

PLANNING FOR PASSENGER RAIL IN VERMONT

In mid-2015, the Vermont Agency of Transportation will complete a State Rail Plan that will guide future investment in Vermont's rail system. Upgrading the existing rail network will provide a foundation for future improved rail service in Vermont, for both passenger and freight rail.

RIDERSHIP RISING

Ridership fluctuates from year to year but in the last decade there has been an overall trend upwards. In 2013, there were 100,829 passengers, up from a low of 57,121 in 2005. The top three stations on the Vermonter were Essex Junction, Brattleboro, and White River Junction, respectively. These three locations account for more than two thirds of passengers on this route.

State passengers on the Ethan Allen mostly travel between Vermont and New York City, some 83 percent in 2013. New York is the largest origin/destination on the Vermonter too but travelers are also bound for other points in New England and cities as far as Washington, DC.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE VERMONTER SERVICE

Since the 2006 State Rail Plan, millions of dollars have been spent improving track and rail infrastructure. Vermont has greatly benefited from federal stimulus and other transportation grants.



Continuously welded rail is installed in Vermont on the Vermonter's route, leading to improved travel time and reducing long-term maintenance.

Amtrak and the State of Vermont completed track upgrades along the Vermonter rail route owned by the New England Central Railroad in October 2012. Improvements to rail infrastructure have reduced the in-state travel time of the Vermonter by 30 minutes and improved reliability... trains arrive on time more frequently.

Investment in the Vermonter route south of the border has also improved service. In Massachusetts, 40 minutes of travel time was shaved off when the route was shifted westerly along the CT River between Northfield and Springfield. When upgrades to the Hartford Line between Springfield and New Haven, CT are completed in 2016, travel time will be more reliable and the trip will be 10 minutes shorter than today.

400,000 RIDERS BY 2030

The State of Vermont's 2011 Comprehensive Energy Plan to reduce energy consumption set a goal of a four-fold increase of train ridership to 400,000 trips by 2030. Using a 3% annual growth (the last 10 years averaged approximately 7%) it was found that this goal will be attained with the extension of the Vermonter to Montreal and new services along the western corridor.

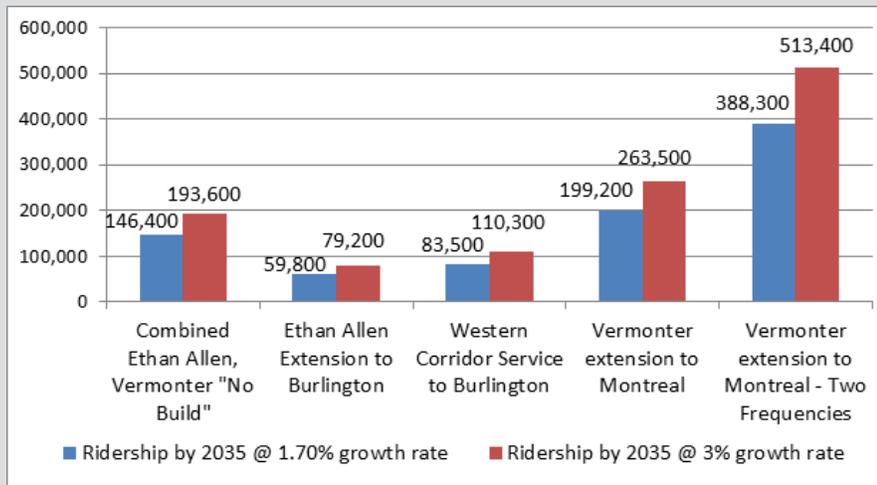


Draft Rail Plan Coming!

In late spring/early summer the draft rail plan will be ready. Public meetings will be held in White River Junction and Essex Junction.



SUMMARY OF RIDERSHIP FORECASTS WITH INCREASED SERVICE



A TALE OF TWO CORRIDORS

Beginning in 2011, VTrans has been proactive about studying options for improved rail service in the eastern and western regions of Vermont.

WESTERN CORRIDOR

VTrans, in collaboration with the State of New York, conducted a Bi-State Intercity Passenger Rail Study to assess options for bringing more rail service to the western region of Vermont.

Besides preserving the Ethan Allen service that originates in Rutland and carries passengers to Albany and New York City, the study recommended in 2014 the addition of a new train to serve the Mechanicville-North Bennington-Manchester-Route route, where there currently is no passenger rail service.

The Bi-State Study was done to complete the planning work needed to position Vermont to be in the Federal Rail Administration’s “pipeline of future projects” that would establish passenger rail service along the corridor.

A program to extend the Ethan Allen service from Rutland to Burlington, with an additional station in Middlebury is now underway. Upgrades of 20 miles of track south of Leicester on the “Western Corridor” segment will enable passenger rail up to 59 miles per hour. VTrans is seeking funds for additional improvements to make service to Burlington possible.

RE-CONNECTING TO MONTREAL

Currently, VTrans, along with the Massachusetts and Connecticut Departments of Transportation are evaluating alternatives to increase the number of trains on the Vermonter route. This service runs between St. Albans and Brattleboro

with connections to MA, CT, New York City and other cities along the Northeast Corridor as far as Washington, DC.

Because Montreal is a large travel market, reviving service to Central Station in Montreal with a day train has the potential to provide a significant boost to Vermont rail ridership. Adding a second Vermonter frequency would further increase Vermont ridership toward the 400,000 rider goal.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

Funding will determine how far plans to increase passenger rail service in Vermont progress. In 2013 the federal government dramatically changed how rail is funded through the Passenger Rail Improvement and Investment Act (PRIIA of 2008).

PRIIA has increased the subsidy the state must pay for passenger rail service. Currently, Vermont pays about \$8million for passenger rail, nearly double from before PRIIA took effect and costs are expected to continue to rise.

A challenge for Vermont is its small population yet relatively long route miles compared to other states Amtrak serves in the northeast. Vermont in fact has more route miles than most other states though has the fewest taxpayers to support rail service.

For more information, or to provide input to the State Rail Plan, please contact:
Costa Pappis, Vermont Agency of Transportation,
 costa.pappis@state.vt.us, 802-828-5790
 Additional information on the Vermont State Rail Plan can be found at: http://rail.vermont.gov/about_us/reports_plans