

**PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
VTrans 5th Floor Board Room
Montpelier, Vermont
September 21, 2017**

ATTENDEES: Michele Boomhower, VTrans
Barbara Donovan, VTrans
Dave Pelletier, VTrans
Ross MacDonald, VTrans
Zoe Neaderland, VTrans
Mark Sousa, GMT
Van Chesnut, Advance Transit
Randy Schoonmaker, SEVT, VPTA
Jamie Feehan, VPTA
Chip Desautels, Premier/VT Translines
Lee Cattaneo, COVE
Katharine Otto, SWCRPC
Michael Harrington, VDOL
Meredith Birkett, VLCT
Mary Grant, RCT
Sandy Thorpe, RCT
Elaine Haytko, VPTA
Rob Moore, LCPC/RCT/GMT
Erica Campbell, Sen. Sanders Office
Mollie Burke, Legislature
Jane Kitchell, Senate

[Note: Minutes reflect the order of the published agenda.]

1. CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS

Barbara Donovan called the meeting to order at 1 PM. Introductions were done.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

June 15, 2017

Action postponed until the next meeting.

3. AHS UPDATES

No report.

4. INTERCITY UPDATES

Bennington Thruway Bus Service

Chip Desautels reported the following:

- Premier Coach under VT Translines got the contract for service from Bennington to Manchester to the train station, bus stop, and airport in Albany with two roundtrips per day.

- The service was launched on August 25, 2017 without advertising. The state is doing a marketing initiative on the service. Towns are also advertising the service.
- The service will use 12-passenger vehicles that will be augmented with a larger vehicle as demand grows. The smaller vehicles have not yet arrived so in the interim full sized vehicles are being used for the service.
- Tickets can be purchased electronically while on the bus using a computer, smartphone, or tablet.
- Data will be analyzed to see the percentage of passengers connecting to the bus or the train in Albany.
- Amtrak has been a helpful partner. Work with Greyhound continues.
- A rental car alliance has been formed in Bennington and Manchester.
- October 11, 2017 will be the official ribbon cutting for the service to be known as “Vermont Shires Connector”. The Governor will attend the event.
- The fare has been set for the route from Manchester to the Amtrak station. Other routes may be adjusted to match.

Rep. Burke asked about parking for passengers. Chip Desautels said there is free parking in the lot next to the Bennington Station Restaurant and in the municipal lot in Manchester. Rep. Burke asked if an Amtrak ticket will cover the bus to the Amtrak train going west. Chip Desautels said there is a single ticket. The train connections are designed to be seamless.

Katharine Otto, SWCRPC, asked how the decision is made to get passengers to their destination on the bus rather than giving preference to the airport or train. Chip Desautels said the driver will use discretion based on the timing of the schedules for the train and airport.

Senator Kitchell suggested information be posted at major tourist attractions in the area. Ross MacDonald said outreach is being done to the chambers, local advocates, resorts, hotels. Information will be posted on websites and Facebook, Google, YouTube.

Michele Boomhower asked if there is a connection north of Manchester. Chip Desautels said there is a separate route (not the Vermont Shires) in place since 2014 that runs from Colchester south so with both services Bennington has three roundtrip services to Albany. The Route 7 service has seen ridership growth and from a public transit point of view is the best way to get to New York City from Burlington. Barb Donovan added changing all the intercity routes was reviewed including a Burlington express route to Rutland on to Albany and the Shires route from Rutland so there would be two routes per day on Route 4, but the budget did not allow for this. There is daily service north, Manchester to Rutland, with Marble Valley bus service.

Mike Harrington asked about the average rate for the trip from Bennington to Albany and the ideal ridership level. Chip Desautels said on the new service the cost for one-way is \$10 and eight to 10 passengers in each direction is good so smaller, more efficient vehicles can be used.

5. UPGRADED STOWE SERVICE

Mark Sousa, GMT, gave an update on the Stowe bus service using the Vail model. There will be 15 minute service on weekends, holidays, and vacations with the current route serving the mountain. In the future Vail is looking at buying land for parking. Vail is providing a 20% match on funding to VTrans for the service. Larger buses will be used due to the capacity needs. Vail is offering ski passes to the bus drivers. Service will begin after Thanksgiving. Ross MacDonald added VTrans is working with Stowe on infrastructure improvements for better traffic flow.

6. VTRANS UPDATES

Capital Shuttle for BGS

Mark Sousa reported year-round capital shuttle service is in place at the request of BGS. Ross MacDonald added the shuttle will have 20 minute service from the Department of Labor to downtown and to the National Life Building.

Mark Sousa noted a grant was received for 12 buses (delivered in December) to be put into service in January 2018. A grant for two electric buses was received for the gap between the cost of a diesel bus and electric bus. The new buses will be used in the city mainly. Barb Donovan said a bid for the electric vehicles will be done.

Michelle McCutcheon-Schour said VEIC is looking at the electric buses for storing energy. The batteries in the buses will be charged and energy pulled off to cover peaks and dips in usage. Software is being developed so all the batteries can “talk”. Bob Moore, LCPC, questioned if the ‘bi-directional’ will be effective for just two buses. Ms. McCutcheon-Schour said the buses need to be used to figure out the revenue streams.

Ross MacDonald announced the ProTerra electric bus set a record of miles traveled on a battery charge on a course (not on a route) of 1, 131 miles.

Sen. Kitchell noted moving away from gas and diesel power will change how the transportation infrastructure is financed in the state. The cost of the infrastructure remains even with electric vehicles. The legislature has looked at adding to the annual cost of vehicle registration (surcharge of \$118) to make up the lost revenue. The legislature has also looked at having revenue from vehicles running on compressed natural gas going into the Transportation Fund. Rep. Burke added a ‘vehicle miles traveled’ tax has also been discussed. Barb Donovan noted the gas tax pays for the operation of public transit even though the passengers are not paying a gas tax.

There was discussion of “autonomous” (driverless) vehicles and impact on public transit. Barb Donovan said there has been discussion of autonomous vehicles used as small buses in more rural areas and shared cars. Sen. Kitchell said all will have an impact on revenue (gas tax) and jobs (fewer drivers needed).

Mobility on Demand

Ross MacDonald announced dates for public meetings will be scheduled in January 2018 for the rollout of the Open Trip Planner which covers fixed services, ADA services, carpools, vanpools, demand response trips.

Rob Moore said the Open Trip Planner should include special service trips (E&D and such). Ross MacDonald said the vision is to include a Travelocity-type app for Google transportation across the state. The goal is to have as many options with as many modes as possible. Lee Cattaneo mentioned in some places Google maps will not download due to poor internet service. Ross MacDonald said the call center can help people get rides. Mary Grant, RCT, said her company uses an app from USDA with GPS tracking. In addition, there are trackers in all the vehicles. A passenger can see where the vehicle is in real time and can even tell if there is a seat available. Ross MacDonald stated open source data can be aligned with the Open Trip Planner.

Sen. Kitchell asked for an update on the scheduling software and the difficulties with the billing component. Barb Donovan stated Route Match is working, but had difficulties with the billing element, especially with Medicaid rides. AHS can give an update at the next meeting. Mark Sousa said GMT had no problems with the scheduling component, but did have major issues with Medicaid billing.

Lee Cattaneo said Medicaid no longer allows transit providers to bill back three months (retroactive). Mary Grant said transportation can only be billed from the point of service at the time the passenger is eligible (no retroactive billing). Sen. Kitchell asked for clarification on the 90 day retroactive charging issue. Barb Donovan will research the matter and report the information.

Long Range Plan

Dave Pelletier reported the plan update continues. The plan covers all modes of transportation and looks out 20 years as required by the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. Information is being compiled and meetings with regional transportation advisory councils are being held. Two stakeholder meetings out of six have been held with diverse representation at the meetings. The discussion at the meetings covered existing conditions and future trends. A meeting on the plan was held with VTrans project managers and division leaders. At the stakeholder meeting on November 2, 2017 a set of priorities, goals, and strategies will be drafted. People will be informed on the trends with policies, goals, and strategies. The plan will be adopted by June 2018.

Erica Campbell asked if there is a performance measurement framework in the plan. Dave Pelletier said new national performance requirements must be included in the plan (pavement management, bridge management, safety management, system performance) and reported on regularly.

Rep. Molly Burke asked if there are performance measures on cutting emissions. Dave Pelletier said the measures are not directly in the plan, but the state's Comprehensive Energy Plan goals of transportation demand management and electric vehicles will be

referenced. Zoe Neaderland added work is being done on analyzing travel time and speed data. How useful this is to transit will be explored.

Submission of Current Competitive Grants

Barb Donovan reported a competitive grant was submitted for \$4 million for 20 vehicles for general service and 10 vehicles for GMT support of the new Stowe/Vail service. Projects include Transit Asset Management (condition of vehicles in each category) and a work plan for service to the elderly and disabled (people want more service).

Katharine Otto, SWCRPC, reported on the mobility project that was done to list and compile information on providers in the southern Windsor County catchment area. An interactive map and information on the list of providers is posted on the SWCRPC website mobility project link.

Van Chesnut commended VTrans on the amount of money brought into the state through competitive grants.

7. RIDES TO WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Barb Donovan said staff met with 211 regarding connection to transit providers and other groups.

Katharine Otto stated the Council on Aging is another helpful resource.

Mary Grant briefly described the demonstration program that provides rides for homeless students in North Country schools. The program is operating in Bennington as well.

8. VA TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION

Randy Schoonmaker reported the VA cannot meet demand for rides with their own vehicles and asked VPT to assist. The VA will pay for volunteer drivers and a booking fee to broker rides. There are four agencies active with the VA.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Survey

Barb Donovan will do a survey to determine what reports/information are wanted at PTAC meetings.

Need for CDL Drivers

Mike Harrington, Department of Labor, said the DOL can assist with the transportation workforce matter. It was noted there are training programs for flaggers and CDL drivers. There is an issue with CDL trainees being able to pass the drug test.

Chip Desautels mentioned CDL drivers cannot cross state lines until 21 years old and many employers will not hire them until 25 years old. The existing workforce is aging and without replacements. Heavy equipment is now very technically complex so mechanics need specialized training, sometimes even vehicle specific training. It is difficult to fill these positions.

Mark Sousa said GMT has a CDL program with ESL instruction to address the language barrier with New Americans.

Sen. Kitchell said the legislature looked at labor market strategies and created a position out of Economic Development devoted to better connections between careers and better technical education (S.135).

Next Meeting(s)

- December 14, 2017 – Montpelier
- March 15, 2018 - Montpelier
- June 21, 2018 - Montpelier

Agenda items:

AHS Updates

Autonomous vehicles update

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mark Sousa, SECOND by Katharine Otto, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:18 PM.

RScty: MRiordan