



Town of Shelburne, Vermont

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Mr. Costa Pappis, AICP
Vermont Agency of Transportation
1 National Life Drive, Davis Bldg., 5th Floor
Montpelier, VT 05633-5001

September 9, 2015

Re: Town of Shelburne's Comments on the Draft Vermont State Rail Plan

Dear Mr. Pappis:

The Town of Shelburne requests that VTrans carefully consider the following comments we are providing with regard to the draft 2015 Rail Plan. Simply put, Shelburne's Selectboard has a number of concerns about aspects of the proposed Rail Plan and urges that it be revised and expanded prior to adoption. Please note that these comments were reviewed and approved unanimously [4-0] by the Selectboard at a meeting on September 8, 2015.

Introduction

As noted in its 2014 municipal Comprehensive Plan, the **Town of Shelburne is supportive of the development and maintenance of a "Multi-modal transportation system that facilitates the safe and efficient movement of people and goods..."** However, **such a system is to be "in scale with the present and anticipate[d] character of the community** while recognizing our role within the larger region, and reinforces the land use patterns and visual characteristics set forth in [the Comprehensive] Plan."

More specifically, the Town's policy objectives include encouraging "the use of the existing railroad facilities for movement of people and freight as part of an integrated, multimodal transportation system." Further, recommended actions include the following:

1. Insure, through zoning and other regulations, the compatibility of railroad facilities and adjacent land uses. Allow businesses that would benefit from railroad use to locate next to railroad facilities, when compatible with adjoining land uses.
2. Encourage reinstatement of interstate passenger rail service on the existing tracks.
3. If rail passenger service is reinstated, encourage coordination with bus service to provide multi-modal services.

The Town cites this language in light of an important principle. **FTA guidelines regarding the preparation of State Rail Plans specify the need for sponsoring agencies to consult with both local and regional officials. We believe that municipal Comprehensive Plans can provide a firm policy foundation for the topics raised during such consultations. To reiterate, a key element of the Town's public policy is that the multimodal transportation system be both efficient and safe.**

Safety

The Town of Shelburne hereby goes on record regarding the safety-related issues it believes are raised by the current draft of the Rail Plan. The Plan promotes a dramatic increase in rail freight volumes and movement of such freight—including potentially hazardous substances—at much higher speeds. Shelburne's Selectboard believes that the Plan does not adequately evaluate the increased risks associated with such changes. Nor does the Plan estimate the cost of (or the source of funding to address) all the necessary safety measures that are associated with those increased risks. As representatives of the Town of Charlotte have noted, communities along the western rail corridor must be prepared to respond to the risks associated with greater speeds and volumes. **We and they believe the Plan as drafted contains insufficient details about training, priorities, frequency, adequacy, budget, and assessments of ability to handle disasters—and must be modified.**

Service

Consistent with the local Comprehensive Plan, Shelburne's Selectboard supports the provision inter-city passenger rail service by Amtrak. More specifically, the board supports the initiation of service between Burlington and Rutland, thus providing access to the Albany and New York metropolitan areas. Shelburne is recognized as a world-class destination. Accordingly, the Town of Shelburne believes that a stop should be included at the existing rail station in Shelburne on the Burlington-to-Rutland and Rutland-to-Burlington Amtrak line. The Selectboard sees development of passenger rail connection to the south to be a higher priority than a connection to the north. The Selectboard requests that the Plan be modified to reflect the potential for a passenger rail stop in Shelburne.

Infrastructure

Consistent with its support for initiating Amtrak service to and from the south (destination: Burlington), the Town of Shelburne also supports investment in the rail line to the degree needed to support establishment of such service. However, such investments should include the physical improvements required to establish a stop in Shelburne, which is not currently a feature of the draft Rail Plan but should be. Finally, the Selectboard is somewhat concerned by the Plan's use of generic infrastructure projects "recommended by the railroads" (e.g., VTR sidings and structures costing more than \$1.6 million) where public funds are proposed to be spent on projects that may involve limited public input. The Selectboard believes that commitment of such funding should not occur without extensive consultation and coordination between the state, the railroad, and any host municipalities. And the Plan should be modified accordingly.

Policy and Budgetary Issues

The Town's aforementioned support for rail investments aside, Shelburne's Selectboard also wishes to go on record with its concerns regarding the planned growth in expenditures—and with the lack of consideration given to the potential cost implications the Plan has for local communities. For example, the Plan identifies a significant gap between the amount of funding required to implement the identified projects and the amount of funding reasonably expected to be available. This is troubling, and Shelburne's Selectboard believes the Plan must be revised to be more fiscally constrained. Further, we acknowledge that both passenger and freight investments—and resulting increased traffic—have the potential to create significant positive economic benefits. However, the increased traffic made possible by the investments also has the potential to cause negative economic impacts, as well as environmental, social, and health impacts, on local communities. Such negative impacts must be addressed in future revisions to the Draft Plan. Specific costs the revised Plan must address include the budget for first response, including specialized equipment, rescue tools, vehicles, spill containment products, foams, and the like, and the cost to deliver training required to be prepared for rail related emergencies.

Long Term Planning

We believe that the concerns of Towns like Shelburne must be carefully considered before a new Rail Plan is adopted. However, we would add that if they cannot be accommodated explicitly in the text of the 2015 State Rail Plan, **the Plan must at least acknowledge the existence of these concerns and commit VTrans to address and resolve them explicitly in the future.** Finally, the Town of Shelburne would take this opportunity to comment on a separate long-term need, which involves the lease between the State of Vermont (as land owner) and Vermont Railway. The current lease will not expire for decades. However, we believe planning documents like the Rail Plan should recognize the considerable importance the terms of any future lease will have. We believe the State must begin to contemplate the substance of any future lease years if not decades in advance.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft 2015 Rail Plan. Please contact Shelburne's Town Manager regarding any future drafts and scheduling associated with the approval process for the final version of the Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Colangelo', written in a cursive style.

Joe Colangelo,
Town Manager

Cc: Shelburne Selectboard
Shelburne Planning Commission
Shelburne Planning & Zoning Department
Shelburne Fire Department
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
Town of Charlotte