

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee RPC Transportation Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday May 18, 2011

Hartford Municipal Bldg, WRJ, VT, 9:30am – 11am

Meeting Summary

Attended: Bob Stacey, Hartland; Kent Gilman, Sharon; Paul Haskell, Sharon Selectman; Rod Maclay, Strafford; Steve Willbanks, Strafford Selectman; Jack Johnson, Chelsea; Pete Webster, Norwich; Tut Doane, Braintree; Nancy Jones, Bradford; Allyn Ricker and Matt Osborn, Hartford; Abbie Sherman (Eric Benson), Bethel; Sam Van Dam, Thetford; Jim Masland, Thetford + State Rep; Dee Montie, Brookfield; Susan Clark, Tunbridge + VTrans; Joe Flynn, VTrans Rail Section, and Rita Seto, TRORC.

Regrets: Michael Brands, Woodstock; Nelson Lee, Jr., Bridgewater; Mardee Sanchez, Randolph; David Palmer, Stagecoach; Nate Cleveland, Royalton; Frank Roderick, Corinth; Van Chesnut, Advance Transit; George Deblon, Pittsfield; Rich Menge, Hartford; Aaron Brown, Upper Valley Transportation Management Association (UVTMA); and Frank Barrett, Jr., Fairlee.

1. **Introductions** – Bob Stacey called meeting to order at 9:37am. Group made introductions. Sam Van Dam, Thetford and Jack Johnson, Chelsea are the newest TAC members.
2. **Election of New Officers** – Rita thanked Frank and Bob for taking up office last year and noted Rod and Kent volunteered to be Chair and Vice Chair respectively. Rita asked for any additional volunteers which none responded. Motion to approve new Chair and Vice Chair by Pete Webster, 2nd Dee Montie. All approved.
3. **Approval of March 10 Minutes** – Motion by Dee, 2nd Kent. Minutes approved.
4. **VTrans Rail Section** – Joe Flynn, VTrans Rail Section

Joe gave updates on current rail projects in Vermont. VT Rail received \$54 million where a portion of ARRA went to fund Vermonter (St. Albans to Brattleboro to Penn Station). There's current push for high speed rail passenger service, passenger services are dependent on freight rail infrastructure. There is new welded rail being put down from St. Albans to WRJ and onward to Mass. This allows passenger rail to operate from a speed of 59 to 79 in some sections. This will shave a total of 1.5hrs to Penn Station. Each rail section weighs 115lbs and can hold 286lbs. Industry standard is 315lbs. This is a \$70 million project where \$52.7 mill is from ARRA, \$5 mill from Rail America, and \$12-\$13 million from value of leftover rail sold. It's anticipated that the welded rail will be finished by October 2012. There are currently 15 active FEMA sites on northern VT rail property (mostly in Orleans, Coventry and Vergennes County).

The \$80 million Western Corridor application was declined for the 3rd time. This passenger service would link Rutland north to Burlington but is not on Washington's radar and now remains serving only freight. The \$20 million Jefford's earmark for transportation remains as a possible funding source. Jim asked Joe that the last 2 years on House Transp. Committee, they've taken funds out of the earmark to balance budget. Jim hopes this practice will stop as the earmark was meant to be dedicated to transportation projects.

#1 goal of VTrans is to extend Vermonter service to Montreal which was discontinued 15 years ago. Security remains the primary issue. US-Canada Customs looking into similar effort with Vancouver-Washington service with a sealed train bypassing border and process passengers at Montreal station and first Vermont stop. The plan would be to retrofit a border check area in the Montreal Central Station.

A new program involves a 3-way partnership between State-Rail Company-Shippers to facilitate future developers for siding infrastructure (entity split 3 way cost). Current small scale projects include Franklin, Caledonia and Chittenden County.

WRJ Rail Station – The T-Bill authorizes VTrans to purchase the station and is seeking federal funds to buy. There would be a 3yr agreement with the current property owner and VTrans hopes by 2013-2014 budget funding will be available.

Bob asked how these welded rails are transported. Joe said these welded rails are manufactured in Indiana, as per ARRA's Made in America stipulation, trucked in and transported onto several rail beds. They are laid, heated and then struck in place to ensure a smoother and quieter ride.

5. **Route 132 Discussion** – (Sharon, Strafford, Thetford + Norwich)

Rita briefly described that the 4 towns containing RT 132 have approached TRORC in assisting them to have VTrans take it back as the maintenance cost has become too great for the towns to shoulder. It's noted that VTrans is reluctant to take on any more roads and this will be an arduous process. Steve Willbanks noted that if VTrans refuses, we still have an option to present to next year's Legislature where they can change that. Steve noted that traffic on RT132 (class 2 in Strafford) is not locally generated and is expected to maintain high condition standards. Paul noted that a total of \$80,000 in gas tax goes to the 4 towns for RT132, insufficient to maintain RT132. Between recent paving projects across 4 towns, the pavement is as good as it gets. The towns are limited to \$175,000 in VTrans paving projects. The functionality of RT132 has changed over the years from Primary Arterial to now functioning as a State Highway.

Jim says he could introduce a bill to the Legislature to get this done. Sam asked what the maintenance standards (aesthetically) be if given to the State? Would it change the character of the road? Rita will find out existing standards and proposed State design standards. Pete noted that Norwich is supportive of the 4 town effort and the main benefit of keeping RT132 as town owned is that the Town controls speed limits and signage. Several TAC members asked what the history of RT132 was, was it ever a State Highway? How did it become town-owned? Steve said Tig (Thetford Selectboard Chair) thought when the Union Village Dam was constructed, there was some agreement with the southern States benefited from the flood control and there would be payment to maintain RT132? This will need to be verified.

*Steve followed up with Jonathon Croft, VTrans Mapping Unit – "in the 1940s certain rural collectors, like RT 132, were assigned numbers. Jon also understands that in the 1960s, these roads, of which he says there are a dozen or so in the state, were reviewed to see if they should become state highways and it was decided at that time not to. Of course, RT132 has changed a great deal in volume and character since those days and especially since the construction of the interstate exits. Among the questions I would have, for example, is why RT244 along Lake Fairlee is state-maintained, but RT132 is not? The good news is that a portion of RT132 already is state-owned. The not-so-good news is that the state only claims ownership of that section in Sharon from Highway 14 to I-89, or about .1 mile, but it's a start."

Pete motioned for TAC to support this effort by Rita providing a letter of support. Also requested are letters from the 4 towns officially indicating their position. Dee 1st, Pete 2nd, all approved.

6. **Box Culverts vs. Arches** – Rod Maclay

Rod asked Jim why State has changed its mind in preferring arch over box culverts. An arch required would increase bridge construction funds. Strafford has 4-5 bridges less than 20ft that could be replaced at a fraction of the cost using box culverts over arches. Rita passed out a brief summary of the Guidelines for the Design of Stream/Road Crossing Passage of Aquatic Organisms in Vermont. She believes there's no requirement restricting the use of box culverts, and that the only Best Management Practices encouraged by Agency of Natural Resources is to have a natural bottom for better fish passage. Using a box culvert, you need to dig deep enough to provide that, and ensure the stream channel is sufficient in passing through the box size. Rita also noted there are box culvert designs with a V-shaped bottom to assist in the natural bottom.

7. **Project Updates** – Rita

Rita just reminded of the Transportation Enhancement Letter of Intent deadline June 3rd, and Municipal Park and Ride program application due end of July for interested towns.

8. **Next Meeting Agenda items**

Transportation Enhancement project presentation – Fairlee
FY'12 Transportation Planning Initiative Work Plan tasks
Scenic Byways (RT4, RT100 and Connecticut River)
NADO Livability Scan
Public Transit Planning Grants

9. Meeting adjourned 11:05 am

Next meeting on Thursday July 14, location TBD.