way, Franklin Lane, that connects Washington and South Streets. The Town is engaged in a planning process that is intended to lead to redevelopment of a large commercial property (currently a majority of the property is occupied by an unused parking lot, an empty commercial building, and several partially occupied buildings). Redevelopment could be planned to include bus access, associated parking spaces, and a passenger shelter.

4. Green Mountain Community Network Local Bus Center



The Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) is the public transit provider in the Bennington region. Its offices (which includes a small indoor waiting area) and bus garage are located just north of downtown’s East Main Street, on Pleasant Street. The site has been developed to accommodate bus access, circulation, and parking, and also is located adjacent to a relatively large municipal parking lot. The site is the hub of local bus service and connects to a comprehensive sidewalk network that runs throughout the center of town. The building and adjacent parking lot have extensive exterior lighting. A separate shelter could be built, or the existing waiting room used or enlarged if necessary. GMCN has indicated a willingness to host the proposed bus stop.

5. North Bennington Train Station



This historic train station, located near the intersection of Routes 67 and 67A in North Bennington Village (five miles from the center of downtown Bennington), is owned by the Village of North Bennington and houses its municipal offices (primarily meeting rooms). A VTrans-funded sidewalk project is improving existing sidewalks in the area and the area is served by GMCN’s local bus routes. The site was selected to serve as a train station as part of the recent NY-Vermont Intercity Passenger Rail Study, but because of the track alignment and lack of sufficient parking, a parking area and platform were proposed for construction across the street on land owned by Bennington College. The building provides adequate sheltered waiting space for passengers.

6. Paradise Inn and Restaurant



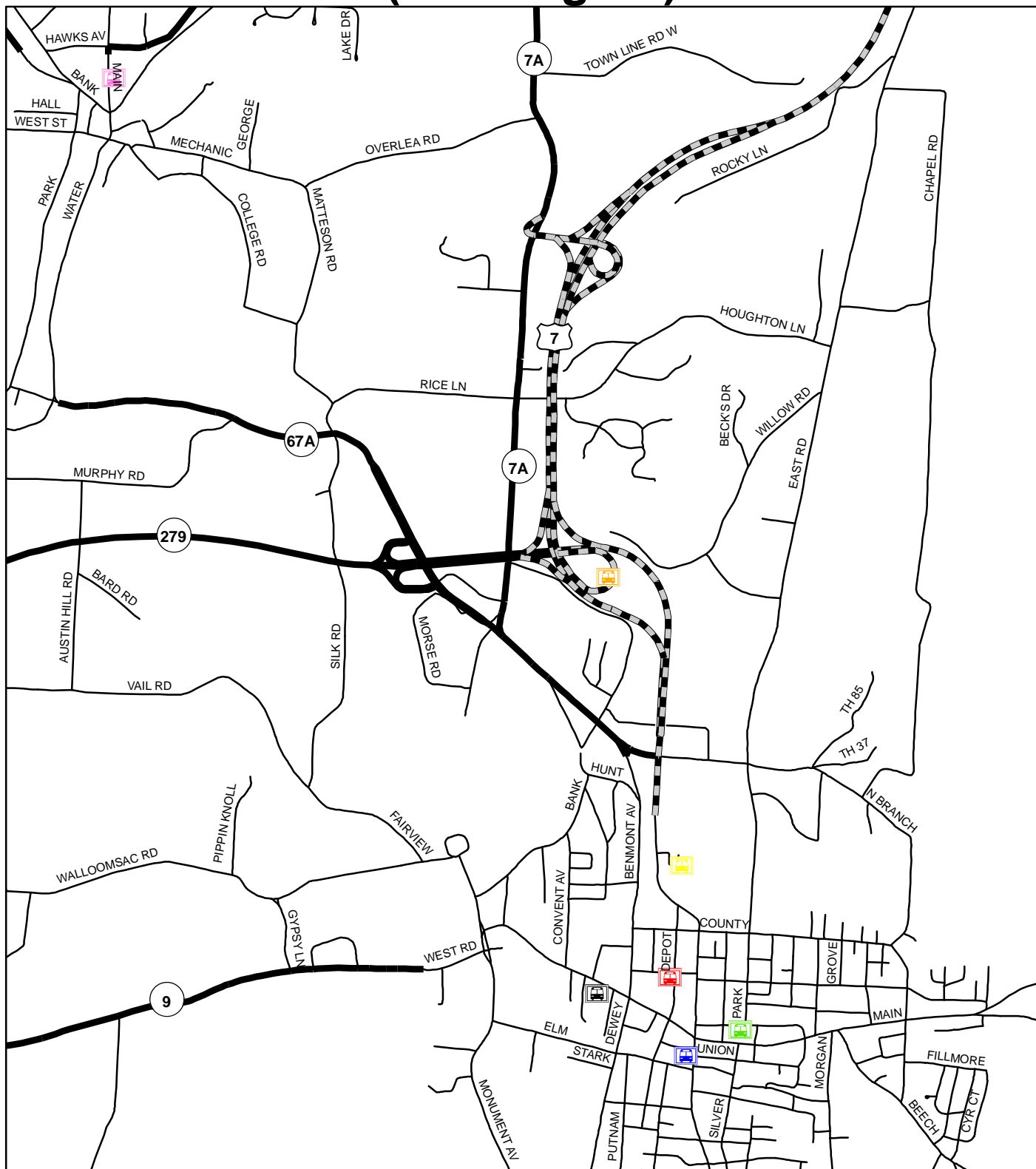
This motel complex includes an adjacent restaurant (under separate ownership) and a former restaurant building currently leased by a private college for classroom and library space. The property is located just west of downtown on VT 9 (West Main Street). Parking is generally available in front of the college building and in the lot between that building and the existing restaurant (the “Brown Cow Café”). Sidewalks would need to be extended a short distance to provide pedestrian access to the property and the local bus service has a route that serves the area, but not directly to this property. Shelter could be provided on the site, requiring some additional construction unless space could be made available in in of the commercial or college buildings.

7. State Welcome Center



The Vermont State Welcome Center, located in the middle of the US 7 / VT 279 interchange, includes a large amount of parking (the vast majority of which is usually unused), provides direct access from major highways, and can easily accommodate bus access and loading/unloading. The site also would eliminate any concerns with traffic congestion that may be encountered in the center of town as it is on both major highways connecting the rail-bus route’s other two destinations: Manchester and the Albany, NY area (Amtrak station). The site is outside of the center of town, however, and has no access for pedestrians and is not currently served by public transportation. Because of its location in the middle of a highway interchange, opportunities for adjacent business development (e.g., if a car rental company wanted to open nearby) do not exist. Some type of shuttle transportation service would have to be employed to transport any passengers not being picked up at the Welcome Center. The facility is designed to function as a rest/waiting/visitor information center, so its on-site facilities are ideal. Hours of operation might need to be adjusted to accommodate the bus schedules.

Proposed Amtrak Bus Station Locations (Bennington)



-  State Office Building
-  Bennington Station Restaurant
-  Town Offices
-  Green Mountain Express
-  North Bennington Train Station
-  Paradise Inn
-  Welcome Center

Map 1a



Map produced August 5, 2015 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

Proposed Amtrak Bus Station Locations (Bennington)



-  State Office Building
-  Bennington Station Restaurant
-  Town Offices
-  Green Mountain Express
-  North Bennington Train Station
-  Paradise Inn
-  Welcome Center

Map 1b



Map produced August 5, 2015 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

Manchester Sites

1. Equinox Resort, Manchester Village



The Equinox Resort is prominently located in the center of historic Manchester Village, about a mile south of the main downtown/commercial center of Manchester. This area is home to a number of hotels and inns. The property is privately owned and, other than a county court house, there is little public property in the immediate area, so an agreement with the resort (or another nearby property) would have to be developed. The property is located directly on VT 7A, but is located about three miles from the interchange where US 7 (the most direct route from Bennington) intersects with VT 11/30. A large parking lot exists behind the building and another across VT 7A off Union Street; both, however, can be quite full when the resort and its restaurants, golf course, and other facilities are busy. It is possible that additional parking would need to be developed. A concern in Manchester is the paucity of car rental companies and lack of an in-town public transportation system. Consequently, until demand results in new business growth in this area, it may be sensible for the rail-bus stop to be located close to accommodations, especially those that may offer their own van service to area destinations. The area is well-connected by sidewalks for pedestrians and, a sheltered waiting area could potentially be arranged with the resort or constructed adjacent to one of the parking areas.

2. Manchester Shopping Center ("Price Chopper" Plaza)



This large commercial complex is located on VT 11/30, just east of the center of Manchester's downtown, and directly on the main access road to US 7. It has a relatively large parking lot, but because of the intensity of retail uses in the area, the number of available spaces is often quite limited. A major redevelopment of the

property is planned, and while that will result in additional parking, it also is likely to generate additional demand for parking. The Town of Manchester owns land adjacent to the shopping center containing leased commercial buildings and parking areas, so it may be possible to designate part of that area for the bus stop, some associated parking, and perhaps a shelter. The site is connected to the center of town and nearby amenities by an extensive sidewalk network, but again, there is no public transportation system and limited car rental opportunities. The entire site is well-illuminated by exterior lighting.

3. RK Miles/Grabber Site



RK Miles is a building supply company occupying several acres of land between Depot Street (VT 11/30) and the rail line. The location is close to downtown and convenient to the US 7 interchange (the direct route between Bennington and Manchester). It was identified in the NY-Vermont Intercity Passenger Rail Study as a preferred location in Manchester for a rail stop, with parking and a platform. Some amount of redevelopment would have been required to accommodate those uses on site, and some site modifications would be necessary even for the rail-bus stop. Parking on the site is quite limited and access/parking for a bus would be challenging. However, an adjacent vacant parcel of land (under separate private ownership), visible at the left in the aerial photo above, had at one point been considered for a retail development that would have included an associated passenger rail ticketing booth, platform, and parking. The parking planned for the retail/rail development actually was located on the other side of the adjacent East Branch of the Batten Kill (river) and would have required a pedestrian bridge, but it is possible that a smaller development and/or a stop for the rail-bus and a parking area with a waiting shelter could be accommodated on that site. New redevelopment proposals for this vacant lot have been in the works, however, so it would be important to contact the owner/ developer to assess the possibility of integrating the bus stop with the planned commercial development. These properties are accessible along the town’s sidewalk network. Public transportation and car rental opportunities would need to be developed to serve the site.

4. Rite Aid Plaza



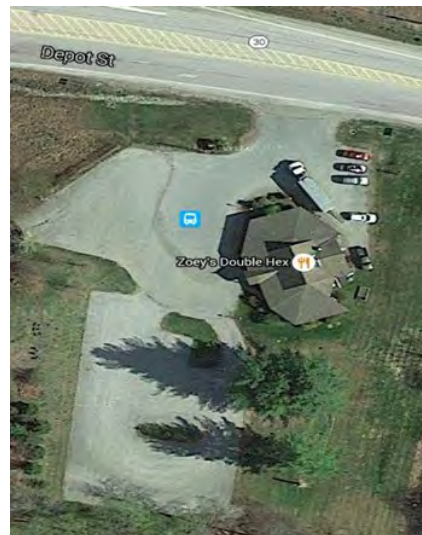
This small shopping center is located on VT 7A in the center of Manchester's downtown. It is used as a bus stop by GMCN's Bennington-Manchester regional service. Parking on the site and in nearby parking lots is quite limited. The Town is considering plans to develop a larger parking lot on land that is nearly adjacent to this site (across from Manchester Elementary School on Memorial Avenue)—and that parking area could make this site more viable (or could serve as the bus stop itself). Those plans, however, are very preliminary at this point. Bus parking and maneuvering at the site is possible, but as in most downtown locations, space is somewhat tight. There is a covered walkway in front of the Rite Aid store that could be used as a waiting area. Sidewalks connect the site to the rest of downtown and nearby commercial areas. Local public transportation and car rental options need to be developed.

5. Manchester Town Office Property



The Manchester municipal offices and public safety service buildings are located less than one mile north of the downtown on VT 7A. The GMCN regional bus service (Bennington to Manchester) stops at this site and connects to a similar service operating out of Rutland here. Parking at the town offices is limited and parking and bus maneuvering at the public safety building would have to be coordinated in a way to avoid interference with the operation of the police, fire department, or rescue squad. The site is on a state highway, but is located quite a distance from the US 7 interchange in Manchester. The property is served by a sidewalk. It would be relatively easy to develop a shelter on the municipal property.

6. Zoey's Double Hex



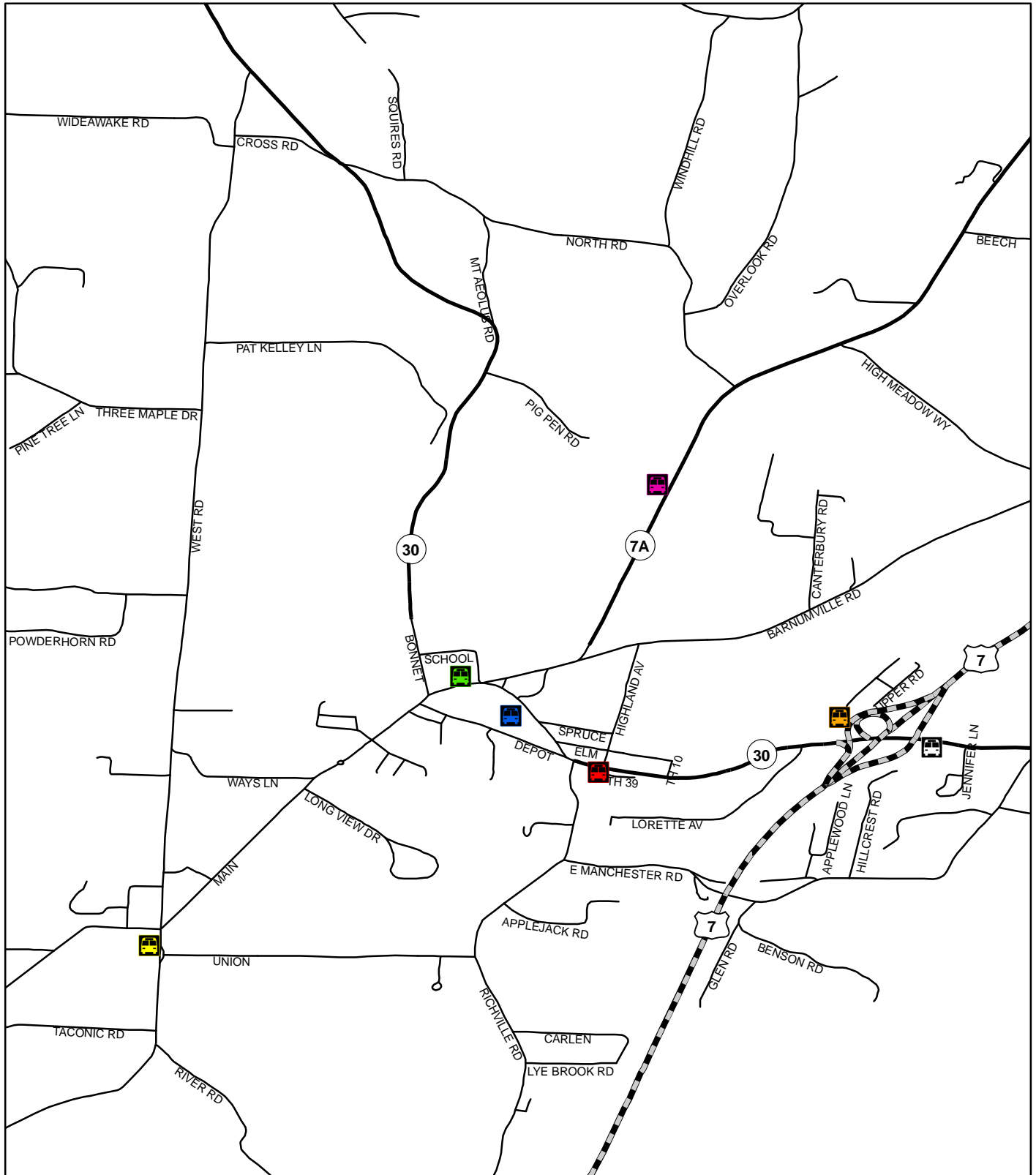
Zoey's Double Hex is a privately owned business (a restaurant) located on VT 11/30 just east of the US 7 interchange. Because of its convenient location adjacent to US 7, the site has been used as a stop for regional bus services. The property contains an extensive parking lot, with space available for bus parking and maneuvering. It is possible that a shelter could be built adjacent to the parking area. There is no pedestrian access to the site and public transportation and car rental opportunities need to be developed. The site also is located quite distant from the center of town, accommodations, and other amenities.








7. State Park and Ride Lot

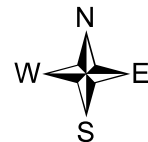


The State developed a 35-space park and ride lot adjacent accessed from Dufresne Pond Road off VT 11/30, just west of the US 7 interchange. This parking lot is conveniently located relative to US 7, but can be difficult to find for people not familiar with the area and, like the Zoey's site, it is not near the center of town. The parking lot does not get much use; nearly all of the spaces are usually available. It does include adequate space for bus loading and maneuvering. It lacks adequate lighting and there is no pedestrian access.

Proposed Amtrak Bus Station Locations (Manchester)

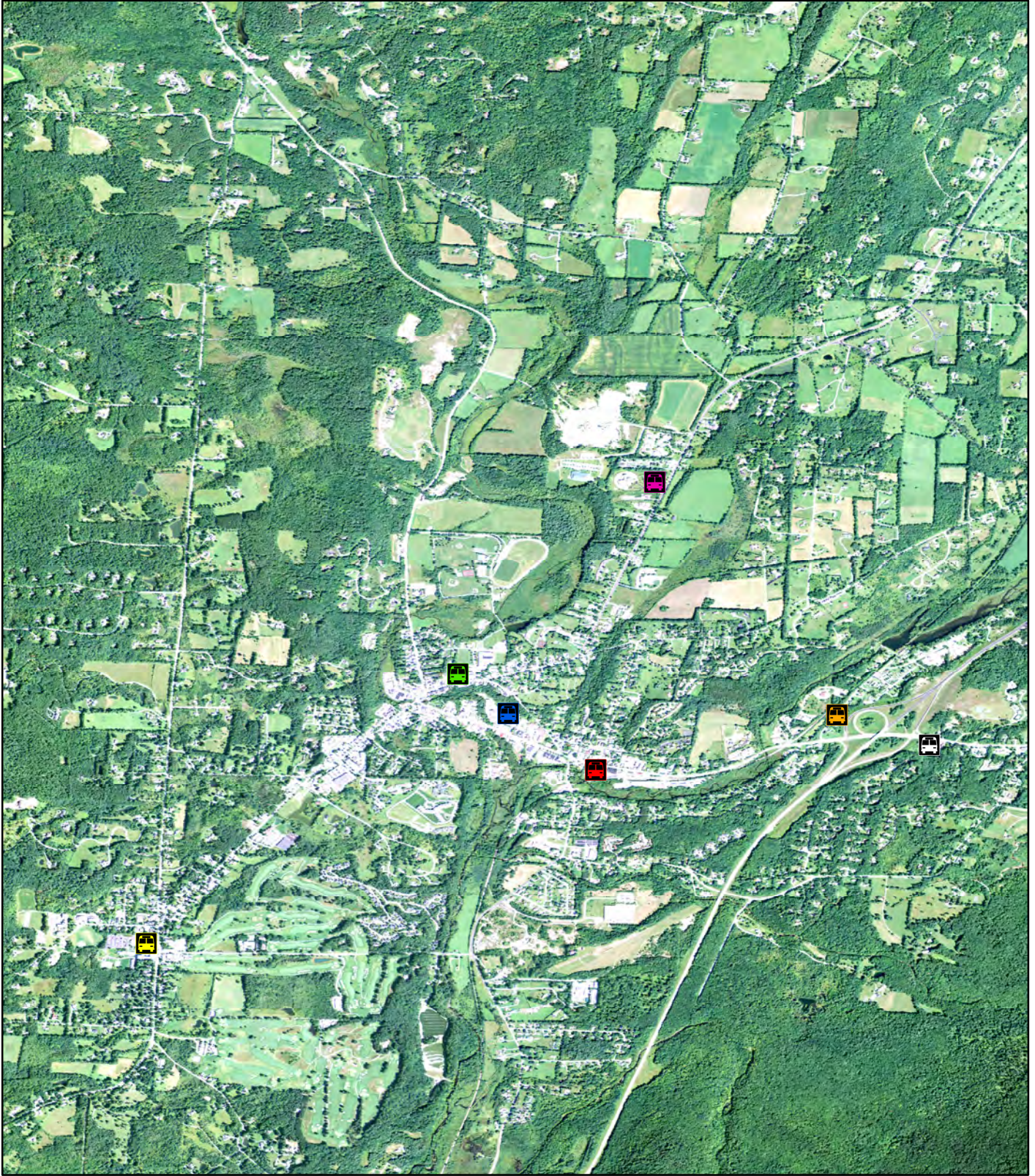









-  Inns At The Equinox
-  Price Chopper Supermarkets
-  R.K. Miles/Grabbers Site
-  Rite Aid
-  State Park and Ride Lot
-  Town Office
-  Zoey's Double Hex



Map produced August 7, 2015 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, Vermont 05201

Proposed Amtrak Bus Station Locations (Manchester)



-  Inns At The Equinox
-  Price Chopper Supermarkets
-  R.K. Miles/Grabbers Site
-  Rite Aid
-  State Park and Ride Lot
-  Town Office
-  Zoey's Double Hex



Map produced August 7, 2015 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, Vermont 05201

Local Transportation Connections

Passengers arriving via the new rail-bus service in Bennington and Manchester will need convenient and reliable transportation from those local bus stops. Local residents who use the service for vacation or business travel will have access to their personal vehicles parked at the site, can make arrangements to be picked up when the bus arrives, or—if they live along or near a GMCN local transit route—take a local bus home. People traveling to the area, however, whether vacationers or business travelers, will need transportation from the bus stop to their hotel, resort, business venue, or other destination. Two alternative transportation options would address this need: a regular or special local bus/shuttle service and vehicle rental businesses.

The Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) operates several regular fixed route bus lines around Bennington (Map 3). One or more of those routes currently provides access to most of the potential Bennington area bus stop locations identified in this report. GMCN has indicated that they would modify or add a service to ensure that a local bus meets arriving and departing rail-bus connections in Bennington. It is likely that the routes would need to be adjusted slightly for those connecting GMCN routes to ensure that hotels, college campuses, and other key destinations were included. Again, GMCN has indicated a willingness to make any reasonable and necessary adjustments to ensure the success of this coordinated local service.

Local public transit options are not generally available in Manchester. GMCN operates a bus line that connects Bennington and Manchester; that line also connects with a regional bus that provides service to Rutland. There is, however, no local service providing regular scheduled service to destinations in and around Manchester. It is possible that GMCN could establish a local service in Manchester in the future if warranted by demand.

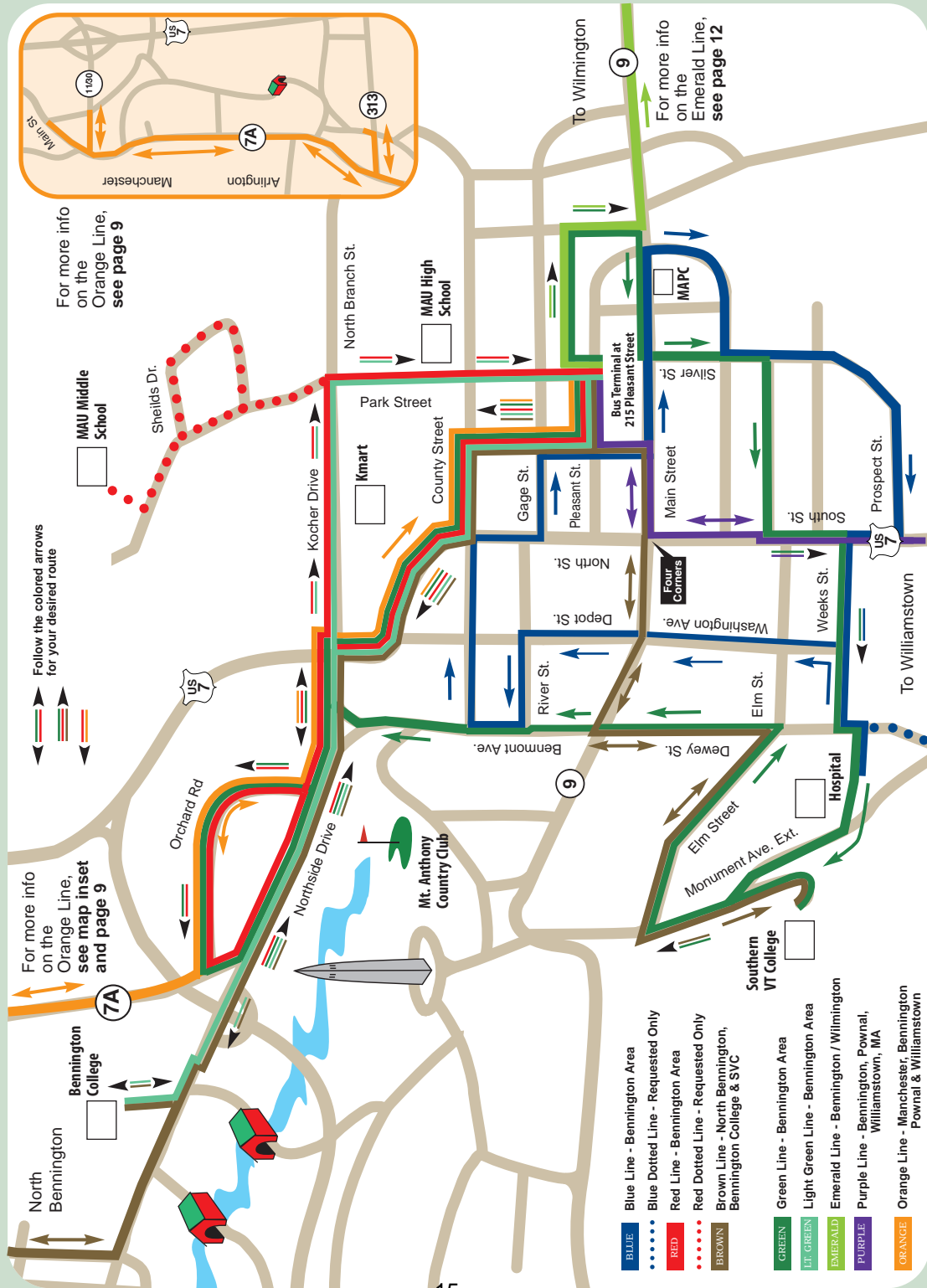
Other key destinations in the Bennington-Manchester area include the region's alpine ski resorts, especially Mount Snow and Haystack (closest to Bennington) and Bromley and Stratton Mountain (closest to Manchester). Travel time to those resort areas are: twenty minutes—Manchester to Bromley, thirty minutes—Manchester to Stratton, and 45 minutes—Bennington to Mount Snow. Those resorts should be contacted to assess interest in providing and helping to promote direct shuttle service between the rail-bus stops in Bennington and/or Manchester and the ski areas.

Because of the dispersed nature of accommodations and travel destinations in southern Vermont, the greatest need for local transportation will be for vehicle rentals. At the present time, there is only one commercial vehicle rental company in the Bennington-Manchester area, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, which operates out of a branch office on Benmont Avenue in Bennington. Based on conversations with the manager of that Enterprise branch office, as many as 120 vehicles are rented from that location at any one time during the busiest (summer) season and additional capacity to accommodate increased demand would be addressed by obtaining vehicles from surrounding areas. The company would increase the supply of vehicles based on customer requests (i.e., through advance reservations) and, eventually, based on experience. It would, therefore, be critical to ensure that travelers planning a trip to Bennington be aware of the need to make an advance reservation with Enterprise to avoid situations where a sufficient number of vehicles are not available. Enterprise would be able to shuttle arriving and departing passengers between the bus stop and their location (about one mile from the center of downtown).

Enterprise (and any other rental business that enters the local market) should be apprised of plans for implementation of the rail-bus service so they are prepared to respond to an increased number of vehicle requests. Another issue that requires coordination is the potential need for rental agencies to adjust business hours to ensure that their services are available when buses are arriving and departing (Enterprise, for example, generally closes at 6:00 PM). There is little room for expansion at Enterprise's existing location on Benmont Avenue. If additional demand requires expanded space for vehicle parking on-site, they may need to seek an alternative location, or perhaps develop an agreement with the town to maintain a certain number of vehicles at a municipal lot (preferably at or adjacent to the bus stop).

There currently is no car rental company operating in Manchester, although the Enterprise branch in Bennington does provide some service to that community (the distance between the Bennington Enterprise location and Manchester is about 25 miles, however, limiting the efficiency of that service). It is likely that a new rental agency, located in Manchester, would be the most efficient and effective way to provide service. Until such a business is attracted to the market, local resorts and hotels could provide (and promote) shuttle connections to the bus stop, and perhaps arrange vehicle rentals (through Enterprise or some other company) and make them available to their guests. Coordination with area these hospitality businesses and vehicle rental companies (in Bennington and possibly in Rutland) prior to the start-up of any service would be essential.

Bennington County Bus Routes



Support from Local Communities

Improved access to passenger rail service from the Bennington Region has been something that both local governments and the Bennington County Regional Commission have actively pursued for over twenty years. The recently adopted (March 2015) Bennington County Regional Plan includes the following discussion of direct bus access between the region and the Rensselaer Amtrak Station (Section 10.4):

Bennington County is ideally located to benefit from greater access to intercity passenger rail service. It is the closest part of Vermont to major rail-oriented urban markets, including New York City. The busy Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak station is less than 50 miles from Bennington, and, more so than any other location in Vermont, travel times and costs are competitive with other transportation modes. Greater access to intercity passenger rail service would not only benefit local residents, it would be a tremendous economic development benefit for the entire region. Several million people in the mid-Atlantic metropolitan corridor rely on trains as their primary means of transportation, and having stops in North Bennington and Manchester would immediately strengthen the regional tourism market. In addition, many people who conduct business in those metropolitan areas would be more likely to live in Bennington County, working from local offices and traveling into New York or other cities as needed for business.

The benefits of greater access to intercity passenger rail service is so compelling, in fact, that it makes sense to pursue innovative ways to forge that connection. One idea is to initiate a direct bus service between Manchester, North Bennington, and the Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak station. The bus would be outfitted to easily transport passengers and baggage, and by limiting the number of stops to Manchester and North Bennington (and perhaps one stop in Rensselaer County, New York, the entire route could be accomplished in just over one hour. Ideally, the bus schedule would be integrated into the [Amtrak timetables](#), with Bennington and Manchester as connecting stops and ticket purchasing available online or at kiosks at rail-bus stations in each community. Direct connections with arriving or departing trains in Rensselaer would then be possible without any delay or inconvenience. A significant benefit to this intermodal connection is that the bus could operate several times each day, giving travelers far more options than a train that would only have one local arrival and departure each day. Of course, the initial capital cost would be far less than what is required for a new train-based connection and the operating subsidy would be much lower. Amtrak currently coordinates with these "[Thruway](#)" bus services in a number of locations. The BCRC should complete a study of the feasibility of establishing such a service between Rensselaer and Bennington County and work to implement such a program with local businesses and the state.

Similarly, the Bennington Town Plan, prepared and approved by the local planning commission and currently being considered for adoption by the town select board, includes the following statement (Section 6.4):

A dedicated Amtrak "Thruway Bus" service could be started at a total annual cost to the State of less than \$500,000. This service would provide two round trip buses per day to Bennington and Manchester, timed to meet Amtrak's Empire Service trains in Rensselaer. A significant benefit is that Bennington and Manchester would be added to Amtrak's regular schedule, allowing people to purchase a single through Amtrak ticket to or from these destinations. Local efforts should be undertaken to identify an appropriate station stop for the bus in Bennington and to coordinate the service with the available public transit and rental car services. This cost-effective transportation improvement should be a high priority for the town and state.

Bennington also has formed an economic development consortium of local officials, economic development

professionals, and business owners (the Bennington Economic Development Partners). That group has identified establishment of the bus to rail connection as its top transportation infrastructure priority for the current year. A letter of support endorsed by that organization is attached.

The Manchester Town Plan, as well as the comprehensive plans of several other municipalities in the region, clearly point to the connections between quality of life, successful economic development, and provision of necessary supporting infrastructure (including access to intercity passenger rail). A multi-town economic development study in northern Bennington County, currently being coordinated through the Bennington County Regional Commission, also has identified infrastructure, and specifically access to intercity passenger rail service, as a priority. A letter in support of the bus to rail initiative from the Town of Manchester is attached (*to be forwarded when signed*).



Bennington County Regional Commission

111 SOUTH STREET • SUITE 203 • BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201 • (802) 442-0713 OR 442-0682 • FAX (802) 442-0439

August 14, 2015

Costa Pappis, Planning Coordinator
Vermont Agency of Transportation
One National Life Drive
Montpelier, VT 05633-5001

Re: Bennington County Connection to Passenger Rail System

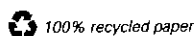
Dear Mr. Pappis:

We understand that you are coordinating a study that is evaluating alternatives for providing a direct bus connection between the Rensselaer, NY Amtrak station and the towns of Bennington and Manchester. The residents, businesses, local governments, and the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) have long advocated for reestablishment of passenger rail service to communities in southwestern Vermont. Our region is located relatively close to the Rensselaer station, one of the busiest in the country, and direct access from that important regional hub to Bennington County would provide a valuable transportation option for area residents, college students, and business travelers. Convenient rail access to major east coast metropolitan areas also would encourage tourism and new business development in our region.

The recently completed New York Vermont Bi-state Passenger Rail Study identified the technical and regulatory issues, as well as the costs, for initiating and operating a new passenger train between Rensselaer and Rutland that would include stops in Bennington and Manchester. During the course of that study, it became clear that another alternative for creating that connection existed and should be investigated. A direct bus link, either a "Thruway Bus" service, operated by Amtrak and fully integrated with its schedule or a similar service operated by a different provider, could be implemented much more quickly and at a small fraction of the cost.

The bus link should offer the benefit of providing the direct access to the passenger rail system long sought by the region while being integrated with the Amtrak timetables and ticketing system. It also should provide the flexibility of at least two daily round trips. Moreover, the service could be initiated with relatively low operating costs and virtually no permitting requirements. A proposal completed by Amtrak estimates that the annual cost to the state would be approximately \$490,000, a figure based on conservative ridership numbers.

Local and regional planning and coordination will be necessary for the benefits of the service to be realized. Appropriate "station" stops will need to be identified in Bennington and Manchester, the Green Mountain Community Network public transit schedules will have to be adjusted to meet the arriving and departing Thruway Buses, and opportunities for car rentals and shuttles to area hotels and

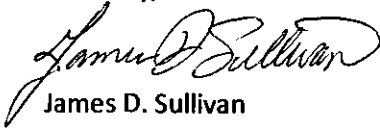


resorts considered. Active promotion of the service by area chambers of commerce and other business interests also will be critical. The Bennington Economic Development Partners (BEDP), a consortium of local officials, business owners, and economic development professionals, is committed to supporting and promoting this service and will be available to facilitate implementation of these local actions. The Bennington County Regional Commission, also a member of the BEDP, has voted unanimously to support this effort.

We appreciate VTrans' interest in improving transportation connections to Bennington County and believe that this direct link to the intercity passenger rail network would be a major step forward. The BEDP is committed to working with VTrans as well as with local officials and businesses in our region to ensure that all needed planning and coordination is completed prior to the start of any new service.

We would be happy discuss this initiative with you at your convenience and look forward to providing assistance as needed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James D. Sullivan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

James D. Sullivan

Executive Director, Bennington County Regional Commission

Chair, Bennington Economic Development Partners Transportation Infrastructure Committee