

State Rail Plan details priorities for upgrading freight

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) is drafting an update to its State Rail Plan that will lay out priorities to upgrade freight rail infrastructure and to increase rail access for businesses. The draft plan will be released in July. Public meetings are planned for July 13th in Essex Junction and July 15th in White River Junction. Both meetings will begin at 6:30 p.m.

VTrans' overall goals for freight are to maintain rail facilities in a state of good repair, upgrade track capacity for 286,000 (286K) pound railcars, and to improve rail yards and access to industrials sidings. The 20-year capital cost for freight improvements is estimated at \$295.3 million.

RAILCAR CAPACITY

286K pounds is the national standard weight for railcars. Currently, most rail lines in Vermont cannot accommodate 286K railcars, the exception being the New England Central Railroad and the Clarendon & Pittsford Railroad, with 191 and 18 miles within Vermont, respectively. All other rail lines in Vermont only accommodates 263K pound rail.



The condition of ties and ballast (crushed stone bed) are factors that determine weight capacity. Pictured here is a Vermont rail bed restored after a washout.

The first priority for VTrans to upgrade rail lines to accommodate heavier railcars is on Vermont's Western Corridor, between Essex Junction and Hoosick, NY. The Green Mountain Railroad and the CT River Line, a subdivision of the Washington County Railroad, both run on state-owned track and are also considered priorities for upgrades.

The ability of rail lines to accommodate 286K pound railcars is limited by both bridges and track. By far the plan's largest investment, about \$200 million, is for bridge rehabilitation and upgrade. At least 49 of the state-owned bridges are not built for 286K pound railcars, and load ratings on 89 other bridges are not available, so their capability is unknown. At least 21 bridges are in poor state of repair and are not rated for the minimum interchange standard of 263K pounds railcars.

Bridges are not the only factors that limit Vermont rail lines' ability to accommodate 286K pound railcars. If railroad crossties are in poor condition, tracks weigh less than 100 pounds per

yard, tracks are of old, poor quality steel, rail lines will also not be able to accommodate heavy railcars. Ideally, rail weight should be 115K pounds per yard or higher to accommodate 286K pound railcars. Some rail line segments in Vermont have rail only 90 pounds per yard, and some segments have poor quality rail nearly 100 years old or have poor crosstie conditions. The draft rail plan has set a goal that all track in the state have a 115 pound minimum weight.

RAIL YARDS AND SIDINGS

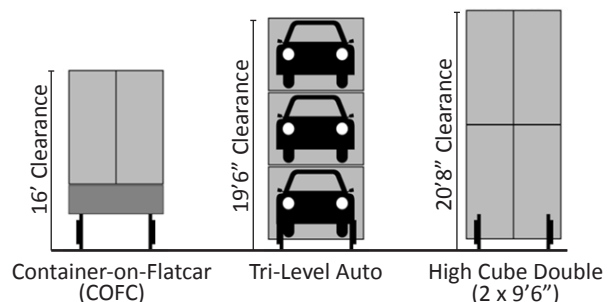
When conducting interviews for the rail plan, rail carriers stressed the importance of considering rail in economic development initiatives and providing access to industrial sites.

Upgrades to several rail yards are recommended in the State Rail Plan including Newport, White River Junction, Bellows Falls and St. Albans as well as rail yards along Vermont Railway, Green Mountain Railroad and Washington County Railroad lines. Improvements may include replacing tracks, adding tracks and expanding transload facilities.

Sidings and rail spurs that will open up rail access to businesses located next to rail are noted as a priority need.

CLEARANCES

When the state rail network was first built, railcars were no higher than 15'6". Some freight is moved in double-stacked railcars and autoracks that require much higher clearance. The Draft Rail Plan recommends that the highest priority for removing vertical clearances on the New England Central Railroad, a rail line that currently hosts double stack intermodal service between Montreal and Worcester through Vermont.



RAIL PLAN PUBLIC MEETINGS

July 13, 6:30 p.m.
Village Offices
2 Lincoln St
Essex Junction

July 15, 6:30 p.m.
Hotel Coolidge
39 S Main St
White River Junction

PREDICTING THE FUTURE

After a dramatic 41 percent decrease in rail freight traffic between 2005 and 2009, rail freight levels are expected to slowly climb back over the next 20 years.

Part of the recent decline in freight traffic has been lumber, which has just recently started to recover.

The bankruptcy of the Montreal Maine and Atlantic Railway following the Lac Megantic disaster greatly diminished freight

shipments on the Washington County Railroad, Connecticut River Line. This should recover as the new Central Maine & Quebec becomes an established presence in the region.

Geographically, some of the greatest opportunities may lie with eastern Canada, since this area is expected to grow quickly, in terms of employment and its general economy.



Rock salt used on Vermont's roads is largely transported by train to storage sheds where trucks pick it up and haul it for spreading on roads.



Upgrades to track in the White River Junction rail yard are recommended in the draft State Rail Plan.



Silos in Lyndonville store barley for Vermont breweries. After shipping to Lyndonville by rail, trucks then distribute the barley throughout the Northeast.



The track for this transload facility in the Burlington rail yard was built with a three-way cost-sharing, one third by the customer, one third by Vermont Railway and one third by the State.

For more information, or to provide input to the State Rail Plan, please contact:
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 Additional information on the Vermont State Rail Plan can be found at: www.rail.vermont.gov