



# VERMONT RAIL PLAN

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## STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

APRIL 2021



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCRPC	Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
FAST	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
GIS	Geographic Information System
L RTP	Long Range Transportation Plan
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century
MARC	Mount Ascutney Regional Commission
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NRPC	Northwest Regional Planning Commission
PRIIA	Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act
RPC	Regional Planning Commission
RRPC	Rutland Regional Planning Commission
SRP	State Rail Plan
TAC	Transportation Advisory Committee
VRAC	Vermont Rail Advisory Council
VTrans	Vermont Agency of Transportation

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In April 2020, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) contracted with Cambridge Systematics to update its State Rail Plan (2015) and State Freight Plan (2012 with minor revisions in 2013, 2015 and 2017) to meet with Federal regulations under the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) and Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. Although two separate documents, there is a significant amount of overlap between the efforts as shown in Figure 1. 1.

**FIGURE 1. 1 VERMONT FREIGHT AND RAIL PLAN ELEMENTS**



*Although two separate planning efforts, the Freight and Rail Plans share common tasks and work products.*

Source: Cambridge Systematics, 2020.

The State Rail Plan provides a framework for maintaining and enhancing the state rail system. It is important to note that the State Rail Plan focuses on rail freight and intercity passenger service provided by Amtrak. Commuter rail is a form of public transit that is addressed as part of public transit plans.<sup>1</sup>

The State Freight Plan provides a framework for maintaining and enhancing all modes of freight movement in Vermont—rail, highway, air, and water. Additional work evaluating performance and identifying needs and gaps for non-rail freight modes (highway, water, air) will be developed separately as part of this plan.

This Technical Memo is the sixth in the set that will provide the background material and information necessary to complete the final State Rail Plan and State Freight Plan. The technical memos cover data analysis, forecasting, and

<sup>1</sup> <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/PTPP>

the processes used in various steps of developing the rail and freight plans. The technical memos are available for review on VTrans' webpages for the State Rail Plan<sup>2</sup> and Freight Plan<sup>3</sup>.

**This technical memorandum was produced while the effort to develop the Vermont Rail Plan was underway. In case of discrepancies between the contents of this technical memo and the Vermont Rail Plan document, the Vermont Rail Plan document prevails.**

In addition, extensive public outreach informs development of both plans and will meet Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) requirements for the Vermont Rail Plan. While there are no specific outreach requirements for the Freight Plan, similar public participation efforts are included.

The remainder of this Technical Memo contains the following Sections:

- Section 2 – Outreach Overview and Summary.
- Section 3 – Stakeholder Comments.

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<sup>2</sup> Vermont State Rail Plan webpage, available from: <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/rail/reports>.

<sup>3</sup> Vermont Freight Plan webpage, available from: <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/freight>.

## 2.0 OUTREACH OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

This Plan update began in April, 2020 during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. COVID-19 has drastically altered the ability to meet in person for interviews, presentations, and other traditional methods of obtaining public input. Instead, VTrans developed a strategy that leveraged digital engagement and provided several opportunities for interaction while maintaining public health protocols. The process was interactive—feedback informed plan development and recommendations, and stakeholders were frequently updated on plan progress. The outreach approach followed a set of guiding principles:

- **Be flexible and engaging.** Given the unforeseen nature of the pandemic, we developed many communication channels, including virtual meetings, an interactive web map (see Figure 2.1), e-blasts, social media, and digital newsletters (see Figure 2.2).
- **Entice with “carrots”.** The team attracted involvement by communicating how stakeholders can directly benefit from sharing ideas and input, and by demonstrating how previous efforts have led to positive change. In addition, the team invited participants to help shape and use a permanent one-stop web tool of rail and freight data.
- **Seeing is believing.** Visuals help people comprehend and remember.
- **Learn by listening.** Stakeholder feedback validated and provided nuance to data, thereby influencing the plan findings and recommendations.

### 2.1 Virtual Meetings with Stakeholders

Virtual meetings, using Microsoft Teams and Zoom, are a dynamic forum to deliver information and field questions or comments in real time. VTrans used two rounds of virtual meetings, held at critical junctures in the planning process. In September and October (2020), the first round of virtual meetings introduced the initial analysis and focused on gathering issues. In December (2020) and January (2021), the second round of virtual meetings focused on reviewing potential Rail Plan initiatives and the technical analysis used to identify which initiatives would become recommendations in the VTrans implementation table.

To help reach a wide public audience, VTrans held two virtual Town Halls. Approximately 80 people attended the meeting held on October 6<sup>th</sup>, which focused on a discussion of existing conditions and future trends, and 65 attended the December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 meeting, which focused on reviewing needs and issues as well as potential solutions to those concerns. These participants provided dialogue, thoughtful questions, and commentary that the project team used throughout the development of the Rail Plan.

In addition, VTrans held more than 11 discussions with groups of municipal representatives through Regional Planning Commissions (RPC) Transportation Advisory Committees across the State. VTrans project staff conducted various informal external and internal meetings with other VTrans staff in other program areas such as transit.

These outreach efforts were supplemented by interviews with railroads operating in the State, specifically calls with Genesee & Wyoming (July 2020), Vermont Rail Systems (July 2020), Pan Am Southern (August 2020), and Canadian Pacific (October 2020). Additional outreach via email was used to gather input on specific concerns such as vertical clearance restrictions and ideas for possible initiatives.

The Vermont Rail Advisory Council (VRAC) was a key participating stakeholder group. VRAC membership is drawn from private rail operators, operators on state-owned railroads, freight shippers, environmental and economic development organizations, regional chambers of commerce, RPCs, the House and Senate transportation committees, and travel and recreation organizations. This group meets quarterly and advises the Governor and VTrans on rail policy matters.

The VRAC received two briefings, which provided members the opportunity to vet information and provide valuable input. While the VRAC served as the formal advisory committee for the development of the Rail Plan, these meetings are open to the public and serve as another forum by which non-members may become informed and comment on Vermont's rail system and issues.

## 2.2 Digital Communications

VTrans used multiple digital approaches to receive input and keep stakeholders informed during Plan development. VTrans provided content and updates through their plan web page. VTrans also developed and maintained an interactive geographic information system (GIS)-based web tool.

The web tool served two distinct purposes. First, it functioned as a central resource by succinctly compiling data that, while publicly available, would require an inquiring mind to know about and scour several VTrans resources to find. Second, the tool acted as a platform to collect information, ideas, and feedback from stakeholders. A screenshot of this tool is shown in Figure 2.1. This tool is hosted by VTrans and will continue to act as an information source following completion of this Plan Update.<sup>4</sup>

To provide timely updates, establish the project brand, and increase awareness about the Plan, the team created three digital newsletters. Each two-page newsletter outlined essential content such as project happenings, meeting dates, and relevant rail data through infographics, photos, and text. An example from the Fall newsletter is shown in Figure 2.2. The first digital newsletter was distributed via email to RPCs in July 2020. After that the newsletters were sent using a database in Constant Contact. This platform was used to manage recipients, deliver newsletters and other content, and track metrics. The Fall newsletter was distributed in October and the Winter newsletter in December 2020.

The contact list is approximately 280 recipients, with an average newsletter open rate of 29%. All newsletters were advertised on VTrans' established social media feeds. For example, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts notified stakeholders about key project happenings such as the online Town Halls. Example social media posts are shown in Figure 2.3.

Comments received via email, the web tool, and spoken or written during the meetings were documented. In total, approximately 140 comments were received across all engagement platforms. A summary of comments in key topic areas is included in the following section and the full list of comments is provided in Table 3.1.

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<sup>4</sup> Access through the "Interactive web map" link on VTrans' Rail Reports website. See: <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/rail/reports>

FIGURE 2.1 WEB TOOL SCREEN CAPTURE

**Update of Vermont Rail Plan and Vermont Freight Plan**

Initiatives List   Comment on Initiative   **View Comments**

Each row below represents a pin on the map added by the public.  
Click on a row to see comments and locate the pin on the map.

- I live in Putney, VT, and work in Hartford, CT. I've been
- bike and pedestrian access to new Amtrak stations in Vergennes
- This initiative should include an examination of the feasibility of
- The Culvert south of the Bartonville Covered Bridge is

< 2 of 4 >

Initiative ID	16
Initiative Description	Improve pedestrian and bicycle access and facilities at and near Amtrak stations
What is your comment?	bike and pedestrian access to new Amtrak stations in Vergennes and Middlebury could be greatly improved. In Vergennes, there is a good multi-use path at the station itself, but it ends at the Park and Ride border and does not continue to the population center of downtown Vergennes.

**Layers**

Layer   Legend

**Freight\_Rail\_Initiatives\_Points**

**Amtrak Stations**

**Amtrak Routes**

NAME

- Ethan Allen Express
- Vermonter

**Freight Rail**

StateOwned

- No
- Yes

**Pending Vermonter Extension to Montreal**

**Pending Ethan Allen Extension to Burlington**

Source: VTrans

FIGURE 2.2 NEWSLETTER ISSUE 2 EXAMPLE



## Fast Facts: Intercity Passenger and Freight Rail

Vermont's rail system is a vital component of the state's multi-modal transportation system. This State Rail Plan provides a framework for maintaining and enhancing the rail system – both intercity passenger service and freight rail. From visiting a friend in New York City or welcoming skiers on the *Ethan Allen* Express and *Vermonter*, to importing hops for craft beer or exporting granite for harbor projects around the U.S., rail plays an integral role in improving sustainability and vibrancy for Vermont's residents, places, and businesses.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

 <p>Amtrak's 11 stations in Vermont (plus one in Claremont, NH) had more than <b>95,000</b> passengers in FY2019.</p>	 <p>The area around Brattleboro's station (Vermont's 2<sup>nd</sup> busiest) is a "Walker's Paradise" according to Walkscore.com.</p>	 <p>Rail carried approximately <b>15%</b> of all goods (by weight) moving in to, out of, within, or through Vermont in 2018.</p>
 <p>Vermont's <b>16</b> transload sites provide businesses with a way to move goods between rail and road.</p>	<h2>Rail Projects Take Shape</h2> <p>These days, we can barely envision what next month will bring, let alone next year. However, long range planning can anticipate, and even help to shape, a range of future scenarios. Planning establishes a vision and high-level policy and program needs.</p> <p>In addition, specific projects identified in past Freight Plan (2012) and Rail Plan (2015) efforts are moving forward. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued safety improvements for highway-rail crossings (25 funded over the next three years)</li> <li>• Extension of <i>Ethan Allen Express</i> to Burlington (2021) and <i>Vermonter</i> to Montreal (Pending)</li> <li>• Middlebury Tunnel/Bridge Replacements (Underway, to be completed in 2021; learn more <a href="#">here</a>)</li> </ul> <p>Visit the VTransparency <a href="#">project map</a>, with details and status for statewide modal improvements, focusing on roads and highways.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued on p. 2 ...</i></p>	

Source: FHI

FIGURE 2.3 SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



Source: VTrans

## 2.3 Key Topic Areas and Summary

The stakeholder comments received are documented in Table 3.2. The comments are organized by date, with indication of how the comment was received, the comment, the theme(s) that best summarize the comment topic, and response. Key themes include:

- **Environmental** – Stakeholders want to understand how the Rail Plan addresses and integrates Vermont’s goals related to greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, resiliency, and energy. Other environmental concerns relate to health impacts that rail operations, infrastructure, and construction present, including noise, fumes, and impacts to habitats and natural resources.
- **Infrastructure** – A vast network of bridges, track, freight facilities, and passenger rail stations comprise Vermont’s rail system. Stakeholders identify assets that are ready for upgrade or replacement to increase safety, comfort, service, and operations, including the Brattleboro Amtrak station. Stakeholders point out how deteriorating infrastructure can negatively impact Vermont tourism, along with ideas for improvement.
- **Multi-Modal** – Seamless connections to rail service to safe, convenient bicycle facilities, public transit, and pedestrian amenities is a key theme. Stakeholders advocate for walkable, transit-oriented development compatible with passenger rail activity. Ensuring equity for those who can’t or don’t own a personal vehicle to access education, jobs, housing, and other destinations contributes to this theme.
- **Publicity** – Elevating awareness of Vermont’s rail is key to success and continued investment. Stakeholders wonder how certain stops, including Vergennes and Middlebury, as well as the resumed Amtrak service, will be promoted through communications, partnerships, and publicity campaigns.
- **Planning** – The Rail Plan is coordinated with Vermont’s relevant initiatives, as well as rail plans of neighboring states. Stakeholders address planning for land use once rail facilities are divested, as well as protecting these parcels through planning measures. An extensive area of consideration relates to COVID-19, and includes the pandemic’s implications on Vermont’s population projections and shifts.
- **Safety** – Stakeholders provide ideas for maintaining and improving safety of rail facilities and the communities in which they travel through. Comments relate to rail crossings (including lights, gates, and vehicular turning movements), removal of brush to improve sightlines, and passenger rail speed, among other concepts.
- **Service** – By and large, service-related comments are the most common. Stakeholders provide comments or ask questions about schedule changes, extension of service, future rail lines, such as the Northeast Kingdom and the Veterans Hospital in White River Junction. Comments about service extend well beyond Vermont’s border, addressing Canada, Boston, New York City, Washington, DC, and Chicago.

### 3.0 STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Table 3.2 contains substantive stakeholder comments received during this Plan update sorted by topic area, or theme, as summarized in Section 2. Some comments have been paraphrased for clarity. The responses do not comprise the responses that each commenter received directly. Cells that are not shaded (i.e., are white) include comments that are applicable to passenger rail issues, initiatives, and recommendations. Cells highlighted in dark gray apply to freight rail issues, initiatives, and recommendations. Cells highlighted in light gray apply to both passenger and freight issues, initiatives, and recommendations. The sample table below serves as a legend, illustrating the color coding scheme.

**TABLE 3.1 COLOR CODING GUIDE**

Comments applicable to passenger rail only.
Comments that apply to both freight passenger rail
Comments that apply to freight rail only

**TABLE 3.2 VERMONT RAIL PLAN STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS**

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
9/1/2020 CCRPC TAC Meeting	Consider the relationship between the use of sidings for storing hazardous materials, and what seems to be a lack of preparedness and resources to deal with the corresponding hazards such storage presents.	Safety	These concerns are addressed in the Hazardous Materials subsection of Section 4.2 of the Draft Rail Plan.
9/1/2020 CCRPC TAC Meeting	In Chittenden County specifically, invite community planners and planning commissions to address balancing development (economic, housing, and other) needs while supporting population growth of the greater Burlington area. There is a need to further analyze and adopt appropriate policy that balances the Historically industrial areas that turn over to other uses when not valued or protected. Communities must finely balance preservation and development needs. It would be helpful if rail operators could identify prime areas along corridors of growing development/preservation status.	Planning	Comment noted. Other considerations around rail clusters include meeting community economic development goals, including access to employment and training, transit-oriented development, and connections to bicycle and pedestrian nodes.
9/1/2020 CCRPC TAC Meeting	Rail yards are being downsized without consideration for safety plans to address hazards.	Planning	Comment noted.
9/1/2020 CCRPC TAC Meeting	There should be bicycle parking and storage at passenger rail facilities, as well as charging stations for e-bikes.	Multi-Modal	Bicycle parking is included in the "Improve multimodal connections..." initiative in the Rail Plan.
9/2/2020 CCRPC TAC Meeting	In Charlotte, VT Railways has done a great job cutting the brush to improve the sightlines at the many private crossings. New lights and gates are being added at the Thompson's Point crossing which improves the safety of the rail corridor within our Town.	Safety	Comment noted.
9/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #1	Model the southern Vermont for Valley Flyer (White River Junction), using existing data sets.	Service	Extension of the Valley Flyer service to White River Junction was modeled.
9/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #1	There is concern that Essex Junction (the current highest passenger rail boarding point) ridership may decrease when Burlington comes on line, with extension of Ethan Allen and Vermonter. Opening Burlington would add thousands of new riders to the system, and that ridership to/from both stations would continue to increase.	Service	Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
9/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #1	There may be need to coordinate and respond to investments in rail elsewhere in New England, including recent upgrades to MA and CT's large rail projects. Vermont is impacted by investments in Knowledge Corridor rail scheduling and projects. COVID-19 is another extenuating factor that impacts rail use and investment.	Planning	Programmed projects/initiatives in neighboring states and Canada are considered.
9/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #1	There may be a need for funding for marketing and tourism to address ridership decline due to COVID-19, and consider the need for a marketing campaign once the Amtrak service is re-implemented.	Publicity	Comment noted.
9/10/2020 Email	How might the Vermonter extension to Montreal relate to the Plattsburg to Montreal Amtrak connection – is this a possible forecasting consideration? More specifically, for a resident of NW Vermont, it may be more efficient to access rail service in Plattsburg.	Service	The Rail Plan recommends developing a Service Development Plan to consider the operations and relationships between all services in Vermont and northeastern New York State.
9/10/2020 Email	Suggest the state promote intra-state Amtrak journeys such as Burlington to Brattleboro. Dinner car/tourist excursions likely have fun photos and could be a nice sidebar.	Service	Comment noted.
9/10/2020 Email	In order to attract the volume of passenger increases the state energy plan (and thus state rail plan) call for, it can really only be done with increased service. We have not seen any increase in service, although work continues on extensions to Burlington and Montreal.	Service	Comment noted.
9/10/2020 Email	Through grant funding, the CCRPC will explore the feasibility of community rail connecting Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, Rutland, and Washington Counties and Transit-Oriented Developments (TOD) adjacent to train stations.	Planning, Multi-Modal	Comment noted.
9/10/2020 Email	Regarding the leadership structure of passenger train service, consider discussion of alternatives, for example the model of the Northern New England Rail Passenger Authority that runs the Downeaster, the Joint Powers Authority models of California, the idea of having a joint position between VT/MA and CT to oversee and develop the Vermonter route. Also it might help our negotiating position with Amtrak to include a discussion of other private operators that could run the service (for example Herzog/ACI that now runs New Haven-Springfield service).	Service	Comment noted.
9/10/2020 Email	Model the implications of running bus connections.	Multi-Modal	Local transit connections were not modeled, however, improving transit connections is a recommendation of the Plan.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
9/10/2020 Email	Extend the "Valley Flyer" north from New Haven-Springfield-Greenfield on to Brattleboro and White River Junction. Add an overnight train from Montreal-New York (perhaps running via Burlington, Rutland and Albany?) Do NOT add new Boston-Montreal service, but instead a section of the Vermonter from Boston with a Boston - Montreal car(s) and car from Boston to New York and beyond. Consider a morning departure from New York bound for Burlington on the Western Corridor via Bennington and back in the afternoon. Consider extending Western Corridor train(s) from Burlington on to Winooski, Champlain College and Essex Junction and perhaps on to Saint Albans and/or Montpelier.	Service	Valley Flyer extension, Ethan Allen service via Bennington, and extension of the Ethan Allen service to Essex Junction were evaluated as alternatives in the Rail Plan.
9/10/2020 Email	Model the ridership and revenue implications of the trains on-time performance (the Vermonter has been both chronically late and typically on-time going back over the last 20 years so there is some interesting data to work with).	Service	On-time performance is evaluated in Chapter 5 of the Rail Plan.
9/23/2020 Web Tool	Exempt transit buses from unnecessary stops before crossing WACR tracks in Montpelier. Transit buses must stop before crossing the Washington County Railroad in Montpelier. This is unsafe for buses turning across traffic on Memorial Drive; a collision with another road vehicle is much more likely than getting struck by a train.	Safety, Multi-Modal	Comment noted.
9/24/2020 RRPC TAC Meeting	Regarding the western corridor, how can we build a passenger network without the addition of stops and rail facilities? Some passenger rail stops are at least 15 miles apart. Rutland to Middlebury is the primary request to be included in further study.	Service	The addition of whistle stops at Brandon and in Shelburne was identified as a potential initiative.
9/24/2020 RRPC TAC Meeting	The Killington Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber and Economic Development Corporation, may be helpful in providing regional tourism statistics.	Publicity	Comment noted.
9/24/2020 RRPC TAC Meeting	There is a potential rail side purchase on the Rutland/Clarendon town line on the south spur along Route 4. There is potential for multi-modal use. Requires confirmation. The buyer is unknown.	Multi-Modal	Comment noted.
9/24/2020 RRPC TAC Meeting	There are still non-lighted (neither lights nor gates) crossings along rail lines.	Safety	Comment noted.
9/24/2020 RRPC TAC Meeting	Passenger rail ridership has been impacted by COVID-related closure of certain Vermont colleges.	Service	Service has been suspended in Vermont due to COVID-19.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
9/30/2020 SWCRPC TAC Meeting	What about exploration of use of Bud cars or other more-local options than Amtrak?	Service	This would be covered in the current and future iterations of the State Transit Plan as it has different funding.
9/30/2020 SWCRPC TAC Meeting	What remaining constraints are there for double-stack clearance in the state?	Infrastructure	Priorities are being explored with each rail operator and will be in the draft report.
9/30/2020 SWCRPC TAC Meeting	An industrial location in Chester where their permitting may have been part of the issue with using the siding.	Infrastructure	Comment noted.
10/6/2020 Web Tool	In the summer & fall of 2019 our neighborhood on Lemroy Ct. in Richmond, VT was used to store rail ties for a construction project. I would like to have this area no longer be used for storage due to health effects from the creosote-migraines, asthma.	Environmental	Comment noted.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Why do the Amtrak Ethan Allen schedule and the schedules for state subsidized busses between Burlington, Manchester and Albany NY not include both bus and rail? Neither the Amtrak schedule nor the bus schedule shows the real frequency of service.	Multi-Modal	Comment noted. Confirmed that when the Vermont Amtrak services and State-funded connectors start back up after COVID they will cross-reference each other in schedules.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Could you provide an update on the Ethan Allen Express plans? What is the effect of the slowdown of many AMTRAK lines from a frequency standpoint on the arrival date of 2021? And are we talking mid/late 2021?	Service	
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	What's the current thinking on how you'll consider the immediate term in-migration to the state and implications for longer term changes? In the southern areas at least it seems to be substantial. Of course, if the economy struggles, we may see out migration as well, especially if housing pressures can't be remedied.	Planning	The passenger demand forecasting considered a range of potential population and economic growth scenarios.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Does the VT Rail Plan coordinate with neighboring state plans?	Planning	VTrans is coordinating with neighboring states and Canadian agencies.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Did I understand correctly that the Vermonter service to Montreal is expected to resume in '23 or '24?	Service	There are many different parties to coordinate with to build a station before the train goes to Montreal. The funding has not yet been identified. VTrans is in discussions with agencies and the Canadian government.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Will these plans have an impact on the area buildings around One Main Street train stop in Burlington?	Planning	No impact is anticipated at this time.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	I'm hoping that the rail plan will include passenger service to the Northeast Kingdom (NEK). Although not a top priority for VT, if its not in the plan it will never happen. The people of NEK will want to have access to the major cities along the east coast via rail.	Service	Comment noted.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	One of the interesting aspects of the folk moving into the southern part of the state is the number of children that have come with them. School enrollments are generally up, which would indicate in-migration of working age adults. That's likely a different trend than we've seen before. Will be interesting to see if that means they're more likely to stay for the long run, or if at some point they'll return to where they came from. I'm thinking that the decision to uproot their children is not made lightly.	Planning	Comment noted.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Currently none of Vermont's Amtrak trains connect with any other long distance trains necessitating an overnight stay in NYC or Washington, DC. Any change of schedule contemplated?	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Is a Boston train a possibility?	Service	Improved connections to Boston are considered in the Plan. One-seat service from Vermont to/from Boston was not considered.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Might the long-term vision include a passenger rail revival connecting more Vermont cities? Could we adopt community supported rail stations, offering greater coordinated integrated state supported train and bus service?	Service, Multi-Modal	Initiatives and recommendations in the Plan include some that would connect more Vermont cities and towns, and improved multimodal connections.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Will the rail plan discuss on how passenger rail can help reduce CO2 and assist in the VT Comprehensive Energy Plan?	Environmental	The general GHG emissions benefits of rail are discussed in Section 4.3.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	Could service connect to Boston through Island Pond?	Service	Such a service is not considered in the Plan.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	The northbound and southbound Vermonter trains (currently) meet in Springfield, MA. It would make sense to run a train out from Boston to meet both trains and return back to Boston. This would mostly benefit Massachusetts though Vermont potentially could prod MassDOT a bit.	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.
10/6/2020 Town Hall Meeting #1	The Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative has a component that speaks to MassDOT plans for future extension of services to Springfield Union Station, which could be connecting options for travelers to Boston. It also dovetails with work between MassDOT and ConnDOT on potential expansion of services on the what is referred to as the Inland Route, which is Boston-Springfield-Hartford-New Haven.	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.
10/6/2020 Web Tool	REALLY looking forward to the upcoming expansion of the Ethan Allen line to Vergennes and hope the project is still underway. Have family in NYC, child heading to college there, and need to travel there for work every month or so. Would LOVE to see the train run at least twice daily or leave NYC closer to the end of the work day; however, understand that this is not likely in the near future.	Service	Comment noted.
10/8/2020 Web Tool	Please focus on a reasonable meet for the Vermonter and the Lake Shore Limited at Springfield, MA for a great Boston or Chicago connection.	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
<p>10/11/2020 Email</p>	<p>I'm writing as a concerned citizen regarding rail projects in Vermont. Although I see the benefit of increased rail travel in regard to greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, and the efficiency of freight for business and construction; my neighborhood had a daunting experience with rail construction during the summer of 2019.</p> <p>I've attached a brief document framing some of what we experienced, but in summary, our neighborhood of Lemroy Court in Richmond was used as a storage site multiple times throughout last summer (2019). An initial load of railroad ties, treated with creosote, was deposited just off of the tracks in our residential area around July 15th of 2019. The creosote on these ties emitted a toxic smell that was inescapable in our neighborhood. In the heat and sun of the summer, the fumes became increasingly stronger as time continued, to the point where we were not able to open windows or use air conditioning due to the ties' impact on our health (migraines, headaches, asthma, irritability, potential pregnancy complications as signed off by our obstetrician, etc.).</p> <p>After a series of respectful complaints and research through channels such as the railroad itself, our town government, our local representative to state congress as well as the Air Quality and Climate Division Department of Environmental Conservation, we learned that there was a project in store for last summer / late fall, that needed a convenient location to store the ties. Thankfully, the ties were moved to an alternate site over from August 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Approximately three weeks later, a second load of ties were stored in the exact same location. After a second series of emails and phone calls to the cited organizations listed above, the second set of ties were moved after approximately two weeks.</p> <p>The takeaway from all of this led to the conclusion that the town and state couldn't do much about what the railroad chose to do with what is technically federal property (the railroad tracks). As a resident of the area, and with what seems like extensive rail plans being developed, I would feel much more at ease if the Lemroy Court area in Richmond was no longer designated as a storage site for such purposes, or if the site were reconfigured altogether. When we moved here in July of 2016, we were aware that there was a railroad track in close proximity, and we assumed there would be the expected traffic and the presumed noise disruption. However, the toxic smell and potentially toxic fumes were not something that we ever imagined.</p>	<p>Environmental</p>	<p>We are sorry to hear about this situation. Community impacts of construction activities are noted as a concern in Section 4.4.</p>

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
10/13/2020 Web Tool	The whistle noise from the crossing heavily impacts the quality of life and home values in the area. This and other crossing in Essex should be refitted so they can become "Quiet" crossings.	Environmental	Quiet zones in this area are listed as a potential initiative.
11/9/2020 Web Tool	Multipurpose trails sharing the Rail ROW as means to increase regional off-road connectivity and access for bikes and pedestrians. Investigate opportunities to expand the multipurpose path beside the rail in Burlington south to Shelburne. The segment of rail that runs from Pine Haven Shores to Rt. 7 in the Village affords opportunities to co-locate a multipurpose path. Doing so would increase safe and convenient access for bicycles and pedestrians.	Multi-Modal	Other organizations may consider multi-use trails and paths to improve access to/from rail stations.
11/9/2020 Web Tool	Brattleboro Amtrak station rail safety issue: As of 2 years ago, this station was a disgrace--deteriorated/unsafe crumbling asphalt at the platform edge, inaccessible waiting room (door threshold with a 3" unramped rise), unfinished rest room, shabby flooring & furnishings). This is NOT the way Vermont should welcome visitors at its 3rd busiest passenger rail station for boardings! The town wants to make improvements, but is hampered by NECR's lack of interest & engagement and Amtrak's systemwide crisis. Why has this been left to fester for so many years? When will the state step up & make needed capital improvements to this station?	Infrastructure	Accessibility issues will be addressed through the planned replacement of the Brattleboro Station, scheduled to start construction in 2022.
11/9/2020 Web Tool	Essex Junction Amtrak station rail safety issue: As the busiest rail passenger station in VT, this station is woefully inadequate. A larger enclosed waiting area is needed, with an additional restroom, and better intermodal directional signage. There is a 'fishbowl' room (with glass walls all around) at the village end of the station building that could easily be re-purposed into an additional enclosed waiting area for train passengers and other visitors, if permission could be secured from NECR & Sprint. VTrans' Rail Division should work closely with the town to address & resolve barriers to station expansion before Amtrak re-starts service here.	Infrastructure	Improvements to the Essex Junction station are planned.
12/4/2020 Email	The resumption of Amtrak service in Vermont must be the number one priority. In this context the completion of the Rutland-Burlington Westside Corridor is assumed to have been complete under the prior plan. If not, it must have equal priority with service resumption.	Service	Comment noted.
12/4/2020 Email	The two separated Vermont passenger rail networks—the New England Central RR (NECR) route used by the VERMONTERR and the Vermont Rail System (VRS) route used by the ETHAN ALLEN EXPRESS, should be united. This requires the upgrade to reasonable passenger service standards of the Burlington-Essex Jct. branch of the NECR.	Service	This is on the list of recommendations in the Rail Plan.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/4/2020 Email	At present Vermont’s two passenger networks cannot be operated as unified network because the 6.86-mile-long Burlington-Essex Jct. branch line is classified as 10 mph Class One track. At a minimum this should be upgraded to permit 40mph passenger speeds. This means a Class Three overhaul. In theory this would allow 59mph passenger speeds. But in the narrow confines of the Winooski River Canyon and with the tunnel and numerous grade crossing on this line 40mph would suffice. This would permit a 15-minute running time from Burlington to Essex Jct. —compared to a half hour or more by bus.	Infrastructure, Service	This is on the list of recommendations in the Rail Plan.
12/4/2020 Email	It is not essential to over-engineer this project. We should seek to provide universal grade-crossing protection, install new ties, ballast and provide for welded rail where it is not presently in place. The reconstruction of the tunnel in Burlington should not be required for passenger service. Bridge conditions need review and there may be a need for siding lengthening at the woodchip fired power plant. If essential signals and Positive Train Control (PTC) can be included, but no more than two blocks should be required on such a short line. The great advantage of this project is to permit through operations between the two Vermont networks. Trains from Rutland and Middlebury could proceed beyond Burlington to serve Essex Jct. , Montpelier and St. Albans. Service could be provided from St. Albans to Burlington and to points south on VRS. Most importantly, when cross-border upgrades are completed, services from VRS points could reach Montreal, with its over 4,000,000 potential riders. The ETHAN ALLEN EXPRESS could serve Canadians for same-day and multi-night trips to Burlington, Vergennes, Middlebury, Rutland and Castleton. Ideally the Barre—Montpelier state-owned branch line should also be restored for passenger operations—at a minimum to central Montpelier, and ideally to downtown Barre. This program should be the highest in-state priority for track upgrading. Genesee and Wyoming Railways/NECR must obviously be closely consulted, as it serves very important freight business on this line. To facilitate multiple passenger frequencies the line should be reviewed for purchase by the state of Vermont.	Infrastructure, Service	VTrans is implementing every reasonable safety feature, but at over \$1 million/mile for current PTC we are monitoring advances of “lightweight” PTC into a deployable solution.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/4/2020 Email	<p>The long-delayed project to extend the VERMONTER to Montreal should be highly prioritized. It is time to put a desired completion date on this project. We need to finalize the engineering designs/costs for any work on this route. Once costs are known serious negotiations on cost-sharing between the USA, Vermont, Canada and Quebec must be highly prioritized. Accept the possibility that something less than a “dream” overhaul of the Canadian National Railroad tracks north of the border may be the way forward. If, for example, we needed to accept five to ten minutes of added running time from the border to Cantic until funding could be found for a full rebuilding, that would be acceptable to reach 4,000,000 potential riders.</p>	Service	This is a “First Priority” recommendation in the Rail Plan.
12/4/2020 Email	<p>Conduct a study that analyzes possible future service improvements on the Vermont passenger rail network.</p> <p>Should both Vermont trains serve Montreal? Should we run an added trip on the VERMONTER route south of White River Jct. to New Haven, by extending on the VALLEY FLYER trains to White River Jct.? This would permit same-day visits to New York and points in the Pioneer/Connecticut Valley. Should we run a regional service—possibly using RDC/DMU trains--from northern Vermont to Montreal? Should we offer regional service cross-state in northern Vermont, for example Montpelier (or Barre) to Burlington and Middlebury; or for commuters St. Albans-Burlington-Middlebury in both directions?</p> <p>Longer-term—should we consider restoring an overnight service from Montreal to New York and Washington? This would permit same-day and weekend trips to the cities at both ends of the line. Such a train could also offer through cars to Virginia, the Carolinas and Florida on Amtrak’s Atlantic Coast service. This could be done either by flipping the VERMONTER to run overnight, or with an added frequency.</p>	Service, Planning	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
<p>12/4/2020 Email</p>	<p>Coordinate seamless bus connections from state-supported motorcoach routes to our Amtrak trains. In addition, we should work with Amtrak and Mass DOT to facilitate rail (or bus) connections Springfield to Boston and Vermont to Chicago.</p> <p>Vermont supports an extensive internal bus network, but virtually none of these services are properly connected to our trains. Further none accept rail tickets, except the ski-shuttle from Rutland to Killington and the “Shires of Vermont” Manchester-Bennington-Albany dedicated Ambus. And absurdly, that route appears nowhere in any Amtrak timetable. Far too often our bus and rail stations are blocks apart and schedules not coordinated.</p> <p>Only at Essex Jct. is there an ideally co-located joint bus/rail station, with proper rail to bus connections to central Burlington, but even there joint tickets are not offered, and the co-located Williston-Essex Jct. bus only connects to Amtrak southbound. We subsidize Greyhound services in Vermont, yet their Boston buses do not connect to the VERMONTER at White River Jct. Our own local bus lines from Rutland and Bellows Falls to Okemo Mountain; across the state from White River Jct. to Rutland; from St. Johnsbury to White River Jct. , and in southern Vermont from Brattleboro up to Mount Snow offer no Amtrak connectivity.</p> <p>The situation is no better by rail. VERMONTER riders can reach Boston southbound—albeit with a better than two-hour layover at Springfield, but northbound the Boston-Springfield train misses the VERMONTER by 3 minutes! We do not connect at Washington or New York to any points south to Florida or New Orleans. The ETHAN ALLEN currently makes a same-day connection to the Amtrak Chicago service at Albany, but only after a 7-hour layover southbound. After the train is extended to Burlington it is likely that the Chicago-Vermont eastbound connection will be broken entirely. The VERMONTER makes a (close) connection to the westbound Chicago train at Springfield, but misses it on the return by over two hours.</p> <p>Have we ever looked at what might be possible to restore these connections? For example, Boston to Vermont northbound would be possible if the VERMONTER ran 30-60 minutes later northbound. The long southbound layover at Springfield could be mitigated if our train ran 1-2 later southbound.</p>	<p>Multi-Modal, Service</p>	<p>A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan. Such a plan would consider the potential to improve coordination between service originating in Boston and northbound Vermonter service.</p>

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/4/2020 Email	<p>Amtrak plans to order new equipment for its eastern USA fleet in the next five years. Vermont should seek close involvement in this order. Our services are longer-distance than most state-supported routes. We should consider more spacious coaches, better Business Class seating and a possible use of lie-flat convertible bed seats for an overnight service. There are higher capacity bi-level coaches now available in the North American market which can fit under the catenary and through the tunnels on the Northeast Corridor. These would provide more seats per train or possibly permit shorter train-sets without loss of capacity. Amtrak has recently taken delivery of 25 each of new diners and sleeping cars—but has made almost no use of this equipment. Could we lease 4-5 of the sleepers (or from the 50 older sleepers Amtrak is retaining) to use on a resumed overnight train? Could some of the diners be modified to provide a superior diner-lounge option on such a train? AllEarth Rail has a fleet of self-propelled Rail Diesel Cars/RDCs already in Vermont. These could be used for added regional trains. Amtrak’s own equipment plans show an interest in using contemporary Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) train-sets to facilitate less costly new regional routes. They also are considering bi-modal diesel and electric trains. The existing Amfleet I cars will be retired soon. We need to be proactively involved in their replacement.</p>	Infrastructure, Service	Comment noted.
12/4/2020 Email	<p>Allow me to preface my thoughts by stating that I inaugurated my career in the rail industry. With respect to returning Amtrak service to Vermont, with demand down during the pandemic daily service is probably not required. However, I think consideration should be given to at least restoring it on the peak travel days which would be Friday and Sunday to be sure and probably Saturday so crews are not idle away from home for perhaps 24 or 36 hours.</p>	Service	VTrans and Amtrak may consider this and other options for restarting service.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/4/2020 Email	Following the resolution of the pandemic, I would hope that the customs arrangements will be conducted in Montreal with a savings of approximately 1-11/2 hours in travel time. To make travel time as attractive as possible, a short connection of a few hundred yards could be rebuilt on existing right-of-way at Cantic, P. Q. to the former Delaware and Hudson line into Windsor station. Windsor station is presently used only for commuter traffic but there's no reason why Amtrak trains couldn't go back there. Very few passengers travel beyond Montreal and those few that do could easily be accommodated via taxi that train crews could call ahead of time to meet passengers at Windsor station. It is also very likely that user charges for the use of Windsor station may be considerably less than at Central Station. The savings could pay for the installation of the short section of track at Cantic to connect the New England Central to what is now Canadian Pacific, former Delaware in Hudson, track. A savings in running time of approximately 30 minutes could be expected from this change as the painfully slow running into Central Station would be circumvented.	Service	Comment noted.
12/4/2020 Email	If the present Vermonter is extended to Montreal arriving at 10:30/11pm it is not exactly going to encourage ridership. It may be a dismal/spectacular failure. Give consideration to restoring the overnight Montrealer. If this train were to leave White River Junction at around 5am we could easily be in Montreal by 9am, particularly if Windsor station is used. This would afford residents of Northern Vermont the possibility of a convenient day trip to Montreal thereby avoiding the expense of a hotel. The southbound trip would leave sometime around or just after dinner. This could only encourage additional one-day ridership that would otherwise be foregone.	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan
12/4/2020 Email	I have never been aware of any promotion of the train. In fact, I've run into many people who don't even know there is/was a train in Vermont. I would think an attractive market for the train would be various groups (church, social, school, etc.) for trips to Montreal and perhaps multi-day trips to New York and Washington D. C.	Publicity	Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/4/2020 Email	Work with MA and CT to reduce running times south of Brattleboro. The New Haven Railway maintained schedules south of Springfield to NY in under three hours 50 and 60 years ago. Certainly we should be able to do it at least as well particularly if dual powered locomotives are used to avoid the engine change at New Haven which can consume 20 and sometimes even more minutes. Consideration should also be given to using a platform south of Springfield that was formally used for bulk mail transfers to rail cars. I can understand that there would be opposition to a second station in Springfield but Richmond, VA has two stations and they seem to do reasonably well. This could easily save another 15 to 20 minutes of running time by eliminating the reverse move into the station at Springfield. It is reasonable to expect a running time between White River Junction in New York of not more than 5 1/2 hours. The Dartmouth coach bus company operated buses between Lebanon, NH and NY in approximately 5 hours prior to the pandemic. Of course they make no stops and serve no intermediate points which the train obviously does. A 5 1/2 hour running time would not require increase in running speeds. It would only involve reducing wasted time at Springfield and New Haven with some speeding up between Brattleboro and Springfield, also related to reducing unnecessary slow running particularly south of Greenfield and south of Holyoke.	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan
12/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #2	Consider scheduling of the passenger rail for people commuting to NYC or visiting Vermont ski or resort areas. Differing options to access northern Vermont are desirable. Connectivity to the Lake Shore Limited is important in the Schenectady/Albany area.	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan
12/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #2	Passenger rail speeds would not work where freight is shared with Amtrak. This is indicated as Class 2. Any area with a scheduled train should be Class 3. Class 4 would be ideal, but signalization is needed. CSX is moving ahead with purchase of Pan Am, which could impact the prioritization of many rail interests. The impacts are not yet known, and worth mention in the Rail Plan.	Safety	Comment noted.
12/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #2	Consider a second train to Montreal, to accommodate tourism with reduced need for transfers to Vermont stops and beyond.	Service	Service to Montreal is a "First Priority" recommendation in the Rail Plan, starting with one train per day, eventually increasing to two per day.
12/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #2	Explore commuter rail on the WACR Montpelier-Barre segment. CSX acquisition of Pan Am also means that reactivation of the Twin State Railroad that travels east to New Hampshire should be considered.	Service	This could be considered in the Transit Plan.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/9/2020 VRAC Meeting #2	VTrans has not issued a position on the CSX acquisition. It is suspected that CSX will apply as a minor impact but there is an opposing position that the transaction presents a significant transaction. There is value in the Rail Plan discussing connections with Class 1 and regional markets. This transaction will land before the Surface Transportation Board; Vermont's participation is important.	Service	VTrans is monitoring this potential acquisition.
12/13/2020 Email	I like the approach of looking at different scenarios for passenger train expansion. In fact I think it should be a model for other states. Studies are often done on specific lines, but what you've done is to give raw material for decision making and creation of priorities. That is very important, but often neglected. Tremendously useful. I know that these ridership numbers are not a detailed model based prediction, but it is very useful to have them as is. And we both know that ridership forecasting is not an exact science, especially for intercity trains (or buses). It could be that including these scenarios in the rail plan could help in future obtaining federal funds.	Planning	Comment noted.
12/13/2020 Email	I like the approach of cataloging initiatives as well. It has the virtue of making federal funding easier for a wide range of items - important as Biden may release a lot of infrastructure funds soon. It also provides a way to rank priorities, which even if not definitive will surely be a help. With both of these approaches, the plan positions the state to take advantage of opportunities for federal funds if/when they arise and also provide a sketch-level roadmap for the next administration after Phil Scott, should they want to increase focus on rail (which one could imagine happening).	Investment	Comment noted.
12/13/2020 Email	The range of scenarios considered really makes sense. They include everything an observer might suggest or what might come up in the political process. I'm glad you included the discussion of the ridership impact from COVID. That is certain to come up in discussions. When people say "2 <sup>nd</sup> New York – Montreal train" we imagine the overnight Montrealer. The ridership forecast does not specify this and I think ridership would come out rather differently on an overnight than simply a factor of existing daytime ridership: endpoint ridership and Montreal and Burlington would be larger for an overnight train than a day train like the Vermonter, but ridership at midpoints during the middle of the night would be much smaller or perhaps the train wouldn't even stop.	Service	Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/13/2020 Email	<p><i>These comments refer to the Implementation Table scoring mechanism.</i></p> <p>Most of the scores seem to follow what I would have assigned. That said, I would have assigned quite different weighting for categories. It is striking that "mobility" is only 5 points. The big goals are mobility, economic opportunity and environment with mobility being the top. Maybe asset condition is a big one too. I'm not sure why "connectivity" is twice as high as mobility -- isn't the point of connectivity to improve mobility (and perhaps improve the financial performance of the network) and does not stand alone as a goal?</p>	Planning	The weighting is consistent with Vermont's Project Selection and Project Prioritization (VPSP2) process.
12/13/2020 Email	<p><b>SAFETY:</b> The additional Amtrak runs should get safety scores of 20 as they take drivers off the road. The train is 10 times safer than driving (multiplied by the number of passengers).</p> <p>No track (or bridge) upgrade should be assigned safety points. All railroad operations are safe, as-is. All trains are run at a speed that is safe, slowing down as necessary to maintain safety. Therefore track upgrades that increase speed are a good thing but should not make any safety impact. (unless one assumes that faster trains bring more business to the railroad and thus improving highway safety).</p> <p>The worst crossings in the state, according to the FRA predictive data are between Montpelier Jct and Barre with Burlington - Essex Junction following right up behind. Vermont Rail Action Network would like to see either separate initiatives to address crossings particularly in these two areas, or to include crossings along with track and bridge upgrades on the initiatives for those areas (which would boost their safety score).</p>	Safety	<p>Initiatives that lead to improvements in the level of service for freight and passenger rail services could induce mode shift from truck to freight rail or automobile to passenger rail. Therefore, some track, bridge, and other freight improvements could yield safety benefits by taking trucks off of the road.</p> <p>The crossing locations noted in this comment could be among the the priority investments, pending outcomes and coordination with the Section 130 analysis that is presently underway.</p>
12/13/2020 Email	<p><b>ASSET CONDITION:</b> The Essex quiet zone does not upgrade or maintain asset condition (in fact I think it should get negative points because it leaves assets requiring more maintenance than before). It could be said to modernize however.</p>	Environmental	Comment noted.
12/13/2020 Email	<p><b>MOBILITY:</b> A large number of passenger rail improvements are rated 0 points even though it seem obvious (to me) that they will increase mobility by increasing access to the rail system and making it more competitive. For example, a stop in Shelburne gives mobility to those in the area who would use it. Speed increases increase the utility of the service, increasing ridership. Junction by shortening the time trains block crossings at 5 points, a continuing sore point in the community.</p>	Service, Environmental, Infrastructure	Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/13/2020 Email	<p><b>RESILIENCY:</b> Building projects in flood zones does not seem like it should get points in fact that seems more like negative points. Some comments specific to the "NECR Winooski Track and Bridge Upgrades": It might help to make it clear this is Burlington-Essex Junction. Most don't know this is the "Winooski Subdivision". This goal gets 2.5 points out of 5 for being endorsed by the RPC. Yet the RPC has already spent its own money on this line (to load rate bridges). The RPC has applied for planning grants related to this line. I think this should be a 5.</p> <p>This line is partially within downtowns and village centers. Indeed, by increasing speeds, one would expect this work to significantly improve the village of Essex.</p>	Environmental, Service	The objective is to award points to projects that improve the resiliency, or "harden," flood-prone infrastructure.
12/13/2020 Email	<p><b>Should get 4 points for this.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment: If the work brings track speed from 10 mph to 25 mph it means trains run at their most fuel-efficient speed with the least possible pollution. Should get 10 points.</li> <li>• Program/Policy Initiatives: These are all great goals but would take more staff time to advance. I do think that leadership especially focused on the Amtrak service would be a help. I know that is outside the scope of the railplan, but it seems worth saying.</li> </ul> <p>The Vermont Rail Action Network would like to see a new initiative added: "maintain and improve freight access to regional short-haul markets and competitive class 1 connections". Having this in the rail plan will provide important back-up if and when Vermont goes before the surface transportation board to protect shipper's interests regarding the Pan-Am sale and any other transactions that may come to fruition.</p>	Environmental, Service, Planning	The highlighted text was identified as a "Key Need and Issue" in Chapter 5. Several initiatives listed in Chapter 6 address this need.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	An individual suggested that the extension of Ethan Allen serve Montreal. The Burlington to Essex branch helps connect two passenger rail services. Running one Vermonter and one Ethan Allen in each direction would expand access for Canada-Vermont tourism. The individual recommended the extension of the Valley Flyer service to White River Junction. There is opportunity to better serve Springfield by adjusting the Vermonter train service.	Service	These recommendations were incorporated into the service initiatives and recommendations in the Plan.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	Equitable mobility depends on options beyond personal car ownership. She expressed interest in improved Essex Junction and Burlington connections, and the potential to serve short-distance commuters.	Multi-Modal	Improved multimodal connections to train stations is a recommendation of the Rail Plan

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	If Amtrak ran from Burlington to Essex Junction would the same track upgrades be required as were discussed for commuter rail?	Service	Some work would be required, but not to the extent required to support frequent commuter rail service.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	What is the status of the extension of the Vermonter and the Ethan Allen, and the status of a Customs pre-clearance facility in Montreal Central Station?	Service	Updates on the Amtrak to Burlington are available on VTrans’s website: <a href="https://vtrans.vermont.gov/rail/amtrak-burlington">https://vtrans.vermont.gov/rail/amtrak-burlington</a> The Montreal Customs facility and Vermonter service to Montreal could be in place in a short-term (less than 4 years) horizon.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	How will the Vergennes and Middlebury stops be promoted?	Publicity	VTrans is currently developing a marketing strategy
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	Will any trains run on the track through Shelburne?	Service	Yes. Trains on the Ethan Allen Express will pass through Shelburne en route to/from Burlington.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	Would there be consideration of altered service for a one-day trip, particularly for veterans to the VA Hospital, to White River Junction?	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	Do not get too focused on commuter rail over intercity rail. Service between Burlington to Montreal, or Montpelier to Rutland, is critical. There is a need to connect Vermont’s two major corridors, with improved coordination of intermodal transportation.	Service, Multi-Modal	Comment noted.
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	The public may not be aware of how rail is subsidized. There is a misconception that rail is not profitable while car travel “pays for itself.” Rail has several a social benefit and is most successful when serving higher density routes. A commuter rail would not likely thrive intra-state. Rail schedules are critical to serve Vermonters, for arrival in Montreal in the morning and return to Vermont in the evening. The painfully slow entrance into Montreal is an issue (estimated 10 mph).	Service	Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/17/2020 Town Hall Meeting #2	Support a rail stop in Brandon. The town is investing in development to support rail.	Service	A stop in Brandon is included in the list of potential initiatives in Chapter 6.

<p>12/17/2020 Email</p>	<p>When D&amp;H was running it carried slate and ag products to market every day. Both my father and grandfather (whose family background in the past who used rail on a regular basis) both said that the passenger and mail that traveled the D&amp;H in the past, that even then, the passenger income was not even close enough to pay for the rail. The commercial freight covered ALL the cost of running the system. At the Town Hall I learned that the AMTRAK model is not flexible to do both? Very strange. As it would be easy with the web ordering systems, for small slate shipments, and ag products to be put in a container (like ships do, or airlines) that fit both a truck and then a train - to move products to markets. . . then , unload the train products containers at the population center or destination (all sizes of containers, even for all kinds of products) to truck for the final distance to the customer. This would be wonderful for ag folks out who grow a lot of food but not enough locally to eat it all.</p> <p>Tim at Laughing Child Farm gave up his select board job as his potato distributor went out of business, and TIM had to do it himself (but farm, and distribute). Peter Helmetag and others collaborated to get their grass fed sheep and lamb to the best restaurants in NYC on a regular basis with a TRUCK, and each sometimes had to DRIVE down, deliver, etc making for a very long day. YEARS ago, the D&amp;H railroad carried those products direct into the cities. TODAY, small ag need to have a regular, even on snow days, way to get products to a larger population market (can easily SELL via a web store set up for that purpose - it is the shipping on a daily basis that need to be low cost and dependable).</p> <p>Now, same as years ago passenger trains alone are NEVER going to pay for the cost of themselves. Bill McDonald was on the call today, he worked in RAIL at a Federal Level, and said the use of passenger rail came close to paying for the costs "only" when moving people between larger population centers,. He said that NONE of the VT population centers came close to the larger. . . so, VT passenger rail would lose money big time (and he said that at the final mile destinations at the train depot, usually people would want their car anyway for the final navigation around Burlington or Rutland etc. I would add that they could HAVE A self driving ELECTRIC CAR rental waiting for them to use that would be affordable? The rail line from NY City would go to Rutland, and then from Rutland to Burlington, passing by the center of VT growing areas (but AMTRAK does not do that, only does passenger). Meaning it would go to FORT EDWARD, NY WHITEHALL, NY, CASTLETON, VT, RUTLAND, etc. (could freight be cost effective and have passenger too)? [comment continues on following page]</p>	<p>Multi-Modal</p>	<p>Amtrak offers limited shipping services for shipments up to 500 pounds in weight. Larger shipments must be transported by freight railroads.</p> <p>Electric car rental availability at stations is an interesting idea that would be consistent with the Plan's recommendation to improve multimodal connectivity to/from stations.</p> <p>Rail equipment design is guided by Federal safety and crashworthiness requirements. More information is available at: <a href="https://railroads.dot.gov/train-occupant-protection/equipment/passenger-rail-equipment-overview">https://railroads.dot.gov/train-occupant-protection/equipment/passenger-rail-equipment-overview</a></p>
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DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
	<p>[comment continued]</p> <p>Seems like they (the railroad mindset folks) are locked into a rail plan, or rail system design, that is not current with needs of SMALL FARMERS, small slate folks, others, all who need a consistent way to move their products to larger markets that is more economical than a TRUCK and the cost of that? OR change the design of the TRAINS to be lower profile (like a car) that would do away with the heavy load of a Passenger-TRAIN-car "costs" (physics), thus needing less of an engine to move passenger or light freight, FASTER TOO. OR, use TUBES like the bank uses to move at their drive-up windows, etc - If that old train model can not compete, then think up a new model?</p>		
<p>12/18/2020 Email</p>	<p>Rail transportation from Vermont to Montreal should take advantage of the new REM train that will connect the south shore of Montreal not only to downtown but to the airport: <a href="https://rem.info/en">https://rem.info/en</a> A year and a half ago I suggested to Senator Leahy's office that the Amtrak train should stop at the southern terminus of the REM. This terminus would have several advantages for US Customs and Immigration, for the city of Montreal, and for Amtrak passengers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There would be room to build a dedicated terminal for the train.</li> <li>• Customs officials could easily drive up from Highgate or Rouse's Point to service the train. This, instead of perhaps having to pay for them to live in Montreal.</li> <li>• Some reduction in traffic and parking in the city of Montreal would occur.</li> <li>• Passengers would enter Montreal through public transport instead of having to find it in the city.</li> <li>• The REM would be much faster than the train.</li> </ul> <p>It frustrates me to read our US and Vermont rail plans and to listen to discussions about them because we are thinking about the railroad as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and trying to regain the level of service we had then. Passenger rail has changed! The REM trains will have no drivers; they will depart every 5 minutes! I'm sure you're aware that high speed for trains in Europe, Japan, and China means 200 MPH. In the US we achieve high-speed trains by defining high speed as 80 MPH. When we consider creating rail service to Montreal, however, let us at least connect to a modern train.</p>	<p>Service</p>	<p>Cross-border service requires investments in customs and border protection facilities and personnel. The agreement between U.S. and Canadian officials to expand facilities at Montreal's Central Station will serve the Vermonter and Adirondack services. Terminating Amtrak service elsewhere would require additional agreements and investments by U.S. and Canadian agencies</p>
<p>12/22/2020 Email</p>	<p>I would love to see rail passenger service to Montreal reinstated. Thank you.</p>	<p>Service</p>	<p>Vermonter service to Montreal is a first priority recommendation in the Rail Plan.</p>

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/23/2020 Email	<p>My comments are not specific to the proposed initiatives, they are regarding changing Amtrak to result in higher ridership and ease-of-use. A minority of them may not be relevant to The Vermonter and Ethan Allen Express.</p> <p>Do whatever it takes to make the cost of riding Amtrak less expensive than riding in a personal automobile, and equal to our less than the average for airplane and bus rides.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce spacing and comfort and privacy. Planes, buses, and cars all have smaller seats than Amtrak.</li> <li>• Eliminate the dining/café, and other cars, that don't have ticketed seats and instead, serve people in their ticketed seats like in planes.</li> <li>• Eliminate the tourist-friendly features and simply retain the aspect of getting passengers from point A to point B.</li> <li>• Build in simple, small, and dense bunkbed-style sleeping platforms and have less of the big, expensive, private rooms and less of the current coach seats.</li> </ul> <p>Ease of use ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow people to rest for extended periods at stations if they have a recent arrival ticket or near departure ticket. (While traveling in Latin America, I often slept in bus stations to make my travel simpler and cheaper than finding lodging-accommodation just for one night. )</li> <li>• Have lockers for storing luggage that have set-your-own-combo locks so that people can comfortably peruse town.</li> <li>• Make the booking feature on website better. For example, when I've searched a trip like Brattleboro to Boston or Albany, it returns an error code maybe because the layover in Springfield is too long for the website to accept? I would like to see all options even if the layover is long. Maybe this has since changed, but I can't tell because of COVID-restrictions on this route.</li> </ul>	Service	Comments noted.
12/28/20 Web Tool	<p>I live in Putney, VT, and work in Hartford, CT. I've been commuting by car for the last twenty years, usually 2-3 times a week. I would LOVE to be able to take the train instead. Amtrak schedule is completely inconvenient, for tourists, not workers. Expansion of this service would benefit workers and tourism alike, allowing folks like me to get work done while in transit, and providing students and others easier access to the recreation of Vermont. This would benefit our state in so many ways!</p>	Service	A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
12/28/2020 Web Tool	Bike and pedestrian access to new Amtrak stations in Vergennes and Middlebury could be greatly improved. In Vergennes, there is a good multi-use path at the station itself, but it ends at the Park and Ride border and does not continue to the population center of downtown Vergennes. Pedestrian and bicyclist access is limited by a narrow road crossing at the overpass on 22A and no other legal alternative for crossing the tracks. In Middlebury legal pedestrian access between Seymour St. and the new station would be highly desirable.	Multi-Modal	Improving multimodal connections to/from train stations is a recommendation of the Rail Plan. Other organizations may consider multi-use trails and paths to improve access to/from rail stations.
12/28/2020 Web Tool	This initiative should include an examination of the feasibility of rendering the track suitable for commuter rail. There is a real need to increase commuter travel options from Essex to Winooski and Burlington so those Vermonters who lack access to an individual motor vehicle can get to services, post-secondary educational opportunities, and work; employers all over Chittenden County struggle to fill positions in part because of the region's dearth of transit options. The tens of thousand of vehicles traveling the corridor daily creates a public health risk for residents of Essex, Winooski, and the north end of Burlington. It also contributes to Vermont's transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. The State's long-range transportation plan cites investments in public transit as part of wise "Coordinated investments in Vermont's historic villages and downtowns, providing walkable communities that encourage vibrant local economies and attract new residents and business, are a great opportunity to preserve the unique character of our state while increasing economic vitality." This is the vision that the City of Winooski has for itself and has as part of its transportation plan" to promote Chittenden County Commuter Rail Service: As a means for reducing commuter vehicle traffic traveling through Winooski and for encouraging transit-oriented development along the ... railroad corridor between Essex Junction and Union Station in Burlington..." Specific location is the Extension from Burlington to Essex Junction to connect Ethan Allen Express with Vermonter.	Multi-Modal	Any contemplation of commuter rail service will be under the purview of the Transit Plan.
12/28/20 Web Tool	The culvert south of the Bartonsville Covered Bridge is constantly being blocked by beaver dams and seems to be failing. It barely was able to handle the Christmas day rain storm/snow melt with water nearly crossing Lower Bartonsville Road. If this culvert fails with all of those propane cars parked on top it will not be good. Upgrade GMRC Bridges and Track to 286k standard (Rutland to Bellows Falls).	Safety	The matter is being further explored.

<p>12/31/2020 Email</p>	<p>My concern is that there is no provision in the proposed Initiatives for railroad equipment (locomotives, passenger coaches, and possibly cab control cars) to replace the current P32AC-DM Dual Mode (DC 3rd Rail) locomotives used on the current Ethan Allan Service between Rutland VT &amp; Penn Station NY; the P42 Diesel-Electric locomotives on the Vermonter between New Haven CT and St. Albans VT; and the Amfleet coaches on both routes. In addition, new or additional service will require additional equipment: Items #100 (Vermont Extension to Montreal-one round trip per day); #102 (Vermont Extension to Montreal-two round trips per day); and #107 (Add a second daily service to the Ethan Allen Express New York City to Burlington). As these are all State-Supported services, the State of Vermont could reasonably expect to acquire new equipment for these services I recommend that the Summary of Potential Initiatives Table be modified by adding:</p> <p>#100A: Acquire Siemens SC-44 Charger locomotives and Siemens Venture single-level coaches to replace the equipment on the current Vermonter service and the extension to Montreal.</p> <p>#102A: Acquire Siemens SC-44 Charger locomotives and Siemens Venture single-level coaches to provide the equipment for the second Vermonter extension to Montreal.</p> <p>#107A: Acquire Siemens Dual-Mode (DC 3rd Rail) Locomotives; Siemens Venture single-level coaches; and Siemens Venture cab-control cars (in lieu of a second Dual Mode locomotive per train) to provide the equipment for the second daily service of the Ethan Allen Express New York City to Burlington.</p> <p>#107B: Acquire Siemens Dual-Mode (DC 3rd Rail) Locomotives; Siemens Venture single-level coaches; and Siemens Venture cab-control cars (in lieu of a second Dual Mode locomotive per train) to replace the equipment on the Ethan Allen Express New York City to Burlington. [Assumption being that this service extension will be in place when the Rail Plan Update is issued. ]</p> <p>Background: The P32AC-DM locomotives used by AMTK for the Ethan Allan service are beyond their 25-year service life. On Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, New York State’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority granted approval for the Metro-North Railroad to enter into a contract with Siemens Mobility for 27 new Siemens Dual Mode Locomotives to replace their aging P32AC-DM locomotives. [comment continues on following page]</p>	<p>Infrastructure, Service</p>	<p>Presently, Vermont is working with other Eastern states, Washington State, and Amtrak to procure new rolling stock that will be used for with both the Vermonter and the Ethan Allen Express. Offerors have submitted proposals that are being evaluated by Amtrak and its State partners, with a decision expected in 2021.</p>
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DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
	<p>[comment continued]  <a href="https://www.thelirrtoday.com/2020/12/mta-selects-siemens-to-build-new-dual">https://www.thelirrtoday.com/2020/12/mta-selects-siemens-to-build-new-dual</a>. Html</p> <p>The specification used by MNR for the procurement was based upon the PRIIA Specification #305-011 Dual Mode (DC 3rd Rail) Passenger Locomotive which was developed by the Next Generation Equipment Committee. The specification was written to accommodate all users of 3rd Rail DC locomotives entering NYC to either MNR’s Grand Central Terminal or AMTK’s Penn Station. Accordingly, the options on the MNR contract with Siemens includes additional Dual Mode Locomotives for MNR, for Long Island Rail Road, for Connecticut Department of Transportation, and up to 26 for New York State Department of Transportation (to be used in Empire, Maple Leaf, Adirondack and Ethan Allen Services, as well as for the Albany/Rensselaer to Penn Station section of the AMTK long distance train Lake Shore Limited). Undoubtedly because Siemens is currently constructing the ALC-42 (Amtrak Long Distance Charger) for AMTK, the projected first new unit for MNR is not expected for 50 months, instead of the usual 33-36 months to construct each locomotive.</p> <p>As information, the MNR P32AC-DM locomotive fleet has an average age which is younger than that of the AMTK P32AC-DM fleet; in addition, the AMTK locomotives operate about 200,000 miles per year compared to only 80,000 miles per year for the MNR locomotives. The Amfleet coaches used in state supported service are over 40 years old and beyond the end of their service life as well.</p> <p>Siemens has produced the SC-44 Charger which is in service in California, Washington and the Mid-West states. Also, the Siemens Venture single level coach, based upon the PRIIA Specification #305-003 Single-Level Car (also developed by the NGEC), is being constructed for Caltrans and IDOT, and IDOT has several cars currently being tested in the Mid-West.</p>		

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
<p>12/31/2020 US Mail &amp; Email</p>	<p>The Town of Brattleboro appreciates the opportunity to review the potential initiatives that are being discussed as part of the update to the State Rail Plan.</p> <p>As you many know, Amtrak currently is planning a large investment (approaching \$5 million) in a new ADA accessible station with a level boarding platform in downtown Brattleboro. In discussions of the station project, the public has been enthusiastic about expanding opportunities for rail travel.</p> <p>After reviewing the Rail Plan Initiatives, we would like to express support for the following initiatives that we believe will have a positive impact on Brattleboro, the region, and Vermont, resulting from both increased tourism and economic development opportunities:</p> <p>Extension of the Valley Flyer service from Greenfield (MA) to White River Junction (ID #108)</p> <p>Extension of the Vermonter service to Montreal (ID #100 and 102). These initiatives are also supported by Brattleboro' s 2018 Town Plan, which includes the following actions:</p> <p>7. 3. 2 Continue to actively work with the State of Vermont, Windham Regional Commission, and transportation providers to maintain and where possible increase the number and frequency of transportation modes to and in Brattleboro.</p> <p>7. 3. 3 Encourage the use of passenger train service through continued efforts to enhance the town's rail station and better connect it to downtown and other local attractions.</p> <p>7. 3. 4 Support state initiatives to improve the rail infrastructure.</p> <p>Thank you for providing this opportunity for us to share the Town's priorities. We hope that initiatives #100, #102, and #108 will be included in the draft plan.</p>	<p>Service</p>	<p>The improvements to Brattleboro station are noted in Tech Memo 3, and included among the improvements that are part of Initiative #111, Passenger Rail Station Improvements Statewide.</p>

<p>12/31/2020 Email</p>	<p>With the likely late 2021 arrival of the Ethan Allen extension to Burlington, the schedule of this train will likely change, since its route is longer. As president of the Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA), we receive much input from passengers of the Ethan Allen. The most popular and highest ridership train of the pre-COVID Ethan Allen is the Friday NYP departure at about 5:47pm. This train provides a great rail service to the Rutland area for weekend travelers and the purpose of passenger rail is to provide an alternative for people, instead of driving their automobiles. We are deeply concerned that this train could be lost with the Burlington extension. This would be a horrible loss for the traveling public.</p> <p>In addition, the Monday-Thursday train has been gradually moved earlier from a NYP departure at about 3:15pm to about 2:15pm, in recent years. This rather minor change has resulted in fewer of our members taking the train, because they would often have to leave work much earlier to depart NYP on a train just after 2pm. With the Burlington extension, the NYP departure may likely be changed to a 11:45am or 12:15pm departure time from NYP. We do not believe this would be a plus for the Rutland area and would result in actually fewer people traveling to Vermont, especially among the working people.</p> <p>We would recommend that if a daily NYP departure is around Noon, then on Fridays, a NYP departure between 5pm and 6pm remain. In other words, the Ethan Allen would depart NYP about Noon and a post 5pm train would depart NYP on Fridays to Rutland. This trainset could then either return from Rutland Saturday afternoon or it could stay in Rutland an extra day and provide a Sunday afternoon departure. The weekend travel market is key and rail passengers who travel on the peak travel days of Fridays and Sundays are more likely to take the train instead of driving, as driving from Manhattan or the lower Hudson Valley late on Friday afternoon is a horrible nightmare of traffic. Passenger rail needs to take cars off the roads and leaving at Noon for about a 5.5 hour trip to southern Vermont is not when most people are traveling to a destination such as Vermont. Of course, we feel that the extension will be great for travel to Burlington, but also note that the Sunday southbound train will have a passenger demand that far exceeds the standard 4 coach, 1 cafe passenger capacity of Amtrak's rather not very flexible fixed train consist.</p> <p>Also, we hope that the Vermonter can be extended to Montreal within the next 2 or 3 years, as this would be a great benefit to this train. We have been lobbying for years to have the Montreal customs facility funded and completed.</p> <p>[comment continues on following page]</p>	<p>Service</p>	<p>A Service Development Plan, considering the operations and scheduling of passenger services is a recommendation of the Rail Plan.</p>
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DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
	<p>[comment continued]</p> <p>ESPA also would like to ask that the ability of passengers to bring skis and bicycles onboard trains needs to be easy and also well publicized to passengers.</p> <p>The Cafe car on both the Ethan Allen and Vermonter need to have Vermont oriented food and snacks onboard, to promote the state of Vermont.</p> <p>Within the next 2 or 3 years, the State of Vermont should look at have special, chartered trains from NYP on selected weekends during January, February, and March, that would provide overnight service to Vermont on busy weekends from New York City, in order to provide a complete travel experience and attract skiers who wish a weekend in Vermont. For example, on a couple of Fridays in the winter, a special train would depart NYP on a Friday around 10pm and arrive in the morning in Vermont with shuttles to specific or sponsoring ski resorts. The return train would depart Vermont late Sunday evening and arrive at NYP at about 7am. Packages could be sold and this would be possible for a longer weekends if scheduled during President's Day weekend, for example. I, personally, look forward to taking a train to Burlington, as it is the only city in the Northeast that I have actually never seen.</p>		
<p>1/14/21 NRPC Meeting</p>	<p>What is the status of alternative materials for railroad ties? Are plastics being used in Vermont or elsewhere? It was suggested that wood ties are being replaced with cement ones at least in more urban, highspeed settings but will check.</p>	<p>Environmental</p>	<p>VTrans is not aware of any composite or concrete ties being used in Vermont. All materials other than treated wood are still a small share of new ties installed in the US. Early deployments of plastic ties had substantial defects and there is a limited number of manufacturers. Both factors may contribute to the limited use of plastic ties.</p>
<p>1/14/21 NRPC Meeting</p>	<p>Is the data available for the origin/destination for the Vermonter?</p>	<p>Service, Planning</p>	<p>Amtrak provided this data for the Vermonter and Ethan Allen services to VTrans for use in the rail plan, but it is not published in the public realm, and is subject to Amtrak's non-disclosure regulations. There is</p>

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
			discussion of ridership by stop, and most common trip pairings (O&D) in Technical Memo #1.
1/14/21 NRPC Meeting	If and how is the A-35 completion related to the rail/freight plans? This matter was confirmed for inclusion in the freight plan.	Infrastructure	VTrans has been coordinating with U.S. and Canadian officials to assess the effects of the A-35 project on cross-border flows of people and goods.
1/14/21 NRPC Meeting	Historically, there was great level of activity when the major rail sidings in St. Albans were active. It's important to bring major rail yards back into use. There was interest in the inventory and marketing for such parcels.	Infrastructure	Comment noted.
1/27/21 MARC TAC Meeting	Local conversations are taking place regarding a station project in Ludlow.	Infrastructure	Comment noted.
1/27/21 MARC TAC Meeting	More widely and visibly share information about how to take a bike on the train.	Multi-Modal	Comment noted.
1/27/21 MARC TAC Meeting	Will there be contents about more sharing of rail ROW with bike/multi use paths?	Multi-Modal	Comment noted.
1/27/21 MARC TAC Meeting	Conduct broader marketing of Amtrak when services resume.	Publicity	Comment noted.
1/27/21 MARC TAC Meeting	How has freight rail transportation been impacted by COVID-19 and how the pandemic may continue influence rail transportation in the future?	Service, Safety	Freight rail transport has not experienced the same decline as intercity passenger rail, and that in the case of some commodities, Vermont is experiencing growth which is expected to continue. The immediate future for passenger rail is less clear and the modeling has taken into consideration a range of growth rates in observation of this uncertainty.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
1/27/21 MARC TAC Meeting	There have been reports of in-migration to Vermont as a result of COVID-19 and it appears to be placing pressure on the real estate market. TAC confirmed they are experiencing the same real-estate trends as other parts of the state, in particular in the southern tier, where houses are being purchased almost immediately after being listed. One of the TAC members indicated this is the case in Springfield. The committee discussed how transportation options such as passenger rail may benefit from this trend.	Planning	Comment noted.
2/4/2021 Email	The news indicates that New Haven is looking to remove their station because it is too close to the tracks. Our suggestion would be to move it to Middlebury because we understand there will be only a platform at the Middlebury stop. We hear that the historic station owner does not want to sell it back to the town. The New Haven historic station should be preserved, and Middlebury would be close to its present location. Please pass our thoughts onto the rail committee.	Infrastructure	Comment noted.
2/4/2021 Web Tool	Please continue to update/upgrade Vermont railroad system so that all who wish to ride passenger rail have the option to.	Service, Infrastructure	Comment noted.
2/4/2021 Web Tool	The highlighted rail line north of the international border shows a path to Gare centrale de Montréal that looks to be incorrect. There is no easy way that I am aware of to get to Central Station if you are approaching from the south on the CP line that you have highlighted starting from Saint-Jean-Richelieu. Also, this path assumes a track connection in Montréal that does not exist today, between CP and CN, that would be extremely expensive to construct. The Montrealer used to use CN trackage all the way to the station, if I'm not mistaken.	Service	The map has been revised to show the correct route.
2/5/2021 Web Tool	I fully support this proposed initiative. There are so many good reasons for this service to happen, but year after year it seems that no real progress is made, besides all of the track work that was done in Vermont years ago. Please do what has to be done to finally make this happen! Thanks.	Service	Comment noted.
2/5/2021 Web Tool	This rail corridor should be upgraded as part of VTrans' long-term plans so that someday Amtrak's Ethan Allan Express train can originate and terminate in Montreal. In the summer I always see lots of Quebec plates in Burlington, and I'm sure that there are people in western Vermont who would very much be interested in traveling to Montreal too.	Service	Comment noted.
2/5/2021 Web Tool	In the short term the schedule should be adjusted so that the westbound Lake Shore Limited can connect with the northbound Vermonter in Springfield so that people can travel from Boston to Vermont. Pre-COVID, the NB Vermonter was scheduled to	Service	Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
	<p>depart Springfield at 3:15 pm and the WB LSL was scheduled to arrive in Springfield at 3:18 pm -- thus missing the connection by only a few minutes. This should be a high priority to make this happen for a number of reasons, including the fact that there no capital cost at all.</p>		
<p>2/11/2021 Email</p>	<p>Just for accuracy "how Hartford integrated Tier II data into its 911 system" should read "how Hartford integrated Tier II data into its computer aided dispatching System (CAD).</p>	<p>Planning</p>	<p>Comment noted.</p>
<p>2/13/2021 Email</p>	<p>First, the draft Plan describes at-grade crossing protection, but at-grade crossing improvements for pedestrians are mentioned only briefly in Initiative #125. The Plan should address how the Rail Program and the state's railroads maintain pavement, pathway, and sidewalk conditions at rail crossings. This includes: regular inspection, repair of gaps between rails and pavement to eliminate trip hazards, winter snow clearing (required when projects are built with federal funds (23 U.S.C. § 116), minimizing chicanes and fencing, and pedestrian crossing treatments that allow passage of mobility devices (such as motorized wheelchairs and recumbent bicycles).</p> <p>VTrans and private railroads must comply with the requirements associated with the "Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990" (ADA, PL 101-336), and the "ADA Amendments Act of 2008," (PL 110-325), including maintenance of pedestrian and pathway crossings.</p> <p>Second, the draft Plan rightfully acknowledges the importance of multimodal connections. The ability to travel with bicycles is implied in Initiative 14. However, a more explicit statement is warranted to say that state-subsidized passenger rail service should welcome passengers with bicycles (including e-bikes, which are often used by families with young children) in accordance with the state's transportation and energy goals.</p>	<p>Multi-Modal</p>	<p>Comments noted.</p>

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/16/2021 Phone call	Will Schwarz, Lieutenant – Team Training ,Vermont Hazardous Materials Response Team. It is different from VEM. It was created by State statute to support fire departments as described at <a href="https://firesafety.vermont.gov/emergency/hazmat/about-us">https://firesafety.vermont.gov/emergency/hazmat/about-us</a> . Will explained there are three levels of responders, something like reporters, responders, and technical members. He said his technical group is called something like the “glow team” because they’re the ones in full body protection wading in to stop leaks. He said we should widely recommend the videos on the TRANSCAER site in addition to the trainings they run. He said VRS has been helpful in providing equipment. As I had forwarded on 3/10, VEM is running a training on response to overturned rail cars in April. That’s a good example to include. It’s from the VEM newsletter anyone can sign up for or find at their site. I’d appreciate your making these additions to the text in the Rail Plan and the appropriate tech memo. This contents is also relevant to the freight plan.	Safety	Information used to revise portions of Tech Memo 3. Links to training opportunities added to Tech Memo 3 and into the Rail Plan Chapter 4.
3/18/2021 Email (VRS)	Concern that if something isn’t a recommendation there isn’t support for it in a grant application.	Planning	Text added to emphasize that VTrans is supportive of other initiatives advancing as well.
3/18/2021 Email (VRS)	Support for “little WACR” to be a recommendation.	Infrastructure	Improvement to track and bridges on the WACR Montpelier and Barre is now a third priority recommendation.
3/18/2021 Email (VRS)	The freight rail improvements to the Albany-Bennington-Burlington line have independent utility for freight regardless of whether passenger rail progresses on it.	Editorial	The freight and passenger aspects were separated into two initiatives.
3/18/2021 Email (VRS)	It was unclear at first to the person why there would be a policy to bring all the bridges to 286k but then not include all the location-specific projects to do that into the recommendation table.	Editorial	The bridge improvements on each state-owned line are separate recommendations.
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Page #1: Even though we understand why commuter rail is not addressed in the State Rail Plan but included in the Public Transit Plan, it will be helpful to briefly describe the reasons for this.	Editorial	Explanation provided in Chapter 1. Vermont includes commuter rail discussion in the transit plan due to potential FTA funding streams for new commuter rail starts.
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Page #21: More details are needed to explain Positive Train Control.	Safety	More information provided in Chapter 4 and in Tech Memo 3.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Page #32: It will be important to reference training first responders with regards to hazardous materials being moved by rail. Moreover, it would also be helpful to clarify which entities are ultimately responsible for bearing the costs associated with a hazardous material spill or explosion response.	Safety	The safety and hazardous materials sections of Chapter 4 and Tech Memo 3 have been expanded to include this information.
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Page #34: For the performance measures listed here, are there associated target years related to those not being met?	Planning	See Tech Memo 3 for more information. Most targets are expressed on a "per year" basis.
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Page #38: In table 6.1, connecting the Ethan Allen Express with the Vermonter should be given an ID#. Rather than highlighting this as a complicated issue, it would be beneficial to detail how this would connect Vermont's eastern and western corridor intercity rail services that would help increase ridership.	Editorial	An ID number has been assigned and explanatory text revised.
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Page #40: In table 6.1, the initiative to explore transit-oriented development (TOD) could use more details. What does municipal support look like? RPCs should be added to as an involved party in these discussions.	Planning	Revised description to say "Work with municipalities and Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) to explore and support TOD opportunities near Amtrak stations, including zoning, utility and other infrastructure, multimodal connections (see ID#14), and other needs."
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	The funding discussion could be more robust in terms of detailing opportunities to address the projected rail funding gap. There was a mention of innovative funding approaches in table 6.1, but no details were provided. It would be beneficial to reference the potential of public-private-partnerships.		Tech Memo 5 describes the costs and funding needs, and Chapter 8 now includes a summary of that information.
3/19/2021 Email (CCRPC)	Please move "Freight as a Good Neighbor" from the third tier of recommendations to the second.		This has been moved to the second tier.
3/19/2021 Email (Advance Transit)	First, on page 43 "Future Service Modeling" you include several mode energy efficiency models but bus is not included. I believe that still serves a very important and relevant transportation option for Vermonters particularly the commuter services between St Albans and Montpelier. I hope, as we hope for Amtrak, after COVID the riders will be coming back and that is not only a fuel efficient model of transportation, it is also cost efficient for lower population density areas we have in Vermont. As rail passenger expansion options are being compared it will be very important to provide the full cost analysis and comparison with other transportation options.		Comment noted.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/19/2021 Email (Advance Transit)	Second, on page 45 "Rail Scenarios" I am curious why an increase to 79mph on sections of the Vermonter will triple the ridership. We already have that speed up to White River Junction and it seems hard to believe that adding that to the section between White River and St Albans will triple the ridership in 2040. I don't need anything added to draft on this – just curious about the reasons for such an increase.		This is not the case. The table was admittedly unclear. We've reviewed and edited the table to make the comparison easier to follow.
3/19/2021 Email (Advance Transit)	Third, on page 22 just a suggestion but I think there is an important transload site just across the river in White River Junction, in Lebanon, NH. I believe that is used for both propane and cement and while it is not in Vermont it is of use to both NECR and VRS I suspect. I know the map doesn't include locations out of Vermont but perhaps this one merits inclusion anyways.		Noted, but the location in New Hampshire was not added to the map.
3/19/2021 Email	Commenter requested more consideration to trails and rail trails.		Added two paragraphs in TM 3, a mention in the Plan, and added "trails" to the description of multimodal connections in Initiative #14
3/19/2021 Email Town of Charlotte	Why is safety, security, and resilience not the first goal?		The goals aren't in any order. We continued the ones from the 2015 Rail Plan with modest update. Recommendations could be made for reordering in several different ways but there wasn't a lot of utility to investing limited time there given it doesn't have much effect.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/19/2021 Email Town of Charlotte	If the trend in crashes stays stable but freight and HAZMAT movements increase, this would be worrisome for increase in incidents.		As noted in Tech Memo #1, p. 53-54, rail-related crashes have been relatively stable in Vermont and Vermont’s crash rates are among the lowest in the nation. Moving freight by rail has much less risk than moving it by truck. Also, similar to the trends in car crashes, improvements to design and technology have been reducing crashes and their resulting impacts. With slower turnover than personal vehicles the curve has moderated more slowly but it is not reasonable to work against a straight line expectation of previous crashes and impacts.
3/19/2021 Email Town of Charlotte	Why are private crossings not more of a focus?		Public crossings are clearly in the purview of a transportation agency. Private crossings are more difficult, and this holds across the states where our consultant has worked on rail plans. Safety improvements or, in rare instances, closures of private crossings are explored as opportunities arise. When a project is being developed—in your example if a 79 MPH initiative was selected for further exploration—all aspects of safety are evaluated.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/19/2021 Email Town of Charlotte	Why are crossing upgrades not on the priority list?		Safety is one of the five initiatives in the first tier of recommendations VTrans will work on. An in-depth review of the VTrans Railroad-Highway Crossing Program is wrapping up in the next few months. Please contact Paul Libby for more information. This review will be discussed with and submitted to FHWA. It will likely be the basis for the VTrans work for the new rule to develop an action plan for FRA. In summary, there is a lot of safety work underway so the Rail Plan doesn't go into deep detail.
3/19/2021 Email Town of Charlotte	What is the State's role in ensuring railroad operators are safe and accountable?		Rail is primarily regulated at the Federal level. Federal PRIIA requirements include reporting on delays to Amtrak that are the responsibility of the host railroad. There are various safety reporting requirements of freight railroads, including the Vermont Tier II reporting. It is in the interest of the railroad operator to be safe in terms of managing costs, such as of derailments, and also to be well-regarded for economic competitiveness. VTrans tracks and participates with railroads on a range of performance measures and goals. The results are a consideration for Rail Plan initiatives.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/22/2021 Email VRS	The Draft Plan presently identifies Bridge and Track Upgrades on the WACR Connecticut River Line as a Second Priority. VTrans has acknowledged that bridge and track upgrades remain critical in both the short term and the long term in maintaining and improving freight networks connections for Vermont businesses, and we would suggest that the WACR - M&B also be included in this line item, rather than limiting it to the Conn River Line.		Improvement to track and bridges on the WACR Montpelier and Barre is now included as a recommended initiative.
3/22/2021 Email VRS	For the reasons noted above and throughout the Rail Plan, bridge and track upgrades on the VTR B&R should be included within Priority 2. In the present draft, these bridge and track upgrades are not included: Leaving the VTR off of the list does not seem at all consistent with the importance of the Western Corridor to business growth and development.		These improvements are included in Initiative 110.
3/22/2021 Email VRS	While we agree that improving transit, bicycle and pedestrian connections to Amtrak is important, we believe that upgrading and improving track in general is and should be a higher priority: Improvements to bicycle and pedestrian connections would more appropriately be assigned to Priority 3 and not Priority 2.		While we respect this opinion, the team heard lots of support for improved multimodal passenger connections, including bicycle and pedestrian connections to rail stations, and that initiative achieved a score in the evaluation process to earn level 2 priority.
3/22/2021 Email VRS	We also wanted to share some additional information about our cooperation and coordination with local first responders. VRS has long believed in the importance of working together with Vermont communities and first responders and routinely provides training opportunities and information on rail operation safety to local fire departments and others. Since the last State Rail Plan was finalized in 2015, VRS has also purchased and pre-positioned substantial quantities of fire fighting foam at locations throughout the state: White River Junction, Burlington, St. Johnsbury and Rutland. The fire fighting foam is made available to local fire departments and Vermont Emergency Management at no cost to the State or local community, and allows for faster and more effective fire fighting response in the event of an incident of any kind.		Comment noted, and this information has been added to the safety discussion in Tech Memo 3.

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/22/2021 Email WRC	<p>The Windham Regional Commission continues to support the extension of passenger rail services in our region as they relate to the stated goals of our Regional Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide for safe, convenient, economical, and energy efficient transportation systems.</li> <li>• To provide a vital and diverse economy with rewarding job opportunities and high environmental standards for the region's citizens.</li> <li>• To support efforts to retain and attract young residents by promoting skill development opportunities, satisfying career choices, and life-style amenities targeting emerging professionals.</li> </ul>		Comment noted
3/22/2021 Email WRC	<p>The WRC supports the extension of the Vermonter service to Montreal. Including potential initiatives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring the Vermonter to 79 mph along its entire route.</li> <li>• Bring Vermonter to 2 daily round trips with Montreal.</li> <li>• Add Vermonter connection to Boston, MA through Springfield, MA contingent on the Massachusetts East-West Rail Link.</li> </ul>		Comment noted
3/22/2021 Email WRC	<p>The WRC supports the extension of the Ethan Allen service to Burlington. There is support in our region for multi modal public transit connections for the communities in the western part of our region, including Londonderry, Jamaica, Stratton, and Winhall, amongst others, through bus or micro transit services to link the region with the Ethan Allen line and allow area residents to more easily access services in Albany, NY.</p>		Comment noted
3/22/2021 Email WRC	<p>The WRC supports initiatives to extend the Valley Flyer north from Greenfield, MA to White River Junction through Brattleboro and Bellows Falls.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given our region's close proximity to Western Massachusetts, and the closely interconnected nature of our two areas this project is particularly impactful for communities in the Windham region.</li> <li>• Increased connectivity with Western Massachusetts will provide residents of our region better access to economic, educational and cultural opportunities available in that area, as well as foster stronger, more sustainable connections to population centers with large concentrations of young people.</li> </ul>		Comment noted

DATE & SOURCE	COMMENT	THEME	RESPONSE
3/23/2021 Email	<p>The status of bike service on Amtrak trains is not clear to us, but we encourage that pilot service to continue when train service resumes. In addition to multi-modal connectivity at stations, we encourage the prioritization of multi-modal improvements at rail crossings. We believe this is critically important at crossings within densely settled villages where sidewalk networks are located on both side of the tracks, such as on Bridge Street in Windsor or in the Chester Depot where the lack of sidewalk continuity reduces safe pedestrian mobility, especially for those in wheelchairs or with visual impairments.</p>		<p>Comment noted and considered to be part of the recommendation to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity.</p>
3/23/2021 Email	<p>In addition, we strongly encourage VTrans to evaluate rail with trail opportunities within the state. There is strong interest in bike paths in Vermont, but limited opportunities due to right-of-way issues, and the positive impact of outdoor recreation on the State of Vermont is well documented. We recognize the safety concerns that some stakeholders have with rail with trail, but we think it would be prudent to at least evaluate the potential and begin planning for it, if feasible, and where it warrants further consideration.</p>		<p>Added two paragraphs in TM 3, a mention in the Plan, and added "trails" to the description of multimodal connections in Initiative #14.</p>