

Meeting Report

March 24, 2006

Exploring passenger rail service for the Burlington area Champlain Flyer office

Attending:

Melinda Moulton, GRIP board member
Andrea Sisino, GRIP passenger rail advisor and Pres. of VRAN
Rick Moulton, Rail Council
Mike Coates, Rail Council
Daryl Benoit, MPO
George Betke, Chairman Farmrail Corporation
Mike Smith, President, Finger Lakes Railway, Corp.
Lee Khan, Omya/VTR consultant

Background

Burlington has an active group of passenger rail advocates who want to pursue an economical and environmentally efficient passenger service to the Burlington area. Passenger rail is one of 5 key components of the Gateway Rural Improvement Pilot project. Of primary interest is the upgrade of the tracks and bridges along the western corridor.

Passenger rail – Single unit Rail Diesel Cars

Presenting a new concept to the group was George Betke, Chairman and CEO of the Farmrail Corporation. The Farmrail Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Farmrail Systems, Inc. owns seven modernized Rail Diesel Cars [RDC]. The RDC is a retrofitted Budd Manufactured cars made originally in Chicago. The strengths of these rail cars include:

- Proven design
- Emission compliant – meets Kyoto protocol
- Reliable service with low maintenance factors
- Cost effective
- Fuel efficient, energy compliant
- New and fully modernized
- Versatile single unit function or multiple unit configurations

Currently, Farmrail owns seven RDCs. One of Farmrail's units is in Vancouver and in service, a second is being rehabbed, the remaining units will be rehabbed in accordance with their intended use.

An additional 23 units are owned by Industrial Rail Services of Moncton, New Brunswick. Five units are in service and performing reliably in rural western Ontario and on Vancouver Island.

Burlington and Passenger Rail

The discussion of Burlington's passenger advocates centered around starting service on two rail lines simultaneously. The initial routes would be Burlington to Essex over New England Central Railroad and Burlington to Charlotte over Vermont Railroad. By targeting resources for track upgrades first between Rutland and Middlebury and then between Middlebury and Charlotte, the passenger service could extend north from Rutland currently serviced by Amtrak's Ethan Allen and south from Charlotte by an RDC. The future goal of both GRIP and VRAN are to connect Albany to Bennington, to Rutland, to Burlington, to Essex, to Montreal.

Public/Private Partnerships

While the RDCs are economical, there will be the need for public and private sector partnerships. Initially partners would be the towns along the lines, however, additional partnerships were discussed –

Ski areas accessible to the western corridor rail lines

- ❑ Bromley
- ❑ Stratton
- ❑ Mt. Snow
- ❑ Okemo
- ❑ Killington/Pico
- ❑ Sugarbush
- ❑ Mad River
- ❑ Stowe
- ❑ Smuggs
- ❑ Jay Peak

Colleges

- ❑ Bennington
- ❑ Castleton

- Middlebury
- UVM
- St. Michaels

State government with service between

- Montpelier
- Waterbury
- Essex/Williston
- Burlington

Next steps

1. Partner with the Farmrail Corporation to explore what might work for VT – joint development of a proposal
2. Visit the Moncton plant in New Brunswick to see the RDC
3. Build a strong coalition with the new Mayor and city organizations involved with transportation initiatives
4. Request information from the state on available funding for passenger and track upgrades
5. Identify additional federal resources